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IGNACIO MANUEL ALTAMIRANO'S
JOURNEY FROM 'INDIO PURO' TO
CULTURAL MESTIZO: INDIGENOUS
IDENTITY, MESTIZAJE, AND
NATIONALISM IN NINETEENTH-
CENTURY MEXICO

Angelica Sanchez-Clark

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IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO**

by

ANGÉLICA M. SÁNCHEZ-CLARK

B.A; Spanish, University of New Mexico, 1992
M.A; Spanish, University of New Mexico, 1995

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Spanish and Portuguese**

The University of New Mexico
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, near and wide,
who have had to make sacrifices in order for me to complete this journey.

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ABSTRACT

Like many Mexican Liberal intellectuals, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (b. Tixtla, Guerrero, 1834; d. San Remo, Italy, 1893) played a central role in defining the role that the *mestizo*—and, by force of circumstance, the Indian—would play in the formation of national identity after Mexico's independence from Spain. This dissertation examines Altamirano's literary and political works, as well as his personal correspondence, and his experiences as a soldier, educator, and politician, in order to understand how Altamirano, represented as an "*indio puro*" who underwent the transformation to *mestizo*, exemplifies the link between Mexico's colonial past and its struggle to define its national identity.

Past and current studies produced about Altamirano have failed to examine with a critical eye how his representation of the colonial and the contemporary, nineteenth-century Indian differs from what other sources reveal about the realities of indigenous life, both under Spanish rule and after Independence. By employing an interdisciplinary approach, using archival, primary, and secondary literary, theoretical, and historical

sources, I examine how dominant groups have appropriated Mexico's indigenous culture throughout the years in order to support their varying political and social agendas. More importantly, I demonstrate that Altamirano, as a member of the *ciudad letrada*, formed part of the dominant group and not that of the subaltern.

Various theories concerning *mestizaje*, assimilation, acculturation, and adaptation are examined and provide insight into how Altamirano's own life and literary production were manipulated to serve the official Liberal project of *mestizaje*, which, in many ways, proved to be more detrimental to the preservation of indigenous culture than 300 years of colonialism. The work of post-colonial theorists like Walter Mignolo demonstrates why Altamirano was unable to escape the colonial paradigm in which he had been formed; Mignolo's work also points to ways in which indigenous groups in the twenty-first century are now able to take control of the production of knowledge and choose what he terms the "decolonial option." Thus, *mestizaje* as theory and reality come together in the life and works of Altamirano, who serves as a case study for the complex issues of Mexican identity and nationalism.

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INTRODUCTION

Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (b. Tixtla, Guerrero, 1834; d. San Remo, Italy, 1893) is revered in Mexico today as the beloved *maestro indio* who devoted his personal and professional life to rescuing the new nation from its colonial past while, at the same time, helping to define what modern Mexico would embody. This dissertation examines Altamirano's literary and political works, as well as his personal correspondence, alongside his experiences as a soldier, educator, and politician, in order to understand how his life exemplifies the link between Mexico's colonial past and its struggle to define its national identity after Independence. In order to place Altamirano and his writings within a historical context, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon the works of historians, anthropologists, educators, linguists, and literary and cultural critics, in order to understand more clearly the ramifications for Mexico's indigenous populations of Altamirano's transformation from an "*indio puro*" to cultural *mestizo*. Finally, through archival research, new sources come to light that reveal Altamirano's active participation in the Liberal project of *mestizaje* that called for the erasure of the contemporary Indian in order to make room for the *mestizo* in Mexico's future.

The Liberal party's appropriation of Altamirano's life, and Altamirano's own role in promoting his personal journey as an example for the nineteenth-century Indian, embodies Mexico's struggles to come to terms with its indigenous past and present. The Liberal agenda of *mestizaje* as the path to patriotic citizenship would negatively impact how the contemporary Indian was represented during the nineteenth century and beyond,

leading to political, social, and educational policies that specifically targeted the eradication of their way of life.

In the field of Latin American literary studies, Altamirano is considered the father of Mexico's foundational novel and national fiction. Past and current literary studies on Altamirano have focused on how his writings, both fiction and non-fiction, exemplify his overarching pedagogical goal to instruct his readers about what the new nation would require of its citizens and to define who these citizens would be. Many literary studies have demonstrated the role that the Liberal party's agenda of whitening the Mexican race through racial and cultural *mestizaje* played in Altamirano's vision of Mexico's future but have largely failed to recognize that in emphasizing the role of the *mestizo*, Altamirano and other intellectuals of his generation relegated the Indian to a more symbolic role, one in which the Indian could continue to represent Mexico's glorious, noble, pre-Hispanic indigenous past but not its future.

Because of his status as the "*gran maestro*" who happened to be an "*indio puro*," Altamirano has been lauded for his commitment to preserving the role of indigenous culture in Mexico's future. While scholars such as José Joaquín Blanco, in his introduction to Altamirano's *Textos costumbristas*, have noted the many contradictions between Altamirano's life and work, many others still tread lightly in acknowledging that, in fact, many of Altamirano's negative opinions regarding contemporary indigenous culture and daily life contributed to the prevailing damaging views of indigenous peoples in twentieth-century Mexico. While Altamirano does devote some of his writings to describing certain indigenous religious traditions (see the analysis of *Textos*

costumbristas in Chapter 2), they are often nostalgic in nature and rarely reflect the current political and social situation of the indigenous pueblos he is visiting.

Before and after his death, Altamirano becomes a victim of the process of mythification. Christopher Conway writes that “el escritor fue transformado en un indio ejemplar cuya vida subrayaba la posibilidad de redimir a la población indígena” (“El aparecido azteca” 125). Scholars like Conway accept the premise that Altamirano was, indeed, a pure Indian from an indigenous pueblo that managed to rise in Mexican politics and society because of a transformation made possible through education. While Altamirano may have been either genetically *mestizo* or full-blooded Indian, the present study explores how Altamirano himself manipulates the mythification of his indigenous identity, as well as that of his pueblo Tixtla, in order to present himself as an exemplary Indian who successfully transformed himself into the patriotic, loyal *mestizo* citizen of the new nation.

Unlike most previous studies about Altamirano, the present study offers a historical context for the evolution of indigenous identity throughout Mexico’s history and contrasts it to the binary representation of the Indian in Altamirano’s body of work. It argues that the nineteenth century was a pivotal time in Mexico’s complex relationship with its indigenous populations, one in which the Liberal project of *mestizaje* called for the erasure of the contemporary Indian. The works of historians discussed throughout this study, such as James Lockhart, Douglas Cope, Serge Gruzinski, Joseph P. Sánchez, Susan Schroeder, Rebecca Earle, Peter Guardino, Alan Knight, William Connell, Michael Meyer, William Beezley, Guy Thomson, David La France, Florencia Mallon, Jean-François Lecaillon, and Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, are crucial for providing a perspective

other than a literary one of indigenous life during the colonial period and after Independence. Their archival and primary research allows for a distinct vision to emerge about how indigenous groups responded to life under Spanish rule, providing numerous examples of negotiation, adaptation, participation, resistance, or rebellion within and against the dominant culture.

Above all, their work demonstrates that Mexico's indigenous populations were not a homogenous group, nor were they the "dull-witted, weak and abject," and "ignorant barbarians" described by many nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Altamirano, his mentor Ignacio Ramírez, and his student Justo Sierra (Earle 167). Historians such as Peter Guardino and Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, who study Altamirano's birth region in the present-day state of Guerrero during the colonial period and in the nineteenth century, counter these negative images of the Indian, revealing that while the political situation was not very favorable for many of the indigenous groups living there, many availed themselves of any available resources in order to make their demands heard. Indeed, their actions stand in stark contrast with Altamirano's characterization of them as either weak, passive, absent, or simply no longer in existence.

While a historical analysis allows a perspective of indigenous life to emerge that is not often present in literary studies, one cannot disregard the contributions of a literary analysis in this type of research, for Altamirano's body of literary work reveals yet another aspect in nineteenth-century Mexico's struggles after Independence that is not often found in works from other disciplines. According to Juan Pablo Dabove, cultural fictions "son la faz visible, pero cifrada, de transacciones entre deseos y repulsiones colectivas" (1). Many nineteenth-century elites confronted the perceived problem of the

Other, whose mere presence served as a reminder of difference, of heterogeneity. The Other differed from those that lettered elites defined as the model citizen, whose identity was “masculina, blanca, adulta, heterosexual, letrada, urbana, cristiana, europea o europeizada” (2). Here, the Other includes rebel *campesinos*, *caudillos*, Indians, blacks, and anyone else considered a threat to a metaphoric national body (2). By examining Altamirano’s writings as a response to these threats, we can see how, as a willing member of the *ciudad letrada*, he manipulates his indigenous identity in order to present himself as the Other at opportune moments. In this way, he bestows upon himself the authority to speak for the Other and to determine what is best for him, a concept Walter Mignolo labels as the “knowing subject” in his article, “Epistemic Disobedience” (see Chapter 3 of the present study).

In an effort to ensure the success of *mestizaje*, Liberal intellectuals suppressed examples of indigenous diversity, activism, resistance, and accommodation and replaced them with images of the Indian as barbaric, deviant, and apathetic, as a victim of colonialism. Yet, current literary studies by scholars such as Conway, Edward N. Wright-Ríos, Erica Segre, and Nicole Girón continue to view Altamirano as a humble Indian who wanted only the best for Mexico’s indigenous populations, rather than as a culturally *mestizo* intellectual who called for the erasure of identifiable indigenous traits in a process he considered necessary in order to produce the ideal Mexican patriotic citizen.

In addition to the historical and literary works analyzed herein, it is important to look at the various theoretical works produced on the concept of *mestizaje* in order to understand the ramifications of the Liberal project of *mestizaje* for Mexico’s indigenous

peoples. The process of *mestizaje*, in its most basic definition, is initiated whenever two races come into contact and its members begin to reproduce biologically.¹ To reduce *mestizaje* to its racial and biological components, however, is to drastically simplify what happens when groups of people from different cultures come together voluntarily or involuntarily and inhabit the same space, whether that space is geographical, political, social, or artistic. The process of cultural *mestizaje* in Latin America and the United States has fascinated many scholars—literary critics, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians—in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

The fields of postcolonial and cultural studies have given birth to a different way of viewing the process of *mestizaje* from its colonial inception in what is today Latin America through the current time. The works produced by literary critics and other scholars on the evolution, usage, and even rejection of the term *mestizaje* demonstrate that the meaning of the term itself shifts, depending on the particular historical context of the people employing it. This is particularly true in Latin America, whether proponents of *mestizaje* are addressing Latin America's colonial past, its struggles for Independence and nation formation, or the present day, when many Latin American countries once again face an indigenous population that refuses to acquiesce to assimilation and become *mestizo*. For nineteenth-century intellectuals like Altamirano, *mestizaje* became the main component of the Liberal goals of progress and modernization. The Liberal project of *mestizaje* called for the social and formal education of Mexico's indigenous populations

¹ In Latin America, the *mestizo* is defined as the offspring of an Indian and a Spaniard or European. For the nation builders of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, certain subaltern groups like the Chinese and blacks or *mulatos* were “often construed as being outside the nation” (Appelbaum et al., 14). Recently, there have been great advances in the study of the *Afromestizo* in Mexico. For an intriguing article on the relationships between *Afromestizos* and indigenous groups in the modern state of Guerrero, see Andrew Fisher's article, “Creating and Contesting Community.”

in order to guide them on the path to a cultural *mestizaje*, and also promoted policies that encouraged European immigration in order to “whiten” Mexico’s indigenous peoples through racial miscegenation. For these intellectuals of the nineteenth century, *mestizaje* equaled complete assimilation.

The works of literary and cultural critics such as Angel Rama, Néstor García-Canclini, Antonio Cornejo-Polar, Agustín Basave Benítez, Martin Lienhard, Mary Louise Pratt, Walter Mignolo, and José Rabasa have proven indispensable to any discussion concerning the identification of those moments when indigenous subaltern cultures have created a space within the dominant Western culture from which they are able to speak. Despite efforts to portray the contrary, from the moment of first contact until today, indigenous peoples have found ways to work within and outside of the dominant systems, including legal, social, and educational ones. The contributions of these scholars to Latin American subaltern and cultural studies dialogue with that of scholars outside the field of literary studies, including historian Serge Gruzinski’s work on the emergence of *mestizaje* in sixteenth-century Mexico.

Additionally, historian Alexandra Minna Stern’s essay on racialization in early twentieth-century Mexico, published in the anthology titled *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (2003), edited by Nancy P. Appelbaum et al., helps provide some answers as to why the processes of *mestizaje* in the twentieth century continued to reinforce the most negative aspects of being “Indian” in Mexico. In his essay, “Between Mestizaje and Castizaje: An Imperial View of the Spanish Vision of Race and Ethnicity in Colonial New Spain,” historian Joseph P. Sánchez also addresses historical and social consequences of racial mixing in his 2006 discussion of *castizaje* in colonial New Spain,

an important concept explored as well by art historian Magali Carrera in her work, *Imagining Identity in New Spain* (2003), which takes us from late colonialism up to Independence.

The arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas at the end of the sixteenth century created, immediately at contact, a cataclysmic physical, cultural, religious, and philosophical confrontation between Europeans and indigenous tribes. With the conquest of Tenochtitlán in 1521 and the colonization of what the Spaniards called “New Spain,” new conflicts of identity arose. Spanish chroniclers, Creoles, and *mestizos* struggled with defining and “reinventing” the Other—referred to homogeneously as the Indian, in spite of the diversity of indigenous cultures—in relation to their personal and political agendas. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *mestizo* writers especially would play an important role in defining the Indian as they attempted to present their indigenous past in a way that would legitimize a place for *mestizos* in the new colonial order. Much as Altamirano would do in the nineteenth century, the creation of this new place often came at the expense of the contemporary Indian, who was often ignored or vilified by *mestizo* and Creole writers.

This effort of defining and reinventing is evident in the colonial discourse whose focus is the “Indian” of pre-conquest New Spain and the Other in the colonial world. In Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s work, *La Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España* (c. 1540-1585), commonly referred to as the *Códice Florentino*, the representation of the sixteenth-century Indian reflects the official interests of the Spanish crown and, by extension, of the Catholic Church’s evangelization objectives. In the same century, the work *Historia de Tlaxcala* (c. 1585), written by Diego Muñoz Camargo, one of the earliest *mestizos* born in

the first ten years after the conquest of Tenochtitlán, serves as an alternative response to the role of the Indian and of *mestizos* like him in the new colonial order.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the work of another *mestizo*, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, offers yet another perspective on the evolution of the Indian as both a subject and as an authority. In *Historia de la nación chichimeca* (c. 1610-1640), Alva Ixtlilxochitl constructs a version of indigenous pre-conquest history of New Spain in which indigenous sources are presented as more valuable than the official Spanish texts. In the late seventeenth century, the Creole Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's "Alboroto y motín de los indios de México" (c. 1692) brings together an idealized vision of New Spain's indigenous past with the overwhelmingly negative depiction of the contemporary Indian, a Creole perspective that would come to dominate literary discourse in Mexico throughout the colonial period and after Independence.

The present study contends that, in the nineteenth century, Altamirano utilizes the same techniques employed by these noble *mestizos* and elite Creoles, albeit for different purposes. Altamirano participates in the same appropriation of Mexico's pre-Hispanic past in order to provide himself with the authority to determine for Mexico's indigenous populations that *mestizaje* was the only way possible for them to participate in the formation of the future nation. Altamirano's familiarity with many of these colonial works, in addition to works by Cortés, Mendieta, and López de Gómara, demonstrate that he too is speaking from a position of power as a member of the *ciudad letrada*, and not necessarily as a subaltern, as he is often portrayed.

The works of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, who arrived in New Spain in 1529, less than a decade after the conquest of Tenochtitlán, reveal the beginnings of a cultural

mestizaje. The beginning of the sixteenth century represented a chaotic period full of conflict, confrontation, and adaptation, not just for the indigenous inhabitants of the New World but also for the members of the dominant European group who sought a way of incorporating the Indian into the larger project of colonization. Soon after his arrival, Sahagún discovered that the perfect conversion of the Indian that the first twelve friars had supposedly achieved in 1524 was a failure. For Sahagún, it was necessary to immerse himself in their world, learn their languages and history, and thus gain enough knowledge about their culture in order to achieve their true conversion to Christianity. As Walden Browne, Lockhart, and others have shown, however, despite his immersion in the world of the Nahuas, Sahagún was never able to shed his European and Catholic perspective, nor did he ever abandon the Spanish colonial plan of evangelization and conversion.

The representation of the Indian in Sahagún's work, moreover, was mediated by external factors that must be taken into consideration in any analysis of his work. The indigenous world represented by Sahagún focused in large part on the moment when the Spaniards arrived in Tenochtitlán. The codices and their accompanying text reflected moments of violence and trauma, as well as acts of heroism by some indigenous groups and of cowardice by others. The poems and codices reproduced and translated by Sahagún and his students in Book XII, for example, represented Moctezuma as terrified and fearful, incapable of defending his people, while, in contrast, the Tlatelolcos are depicted as fighting to the death against the Spaniards (Gruzinski, *Painting the Conquest* 36-37).

Lockhart suggests that this type of representation is typical of a group who blames their leader *after* their defeat. According to Lockhart, "We must not look to the Moteucçoma portrayed in the Florentine Codex as a true expression of the first Mexica

reaction to the Spaniards” (*We People Here* 18), yet it is a prevailing image that clearly influenced how nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals and scholars² viewed and portrayed the colonial Indian. Sahagún’s writings, resurrected by many of Altamirano’s contemporaries during the nineteenth century, served to reinforce not only a black-and-white picture of the conquest but also one of the Indian as a subjugated victim.³ In order to try to obtain a more “complete” perspective on the conquest, Lockhart analyzes other texts produced by indigenous individuals that reveal that “they were not shaken out of their usual modes by the Spaniards, did not ultimately view them differently than anything else, but perceived them to be as an encapsulated element within their general lore” (12).⁴

The representation of the Tlatelolcos—“the leading power of the ‘Triple Alliance’ of the Valley of Mexico” (Lockhart 5)—in the *Códice Florentino* complicates the analysis of this text even more. It should not be surprising that the Tlatelolcos are represented as the heroes, as active participants in the resistance against the Spaniards, many times sacrificing

² Sahagún’s influence can be seen in the works of twentieth-century Mexican scholars like Ángel María Garibay and Miguel León-Portilla, who turned to his writings in their goal of reconstructing an “authentic” version of the conquest from the indigenous perspective. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, Garibay and León-Portilla utilized Sahagún’s work in order to show the complete, humiliating defeat of the Aztecs at the hands of the Spanish while ignoring other sources that point to a much more complicated image of the conquest period and beyond, one which reveals that, although relegated to a subaltern position by the dominant culture, indigenous groups often managed to create spaces in which to continue to exist. See Miguel León-Portilla’s *El reverso de la conquista*.

³ In 1877, Alfredo Chavero (1 February 1841-24 October 1906) published a biography of Sahagún simply titled *Sahagún* (Mexico: J.M. Sandoval, 1877). In 1880, Chavero, collaborated with Vicente Riva Palacio in the publication of *México a través de los siglos* in 1880, and in 1882 published yet another biography of Sahagún in volume 6 of the *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. As will be discussed below, the *Boletín* was a publication of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, an important organization in which Altamirano was very involved. Like many other nineteenth-century intellectuals, Chavero was interested in writing and publishing about the pre-Hispanic and conquest periods of Mexico. Documents housed in the Archivo General de la Nación, in Mexico City, reveal that Chavero and Altamirano knew each other personally. In October 1873, Chavero submitted a request to the Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública requesting a leave of absence from the Escuela Nacional de Comercio and requested that Altamirano serve as his substitute during his year-long absence. Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, president of the Republic, granted the request and Altamirano accepted. See “Se nombra a Ygnacio Altamirano a la Catedra de Derecho Administrativo,” October 1873, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes, caja 47, expediente 23, 6 folios.

⁴ See the recent works by Amos Megged, Matthew Restall, and Michel Oudijk, which address the participation of numerous indigenous groups in the conquest of Latin America. For Mexico, see Megged, “Testimonies of the Spanish-Indigenous Conquest”; Oudijk and Restall, *La conquista indígena de Mesoamérica*; and Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors*.

their lives in defense of a leader that abandons his people first emotionally and then through his death. The young Nahua students with whom Sahagún worked in the 1540s were members of the Tlatelolcos, the indigenous group that, according to Lockhart, was the one that truly lost in the conquest. Consequently, they took the opportunity that Sahagún afforded them in order to write their own impressions of the conquest and in order to emphasize certain aspects of these events that were not present in texts produced by other indigenous groups about the conquest.

Additionally, their formal training under Sahagún directly influenced how they represented the histories they were instructed to compile. Sahagún trained them in Latin, Catholic doctrine, and European art and literature. Inevitably, their European training influenced their depiction of the indigenous world, as Serge Gruzinski demonstrates in his work, *Painting the Conquest* (1992), which is discussed below. Sahagún depended on his Nahua students first to transcribe the oral histories they collected from indigenous communities and then to help him edit and correct his translations. Thus, these students became active participants in selecting which histories would be included in Sahagún's work and, equally importantly, which would be omitted.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sahagún's work has been the focus of many literary, linguistic, anthropological, and historical studies. His influence can be detected as far back as the sixteenth century in the works produced by the *mestizo* Diego Muñoz Camargo. Muñoz Camargo wrote his work *Historia de Tlaxcala* between 1576 and 1595, over half a century after the conquest.⁵ According to scholar Marilyn Miller, his work

⁵ Like Sahagún, Muñoz Camargo is also resurrected in the nineteenth century by Liberal intellectuals. In the 1870s Chavero began publishing Muñoz Camargo's work in the *Periódico del Gobierno* and in 1892 published the entire edition of *Historia de Tlaxcala*.

has not received much attention from literary scholars because of the lack of “literary qualities” in his writings (Miller, “Covert *Mestizaje*” 45). The difficulty in fixing his identity either as a biological *mestizo*, a cultural Spaniard, a *criollo*, or a cacique, moreover, has relegated him to an inferior position in colonial studies. Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 60s, historians such as Charles Gibson and Magnus Mörner took on the task of trying to situate Muñoz Camargo within his proper political and historical context.

Gibson’s research has been instrumental in identifying who exactly was Muñoz Camargo and what was his role in the indigenous community of Tlaxcala after the conquest. Gibson describes him as a “famous mestizo historian of Tlaxcala,” son of the Spanish *conquistador* Diego Muñoz and an unidentified indigenous woman of a noble Tlaxcalan family (563). Muñoz Camargo spent much of his childhood in the royal courts in Mexico City but retained his close ties to Tlaxcala through his marriage to Leonor Vázquez, an Indian *cacica* of Tlaxcala (564). He was educated within the European Christian system, and at the age of 10, he was made responsible for the Christian education of a group of Indians that Cabeza de Vaca had brought from Florida to Mexico City, an honor he describes with great pride in his work (Miller, “Covert *Mestizaje*” 43).

Muñoz Camargo’s knowledge, admiration, and respect for the Spanish culture are quite evident in his work, and raise the question of whether he should be considered more *mestizo* than Indian. Some critics have determined that Muñoz Camargo was not able to escape the influence of the Spanish culture and that the text he produced fits completely within the European tradition. Nevertheless, his intimate knowledge of the Nahuatl world cannot be denied. He was bilingual and knew the oral histories of his Tlaxcalan culture through his mother and his wife, both Tlaxcalan noblewomen. This knowledge is

manifested in his representation of the indigenous world in his *Historia*. He creates a genealogy of the Tlaxcalans and their ancestors, the Tarascos and the Chichimecas. It is assumed that much of this information was compiled from oral histories, thus adding an air of authenticity to his version of this history.

Sahagún's influence in Muñoz Camargo's work is evident in chapter 1 of the second book, where Muñoz Camargo describes the prophecies that foretold of the Spanish conquest. Although his telling of the prophecies appears to be authentic and indigenous, Lockhart contends that the prophecies came directly from Sahagún's work, where these prophecies were described in great detail.⁶ In chapter 3, Muñoz Camargo describes the interactions between the Tlaxcalans and Cortés, always emphasizing the important role that the Tlaxcalans had in Moctezuma's defeat. According to historian Susan Shroeder, the Tlaxcalans first fought against the Spanish until they accepted two important facts: the military superiority of the Spanish and the advantages that such an alliance could bring them (*Native Resistance* xiii). Obviously Muñoz Camargo does not mention this part of Tlaxcalan history, a process of selection that results in a positive depiction of the Tlaxcalans from the perspective of a privileged individual who holds an important status in both the Spanish and the indigenous spheres.

This process of selection is also evident in Altamirano's nineteenth-century appropriation of Mexico's pre-Hispanic indigenous past, in his manipulation of his indigenous identity to present himself as an authority, and in decisions he makes regarding the representation of the contemporary Indian. Like Muñoz Camargo, Altamirano's works

⁶ Lockhart examines other indigenous texts to verify whether similar prophecies appear, especially in other Tlaxcalan texts, and discovers that there is no mention of these prophecies. Lockhart concludes that the lack of any mention of

reveal the same Sahagunian influence, as well as an inability to escape his Eurocentric educational formation. This is especially seen in the constant references Altamirano makes not only to colonial texts and their writers but to the emphasis he places on languages such as French, German, English, and, of course Spanish.

Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl was another important sixteenth-century *mestizo* writer whose works were also resurrected in the nineteenth century by intellectuals striving to emphasize Mexico's pre-Hispanic origins in the formation of the nation.⁷ Alva Ixtlilxochitl was born between 1568 and 1580, about 10 years after Muñoz Camargo began writing his *Historia de Tlaxcala*. Alva Ixtlilxochitl was a descendant of the Texcocan nobility through his mother, the *mestiza* Ana Cortés. His father was a Spaniard, Juan Pérez de Peraleda (Germán Vázquez, 18). According to his genealogy, he was a direct descendant of Cuitláhuac, the penultimate Aztec leader of Tenochtitlán. Like Muñoz Camargo, Alva Ixtlilxochitl played an important role in both the indigenous and Spanish worlds. Although he did not reach the same position as did Muñoz Camargo within the Spanish court, Alva Ixtlilxochitl was formally educated in the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco where he studied Spanish and Nahuatl. He also participated in colonial government, serving as governor of Texcoco in 1612 and of Tlalmanalco in 1613 (21).

As in Muñoz Camargo's work, the construction of the Indian in Alva Ixtlilxochitl's work is also a product of both his own formation within the Spanish world and of the need to establish his authority, which included creating a genealogy that emphasized the noble

prophecies indicates that as far as the conquest was concerned, "Tlaxcalans and others had nothing to explain and far less to regret, so they did not look back for omens" (Lockhart, *We People Here* 17).

⁷ Before and after Independence, for example, Carlos Bustamante produced several editions of *Historia de la nación chichimeca*, and in 1891-1892, Alfredo Chavero published *Obras históricas de don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl* at the request of Porfirio Díaz as part of "un homenaje de México á Cristóbal Colón en el cuarto centenario del descubrimiento de América."

lineage of his ancestors. For nineteenth-century Liberals, the question of a collective Mexican lineage and genealogy would play an important role in establishing the noble indigenous elements of their past as they worked towards reinforcing their *mestizo* identity after Independence. This careful construction of lineage also was an important aspect of the sixteenth-century *mestizo* histories whose authors sought some sort of recompense, as in the case of Muñoz Camargo, or who were soliciting help, as in the case of Alva Ixtlilxochitl.

Scholars like Germán Vázquez, editor of the 1985 edition of *Historia de la nación chichimeca*, point out that, despite its pre-Hispanic sources, Alva Ixtlilxochitl's work is "estructurada y pensada por una mentalidad europea" with obvious influences from the Bible and Alfonso X el Sabio (33). Vázquez argues that he can be classified as "Mexican"—neither Spanish nor Indian—and situates him within what he calls "un incipiente nacionalismo de los novohispanos del siglo XVI" (23). This classification speaks to a political construct that reaches its apex in the nineteenth century but one which was adopted first by *mestizos* such as Muñoz Camargo and Alva Ixtlilxochitl, then by Creoles throughout the colonial period and pre-Independence, and finally by Liberals such as Altamirano. Although their political agendas were quite different, both colonial Creoles and nineteenth-century Liberals were concerned with clearly distinguishing themselves from peninsular Spaniards and with defining and justifying what their political and economic roles should be at very different times in Mexico's history. While Germán Vázquez differentiates being "*mestizo*" from "Mexican," it is important to note that in the late nineteenth century, according to Altamirano, to be Mexican—to be a fully participating citizen—meant embracing *mestizaje*. For intellectuals such as Altamirano, being Mexican and *mestizo* were equivalent and represented the future of the new nation.

Vázquez situates Alva Ixtlilxochitl within what Vázquez and other scholars have termed “the incipient nationalism”⁸ of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Creoles, which, he writes, culminate in the works of the Creole scholar and intellectual Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora (23). Indeed, it is not difficult to find a concrete connection between Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Sigüenza y Góngora. Vázquez explains that Sigüenza y Góngora had in his possession the original manuscript of *Historia de la nación chichimeca*, a gift from Juan de Alva, the illegitimate son of Alva Ixtlilxochitl. The fact that this work ended up in the hands of Sigüenza y Góngora is not surprising, given his fascination with collecting artifacts and texts concerning New Spain’s indigenous past. As an intellectual and as a Creole, he considered himself responsible for recovering objects that would provide some insight into New Spain’s pre-Hispanic history, a role Altamirano would play as well in the nineteenth century.

Sigüenza y Góngora’s admiration for New Spain’s indigenous past did not transfer to the contemporary Indian, especially to the lower-class Indian that inhabited Mexico City in the seventeenth century. Sigüenza y Góngora was unable to relate New Spain’s glorious indigenous past with the current chaos and disorder in Mexico City, an urban space where there was constant contact between the different social, economic, and ethnic groups. His disdain was directed at the masses, comprised of Indians, mulattoes, as well as Spaniards and Creoles who did not respect the social and ethnic divisions that he believed represented a

⁸ In *Latin America between Colony and Nation: Selected Essays*, historian John Lynch addresses the colonial roots of Independence, nationalism, and the formation of an American identity among Creoles, as early as the seventeenth century. He attributes this “predominantly Creole nationalism” to the Bourbon reforms, which attempted to wrest control from the Creoles in economic and political arenas. Historian Dorothy Tanck de Estrada also addresses the idea of nationalism in colonial New Spain, noting that in the eighteenth-century several works published expounded ideas of a “pueblo que ya sabía era distinto y que comenzaba a considerarse patria” (27). In Juan José Eguiara y Eguren’s (c. 1696-1763) work, she identifies a “sentido incipiente de nacionalismo” meant to defend New Spain against critics who considered it an intellectual wasteland (“Tensión” 28-29).

necessary social order. This attitude is clearly manifested in the letter he writes to Admiral Andrés de Pez titled “Alboroto y motín de los indios de México del 7 de junio de 1692.” In this letter, Sigüenza y Góngora is focused on representing the contemporary indigenous subject as the epitome of what is wrong in the New World. Although he also criticizes other groups such as the blacks and the Chinese, he directly blames the Indians as the cause of the riot that arose after a year of flooding, insect plagues, and the resulting lack of food. He writes,

...siendo plebe tan en extremo plebe, que sólo ella lo puede ser de la que se reputare la más infame, y lo es de todas las plebes, por componerse de indios, de negros criollos y bozales de diferentes naciones, de chinos, de mulatos, de moriscos, de mestizos, de zambaigos, de lobos y también de españoles que, en declarándose zaramullos (que es lo mismo que pícaros, chulos y arrebatacapas) y degenerando de sus obligaciones, son los peores entre esta ruin canalla. (*Seis obras* 113)

The contact between these various groups in the urban setting of Mexico City resulted in a disorderly riot that disrespected the symbols of institutions such as the Church or the government. For Sigüenza y Góngora, this lack of respect for the social order was the greatest sin for which God had punished the unruly masses with famine.

In order to illustrate how control of the city and the Indians could be retaken, Sigüenza y Góngora returns in “Alboroto y motín” to the moment of conquest. According to literary critic Kathleen Ross, Sigüenza y Góngora’s letter is a *carta de relación* similar to the ones written by Hernán Cortés in the 1520s to Charles V. Sigüenza y Góngora uses as a model Cortés’s description of “La noche triste” in order to emphasize his role as a witness to

the events of the uprising and his identification with Spanish power. According to Ross, he presents himself as another Cortés who can establish and maintain control over the Indians. Ross also points out that “Alboroto y motín” is a Creole *and* an American text in Sigüenza y Góngora’s appropriation of New Spain’s pre-Hispanic history as his own and in the linguistic abilities of the narrator in understanding and translating into Spanish the voices of the indigenous women. Sigüenza y Góngora also offers details about indigenous foods, culture, and the flora and fauna of the New World. He does this, however, in order to create a new “American” identity for Creoles like himself and not necessarily to represent the contemporary indigenous peoples of New Spain, a technique adopted also by nineteenth-century intellectuals as they strive to create a *mestizo* nation after Independence.

In “Alboroto y motín,” it is evident that Sigüenza y Góngora’s identification with the pre-Hispanic past suffers a rupture when he is confronted with the contemporary Indian. According to literary critic José Rabasa, Sigüenza y Góngora, a member of the elite, organized the representation of the uprising according to his own political agenda, appropriating New Spain’s indigenous past while rejecting the contemporary Indian. Writing from his position as a lettered Criollo, Sigüenza y Góngora situates the contemporary Indian within a subaltern position. He uses his knowledge as an educated member of the elite to demonstrate that the Spanish dominance over the Indians during the conquest was justified because the Indians were idolatrous and barbaric. He uses the same justification to declare that now Creoles like himself, with their knowledge of the indigenous past and as witnesses of the history of New Spain after the conquest, are the ones who should govern in order to impose control over the Indians and the rest of the masses that threaten the future of New Spain. In a way, Sigüenza y Góngora offers his text as a warning of what

might happen if Creoles do not receive support from the Spanish government in order to maintain order and control.

Rabasa's analysis of Sigüenza y Góngora's "Alboroto y motín" reveals not necessarily a Creole text but one of "subaltern insurgency" in which it is possible to recover strategies of resistance and mobilization from the lower social classes that can help scholars of subaltern studies identify these same strategies within the text (53). In colonial texts such as this one, produced by an elite member of the dominant culture, Rabasa identifies the struggle between two cultures that is present in today's indigenous insurgencies. Despite Sigüenza y Góngora's efforts to appropriate Mexico's indigenous past as his own while marginalizing the contemporary Indian, Rabasa sees this text as just one of many examples of subaltern rebellion against Western culture that began with the arrival of Europeans to the New World.

Rabasa has noted that subaltern studies must avoid "privileging an elite Third World intellectual cadre" and instead position the subaltern (or the First World sympathizer) as a "collaborator of colonialist discourses" (51). Rabasa contends that colonialist writings extend beyond the colonial period and impact contemporary modernization programs that tend to confine "Indian cultures to the museums and the curio shop" (52). Preparing for independence, the Creole elite in late-eighteenth-century New Spain, for example, made it a point to distance themselves from the contemporary Indian while, at the same time, appropriating the indigenous mythical past in order to provide their burgeoning new nation with a long and ancient tradition that would make it equal to that of Europe.

During the nineteenth century, the Liberal project of *mestizaje* accelerated this process of appropriation and rejection noted in the literary and artistic productions of the previous centuries. Scholar Agustín Basave Benítez's (philosopher, sociologist, and politician) work, *México mestizo* (1992), offers an in-depth analysis of the concept of *mestizaje* in nineteenth-century Mexico, focusing specifically on the concept of *mestizofilia* in the works of Andrés Molina Enríquez (1865-1940), especially as developed in *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909). Molina Enríquez was a Positivist sociologist and amateur anthropologist who believed that the only true Mexicans were the *mestizos*.⁹ Like many of his contemporaries, Molina Enríquez believed that Mexico would not prosper until it finished its process of *mestizaje*, or whitening. Thus, Molina Enríquez promoted *mestizofilia*—the mixing of races and cultures to produce the new nation—as a desirable goal for Mexico.

Mestizaje and the formation of nation become so intertwined that rejecting the process of *mestizaje* meant a rejection of the nation. Basave Benítez defines the nation as a group of people who feel that they belong to one nationality. This called for the creation of a state that would contain all these groups while at the same time separating them from the rest (14). Literary critic Mary Louise Pratt discusses the three stages in the creation of the modern nation—an “imagined community”—as conceived by historian Benedict Anderson: first, the religious communities; second, the dynastic realms; and third, the nation-state, in which “Nations are held together by an idea of a secular fraternal bond” (9). Basave Benítez notes that the idea of nationalism is one that

⁹ Mexican Positivists were a group of Mexican intellectuals who served as architects of Porfirio Díaz's state, economic, and social policies in the late nineteenth century. According to historian Mary K. Vaughan, positivism, a European import that combined the ideas of Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer, advocated the idea of

was created and executed by the elite of Latin America, a notion that is reiterated by scholars such as Angel Rama and Thomas C. Holt, who writes that “the loudest cries of national belonging...came from those who denied it to others” (cited in Appelbaum et al. ix). In turn, *mestizaje* is also viewed as a process imposed by the dominant culture on the subaltern one, a process that “always began as an initiative of white intellectual elites...and often served to maintain the social status quo” (xi).

Similar to José Rabasa, Basave Benítez also notes that during the early Independence movements, Creoles appropriated the pre-Hispanic glorious past of the dead Indian “a cambio de desvincularse de la miseria del indio vivo” (19). For Altamirano, Sierra, and other late nineteenth-century intellectuals like Molina Enríquez, the poor social conditions of Mexico’s rural Indians were directly related to their condition of supposed racial inferiority as well as to their lack of education, a situation they directly blamed on their status as colonized subjects. While their pre-Hispanic past pointed to Mexico’s future national identity, their contemporary status would only serve as a detriment to its social and economic progress. Basave Benítez examines how the educational system, developed during the late 1800s, served as a tool to put into practice the concept of *mestizofilia*. Education, it was hoped, would help erase the racial distinctions—and *localidad*—and would help promote those fraternal links between groups that would result in “una raza cósmica” (25),¹⁰ a concept developed by José Vasconcelos, Mexico’s Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924.

European and Anglo-Saxon superiority and thus supported “foreign penetration [as] a vehicle for development” (13). This idea would be extended to include the whitening of Mexico’s indigenous population through miscegenation.

¹⁰ See Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race*, for an analysis of how Chicano critics have appropriated this concept in their work on *mestizaje* in the U.S.

Many of the ideas concerning the education and *mestizaje* of Mexico's nineteenth-century indigenous populations carried over into the early twentieth century, as seen in the work of Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio (1883-1960), especially *Forjando la patria* (1916), and his contemporary, Vasconcelos.¹¹ According to Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, editor and translator of the first English translation of this work, Gamio sought "to reconcile the anthropology he had learned at Columbia University with nineteenth-century narratives about modernization and even older anxieties about the nature of postcolonial national identity" (2). Although Armstrong-Fumero perceives Gamio "as a promoter of the rights of Mexico's indigenous people," he acknowledges that Gamio utilized his scientific training to tie national progress with the necessary assimilation of indigenous peoples through *mestizaje* (6, 10).

In Vasconcelos's idealized vision of the future, he predicted the coming of the Aesthetic Era brought about by the "expansion of human consciousness beyond the present limits prescribed by science and logic" (*La raza cósmica* xvii). According to editor and translator Didier T. Jaén, Vasconcelos contended that because of the mixture of races already in process in Latin America, Latin America needed to be ready to remove any remaining ethnic barriers and produce a new, fully *mestizo* race in which any identifiable racial traits would "become diffused and eventually disappear, and which will be gifted with the power of creative fantasy over reason" (xii). Although Jaén argues that Vasconcelos has been unfairly condemned for an anti-Indianist attitude in his work, it is difficult to overlook his observation, made in the 1948 prologue of *La raza cósmica*:

¹¹ For a discussion of both Gamio and Vasconcelos's role in the promotion of the concept of *mestizaje*, see Miguel López's dissertation, "(De)generando heterogeneidades," especially the introduction and chapter 1.

“El atraso de los pueblos hispanoamericanos, donde predomina el element indígena, es difícil de explicar” (45).

Vasconcelos’s call for a biological transformation of the races, accompanied by a spiritual factor that he claims helped advance the Indian from cannibalism to a civilized state in a few centuries (xx), echoes the Liberal belief that education must be accompanied by a biological transformation, hence the promotion of immigration policies designed to gradually “whiten” the indigenous populations. Altamirano’s *bosquejos de educación* discussed below in Chapter 3 reveal his own role in advocating formal and social education as a tool for transforming Mexico’s indigenous populations into cultural *mestizos*.

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, literary and cultural critics have carefully analyzed the process of contact between cultures and the relationships that emerge from what is often seen as an uneven and often uneasy alliance between a dominant and a subaltern group. Mary Louise Pratt defines these “contact zones” as “places where cultures that have been on historically separate trajectories intersect or come into contact with each other and establish a society, often in contexts of colonialism” (1). In his 1985 work, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, Angel Rama refers to this as a process of “*transculturación*,” rather than *mestizaje*, in which the minority group takes what it needs from the dominant group while conserving what it wants from its own culture. Influenced by the work of Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz, Rama also rejects the term “*aculturación*” because it implies the dominant culture subsuming another, thus resulting in a complete erasure or loss of the colonized culture (*Transculturación narrativa* 32).

The process of transculturation also moves us away from the biological aspects of nineteenth-century *mestizaje* towards one where cultural manifestations reflect a form of “narrative transitivity” between cultures, regardless of the unequal relationship between the cultures in question (Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race* 17). Rama proposes that the subaltern group participates in a process of losses, rediscoveries, and incorporation from within its own culture and that of the dominant group. While Ortiz acknowledges that the point of initial contact between the Spanish and the indigenous groups of the New World was one of violence, attempted extermination, and conquest, Rama points out that the processes of contact gave rise to a system in which the dominated culture refuses to be eradicated or relegated to a mythical past.

According to Miller, Pratt approaches the concept of “transculturation” from an ethnographic understanding in order to describe how subaltern groups “select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant...culture” (cited in Miller 17). Transculturation thus acknowledges a transitive, or interactive, process that two cultures undergo as they negotiate a daily existence, which, in turn, is reflected in cultural productions such as art, music, and literature. More importantly, it reveals a resistance on the part of the subaltern group to being dismissed as simply passive or inferior. Critics, therefore, can now look as far back as the moment of first contact between the Spanish and indigenous groups for these moments of cultural resistance and appropriation in order to reiterate that indigenous groups did not, in fact, lose their cultural identity.

In his work *La ciudad letrada* (1984), Rama uses the concept of transculturation to describe the social, political, and racial dynamics throughout the history of Mexico

City. Of particular significance to the present study is his chapter on the nineteenth century, especially his observations regarding the role of education and language in the on-going efforts to assimilate Mexico's indigenous populations. Once more, Rama argues that what is in play during the nineteenth century is the process of transculturation, whereby members of the lower social classes—originally from the rural areas—managed to create a space in urban Mexico City, the center of power for the *letrados*, in which the *plebe* retained “el habla popular” in their everyday lives (44).¹²

Rama's identification of the existence of a popular language in the nineteenth century proved to be a challenge to the official language of the *ciudad letrada*, which served hegemony by producing laws, proclamations, cédulas, and propaganda (41). The rigidity of the public language employed by the *ciudad letrada* created a separation between the *letrados* and the *plebe* that allowed the masses to maintain their private language, which often reflected their indigenous connections. Indeed, it is the public diatribes of the *letrados* against the continued presence of this informal, ignorant, and barbaric popular language that point to the evolution of what Rama calls “el español americano” (*La ciudad letrada* 44). As Chapter 3 of the present study demonstrates, the role of language—Spanish versus indigenous—comes to play a key role in Altamirano's own works and in the official educational policies he helped develop, which were aimed specifically at assimilating indigenous rural communities.

Rama refers to the existence of these two types of languages—that of the dominant and the subaltern—as “*diglosia*,” a Bahktinian linguistic concept that has been

¹² Echoing Sigüenza y Góngora's “Alboroto y motín,” in the nineteenth-century urban setting of Mexico City, Rama describes the *plebe* as comprised of lower social classes of foreigners, mulatos, zambos, mestizos and Indians (Rama, *La ciudad letrada* 45).

adopted by other critics such as Antonio Cornejo-Polar and Martin Lienhard to describe the process of cultural transformations. In the nineteenth century, members of the *ciudad letrada* such as Altamirano and Sierra viewed the existence of the indigenous and African languages in rural Mexico well after Independence as a challenge to their project of economic and social progress. For twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars, however, the continued existence of these private languages proved that these groups found ways to resist complete assimilation, despite the concerted efforts of the *ciudad letrada*.

In chapter 4 of *La ciudad letrada*, “La ciudad modernizada,” Rama sees a redoubling of efforts during the nineteenth century to urbanize and educate the rural masses, a process which involved the appropriation by intellectuals of the oral culture of the *campesinos* and its incorporation into written text. Although the *letrados* tried to immobilize their oral production, the producers of this oral culture, according to Rama, do not remain fixed in time or space. They are always in a process of transformation: “esas culturas nunca estuvieron inmóviles...ni se rehusaron a las novedades transformadoras....” They were continuously “eligiendo y desechando sobre ese continuo cultural, combinando sus componentes de distinta manera y produciendo respuestas adecuadas a las modificaciones históricas” (*La ciudad letrada* 88). Despite this affirmation of agency on the part of the subaltern groups, the national literatures produced during the nineteenth century by intellectuals like Altamirano attempted to represent the official triumph of the *ciudad letrada*.

Despite their attempts to assimilate the subaltern groups through education and through the whitening of the indigenous masses, members of the *ciudad letrada* failed to

create a single *mestizo* race united in the project of nationalism. With the immigration of the masses to the cities, Rama notes, came the invasion of the popular cultures, but it was not the conservative rural folklore that could be incorporated by the intellectuals in their *cuadros de costumbres* but instead one that was “vulgar, masiva y crecientemente urbana” (*La ciudad letrada* 143).

The vulgar masses described by Sigüenza y Góngora in the seventeenth century and by Rama in the nineteenth century reflect a multiplicity of identities that proved to be an obstacle to the project of *mestizaje*, both before and after Independence. Critic Néstor García Canclini’s theory of cultural hybridity and its immersion in history allows for another way to discuss the presence of so many distinct groups in Latin America’s evolution. García Canclini’s use of the term “hybridity” has a biological base, pointing to the examples biologists have provided: “ejemplos de hibridaciones fecundas, enriquecedoras, que generan expansión y diversificación” (“Culturas híbridas y estrategias comunicacionales” 110). For García Canclini, the term “hybridity” more appropriately describes the diverse intercultural interactions between the subaltern groups and the dominant culture than the more limiting terms of *mestizaje* and syncretism, which, according to critic Martin Lienhard, implies that practices have merged into one.

According to Cornejo-Polar, García Canclini’s theory offers a way to enter and exit out of modernity, “aunque estos tránsitos no siempre obedezcan a las necesidades, o a los intereses o a la libertad de quienes los realizan” (“*Mestizaje e hibridez*” 342). In his study of Andean literature and culture, Cornejo-Polar identifies moments of “performance hibridizado” that occur in certain border zones in opposition to the hegemony of the nation. For him, culture is the arena where the dominant and subaltern

groups come into conflict and out of which emerges plurality, an idea developed in his influential 1994 work, *Escribir en el aire*. This plurality, or heterogeneity as he calls it, is evident in the uneasy, often conflictive coexistence of oral forms within the written text, which many times are obscured by the dominance of the written word. Cornejo-Polar is concerned with identifying those spaces of contact in which “la conflictividad de los actores sociales produce cruces y contaminaciones que desmienten la fijeza de las identidades colectivas, expresándolas en su carácter fluido y provisional” (ix).

In tracing Latin America’s heterogeneity Cornejo-Polar discovers many instances of cultural shock between oral and alphabetic cultures that reveal the inevitable miscommunications between the Spanish and indigenous cultures that often led to violent confrontations. Although his focus is Andean literature, Cornejo-Polar contends that the conflicts between these two cultures occurred throughout Latin America, resulting in confusing and complex processes of trying to identify and dominate the subaltern “Other.” From the viewpoint of the dominant culture, these moments of first contact, or “grado cero,” as Cornejo-Polar calls them, propel the Indian into a process of transformation in which he is stripped of his cultural identity (such as Inka or Nahua) and converted into the muted “Other,” a colonized figure whose agency is denied because of his inability to communicate with the dominant culture (36). The written text, such as the Bible in Andean literature’s moment of “grado cero,” becomes a symbol of domination, power, and triumph over the oral culture of the indigenous groups. During the nineteenth century, we see these same conflicts between the oral and alphabetic cultures, as Altamirano proposes that the transformation of the Indian could only be achieved through education and literacy. The novel—the written word—becomes, for Altamirano, a

pedagogical tool to impose the power of the dominant *ciudad letrada* over what he portrays as a powerless, illiterate culture.

The process of contact between the various social classes, once again, points to a process of continued negotiation, which critics like Cornejo-Polar view as a “proceso múltiple de mixturación” (“*Mestizaje e hibridez*” 341). While many contemporary scholars of cultural studies see the process of *mestizaje* as one in which people of two distinct groups are forced together and manage to survive and even thrive, others like Cornejo-Polar see the use of the term *mestizaje* as one that offers “imágenes armónicas de lo que obviamente es desgajado y beligerante” (341). Cornejo-Polar is also critical of the term “*transculturación*” as proposed by Ortiz and Rama, which he sees as simply a more sophisticated version of the term “*mestizaje*.” Again, what he objects to is the interpretation that harmony now prevails where before there existed conflict and violence.

French historian and critic Serge Gruzinski also addresses the processes of cultural transformation, or *mestizaje*, that indigenous peoples underwent in the sixteenth century. In *Painting the Conquest* (1992), Gruzinski examines the many codices produced in New Spain during the sixteenth century, which he sees as visual representations of the beginnings of *mestizaje*. Gruzinski deems it inappropriate to speak of a “subjugated vision” because these images reveal that Indians did not “limit themselves to the role of passive spectators” (12). The creation of codices, moreover, such as the Lienzo de Tlaxcala, reveal that, as early as the 1550s, the “Tlaxcalan nobility had become sufficiently Hispanicized to be aware of its position in a colonial universe and to apply all possible pressure on the crown in order to win its case” (40). While the codices analyzed by Gruzinski were indeed produced by

indigenous individuals, it is clear that the artists had been trained in the techniques of Renaissance art, and, as Gruzinski shows, many of the indigenous students showed quite an aptitude for adopting and incorporating certain European forms and images into their creations.

For Gruzinski, however, sixteenth-century *mestizaje* did not imply a complete erasure of indigenous culture, for he also identifies the inclusion of what are clearly pre-Hispanic elements in the codices. This artistic creation “[does] not...represent the triumph of a European style; rather it reveals the multifarious evolution of indigenous reaction to new forms” (52). Thus, while acknowledging that the initial conquest and subsequent colonization of the New World involved many moments of conflict, violence, and domination, Gruzinski is more concerned with identifying those moments in cultural production that reveal the emergence of a true *mestizo* culture.

According to historian Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Gruzinski’s work is a challenge to proponents of cultural studies and multiculturalism, which Gruzinski contends has contributed to the increasing tendency to exoticise Latin America (270). The promotion of multicultural diversity and the reconstruction of the “Indianness” of the indigenous population, moreover, have resulted in the rigidification of identities and in making “difference” the focus of many scholars’ works (Cañizares-Esguerra 270-71). In his book, *El pensamiento mestizo* (2000) (translation of *La pensée métisse* 1999), Gruzinski again proposes that the cultural aspects of *mestizaje* can be identified in the daily interactions in which the indigenous and the European were forced to negotiate both vital and trivial questions of day-to-day life. Citing Mexican anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1908-

1996), he writes: “los elementos opuestos de las culturas en contacto...tienden a penetrarse mutuamente, a conjugarse y a identificarse” (45).

To reduce the conquest of the New World to a destructive encounter between the “good” Indians and the “bad” Europeans “empobrece la realidad” (48). Gruzinski cautions that one must never forget that the process of adaptation and *mestizaje* was born out of the need to survive in a “contexto de conquista, de choque y de violencia física que nunca hemos de perder de vista” (90). Equally important for Gruzinski is acknowledging that out of the conquest emerged purely *mestizo* original art forms that are to be celebrated. As Cañizares-Esguerra points out, for Gruzinski “the study of sixteenth-century Mexico is not an antiquarian exercise but an activity that should shed abundant light on contemporary predicaments and challenges” (274).

The work of scholars like Gruzinski moves away from the racial and biological components of *mestizaje* that reflected the pseudo-science of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries towards a study of its cultural production. It can be argued, however, that, like the intellectuals of the nineteenth century, Gruzinski promotes the idea that *mestizaje* equaled the irreversible transformation of the indigenous population, to the point where he questions whether it is possible to identify where the indigenous world begins and where the world of the Spanish conquerors ends: “¿dónde empieza el mundo indígena y dónde termina el de los conquistadores? Sus confines se encuentran hasta tal punto imbricados que ya son inseparables” (*El pensamiento mestizo* 80).

Gruzinski contends that historians such as James Lockhart have worked diligently to show that the indigenous and Spanish spheres remained separate, thus accounting for an indigenous identity that survived colonialism. He argues that this approach negates the

chaotic, violent, negotiated process of *mestizaje* that resulted from the encounter of diverse groups of people—both European and indigenous: “La diversidad de los protagonistas indígenas y europeas...y las tensiones que les oponen introducen una heterogeneidad que la conmoción de la derrota y las deficiencias del marco político acentúan aún más” (77). Gruzinski’s theories promote the idea that heterogeneity, multiplicity of identities, and cultural diversity are found in the study of the *mestizos* who, while greatly influenced by European culture, actively participated in their own cultural production of the sixteenth century.

In studying the cultural production of indigenous groups before and after the conquest, cultural critic Walter Mignolo has also sought to identify that space “in-between” in which cultural differences are articulated (xii). In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), Mignolo calls for critics to look back at the colonial legacies in order to examine the interactions between people, institutions, and the resulting cultural production then and in the present. Like many other critics, Mignolo points to the conflicts and clashes between an oral and an alphabetic culture during the conquest of the Americas. The dominant culture believed that people without letters were a people without history; oral narratives were looked upon as incoherent and inconsistent (3), thus providing justification for the project of colonization. The colonizing of language, memory, and space was directly tied to the evangelical project—Indians had to learn the Castilian language and customs in order to be converted to Christianity (2).

In the nineteenth century, these processes of “colonization” continued in the name of creating the new nation. Indeed, the word itself continued to be used by Altamirano and other nineteenth-century intellectuals in reference to the ongoing project of

assimilating Mexico's indigenous peoples. Mignolo writes that the builders of nationhood "played an important role in the conflictive process of negotiating Spanish legacy and celebrating the Amerindian's pre-Spanish past while at the same time suppressing its burning present" (316).

Mignolo's work emphasizes the relationship between modernity, coloniality, and capitalism. While colonialism in Latin America may have officially ended with Independence from Spain, the logic of coloniality has not. Altamirano's works demonstrate that the Liberal goal of assuring that Mexico could compete economically with other nations involved the continued colonization and transformation of its indigenous pueblos. The dominant Western culture continues to control financial flows and the international markets, as well as to impose its ideas regarding progress and prosperity. According to Mignolo, under colonialism, the Crown and Church were convinced that the conversion of indigenous groups, and of their social organization, would be beneficial for the Indian. All they lacked to become "civilized" were the Christian faith and alphabetic writing (452).

This colonial attitude continued into the nineteenth century, when intellectuals took it upon themselves to determine that what indigenous communities needed in order to fully participate in the formation of the new nation was access to Western education and industrialized methods of production. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, history may seem to be repeating itself, as the dominant culture continues to call for the complete assimilation of indigenous communities around the world. Mignolo, however, claims that it is not that history repeats itself but rather that the world is still living under the structure of modernity/coloniality, "which has changed its content but not its logic

and goals” (454). Mignolo, furthermore, concludes that it is only recently that indigenous groups have begun to escape the paradigm of colonialism by controlling the *production* of knowledge and thus “changing the terms of the conversation” (“Epistemic Disobedience” 162).

Like Mignolo, Rabasa directly links the beginning of modernity in the New World that arrived with the Spanish to the beginnings of a capitalistic system that continues to impose coloniality in Latin America. Rabasa recognizes that the pressures of the dominant culture have permanently impacted indigenous groups, explaining that modernity and its colonial legacy are part of their outlooks. Nevertheless, in examining the processes of interaction between the two worlds, he finds evidence—in the past and present—where indigenous groups have managed to articulate their worldview in a way that reveals that the modern and the non-modern can coexist without contradiction. The field of subaltern studies provides scholars an opportunity to identify a plurality and multiplicity of indigenous voices, what Rabasa refers to as echographies, which speak to their resistance, rebellion, and continued negotiation against and within the dominant group.

The study of language is one area that brings together questions of assimilation, resistance, and negotiation. The role of language—public and private, oral and written—and its relationship to those who hold power is one that continues to dominate the field of literary and cultural studies, as seen in the work of literary critics Angel Rama and Martin Lienhard. Like Cornejo-Polar, Lienhard also rejects the term “transculturation” to describe processes of interaction between two cultures because it denies “the permanent discrimination of those sectors marginalized culturally or socially” (Miller, *Rise and Fall*

of the *Cosmic Race* 18). Instead, Lienhard suggests applying the Bahktinian linguistic concept of *diglosia* to cultural, literary, and historical studies. Lienhard contends that the paradigm of *diglosia* will continue to reveal that colonization was not as rigid or as static as had been previously thought.

As seen in Chapter 3 and the conclusion of the present study, evidence of *diglosia* during the late colonial period and during the nineteenth century is largely ignored by Altamirano in his writings because it points to a resistance to the complete assimilation demanded by the Liberal project of *mestizaje*. Lienhard also advocates that cultural *diglosia* can be a useful tool in analyzing current processes of contact under the ever-increasing pressures of globalization where certain subaltern groups continue to actively take—sometimes by force—what they need from the dominant groups in order to preserve their cultural identity and maintain political agency. Of importance to his theory is the realization that while the dominant language, or culture, often permanently changes the marginalized culture, the reverse is also often true. Although often in subtle ways, the language of the subaltern succeeds in altering that of the dominant group.

This overview of the ever-evolving theories of *mestizaje*, transculturation, cultural hybridity, and cultural *diglosia* reveals that the process of interaction and the relationships that developed when two worlds and two worldviews came into contact is still ongoing today. Attempts to relegate indigenous groups to their pre-Hispanic past while denying the contemporary Indian's acts of agency and resistance have failed. While the indigenous cultures were permanently impacted by the conquest, it is also true that the dominant culture was forever changed as well. The work of these scholars, regardless of their locus of enunciation, reveals a process of negotiation, fluidity,

resistance, rebellion, and adaptation that, although often manipulated by members of the dominant culture to serve either their own agendas or that of the Crown or government, nevertheless reveals a plurality of indigenous and *mestizo* voices and identities. Scholars like Gruzinski fear that cultural and subaltern studies have led to a rigidification of identities and a focus on “difference.” However, the questions of identity and difference have always been present in Latin America’s colonial history and present, and the work of critics like Rama, Mignolo, and Rabasa force us to acknowledge that the subaltern has always retained a voice and identity in the spaces “in-between.”

Despite official projects of assimilation and *mestizaje*, indigenous groups have made and continue to make their presence felt. The nineteenth century, analyzed through the work of intellectuals like Altamirano, reveals a concerted effort to legally, culturally, and biologically exterminate the Indian. The works analyzed herein help situate the project of *mestizaje* in the nineteenth century within the larger context of modernity, coloniality, racialization, and agency. Cultural critics also force us to examine the past in order to “speak the present,” to borrow Mignolo’s terms. Their work demands that we continue to examine these complex relationships born out of coloniality.

Towards this end, in Chapter 1, “Altamirano as Indian and *Mestizo*,” the present study examines key elements of Altamirano’s biography in order to understand how the issues of *mestizaje* and indigenous identity come together in his body of work as well as in his life. In order to promote the project of *mestizaje*, Altamirano and other Liberal intellectuals such as Ignacio Ramírez and Justo Sierra chose to portray the nineteenth-century Indian as ignorant, superstitious, and apathetic, a result, they stressed, of his colonial servitude. Only those Indians willing to undergo the process of becoming a

cultural *mestizo*, like Altamirano, could dream of participating as a citizen of modern Mexico.

Many scholars such as historians, anthropologists, and linguists, however, have shown that indigenous peoples, in fact, did *not* remain passive under colonial rule nor during the nineteenth century, as seen in Chapter 2, “Life, Politics, and Discourse in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Mexico.” While one cannot expect Altamirano to have known what current research has revealed about the complex relationship between Mexico’s indigenous population and the dominant culture, this analysis demonstrates that Altamirano’s active participation in many historic nineteenth-century events, as well as his personal and professional relationships with Mexican military and political leaders, would have made it impossible for him to ignore what other scholars have noted: throughout Mexico’s history, the subaltern, the Other, the Indian, has fought to construct a space within the dominant culture from which to speak.

Chapter 3, “The Indian, the *Mestizo*, and Education: The Path to Civilization,” examines Altamirano’s educational philosophies as reflected in his literary and political writings. His didactic works analyzed in this chapter reveal that he was not able to escape his own formation in a world still functioning within the colonial paradigm. The education policies developed by Altamirano’s mentor, Ignacio Ramírez, in the 1860s, Altamirano’s own writings of the 1860s and 1870s, and, later, the writings and policies of Altamirano’s student, Justo Sierra, together serve to demonstrate how the Liberal party often appropriated and incorporated colonial perspectives and policies in addressing the question of the Indian. Indeed, in their efforts to secure a progressive, modern future for Mexico’s citizens, their works served to entrench the most negative aspects of

colonialism concerning the representation and treatment of Mexico's indigenous groups. Through the lens of Walter Mignolo's post-colonial theories, it is possible to see that Altamirano and his peers were not able to escape the colonial paradigm they were so eager to reject after Independence.

This study of Altamirano's literary production and his role in defining *mestizaje* as Mexico's future contributes to the broader area of Latin American Studies because it points to how an interdisciplinary approach can shed light on the complex issues of identity and nationalism. Although the distinct racial and ethnic categories had been officially eliminated in the first Mexican constitutions after Independence, the people to whom the label referred had not. Mexico's founding fathers struggled with promoting and implementing the concept of *mestizaje* and with the question of what to do with "the subaltern" after Independence. The present study, "Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Journey from "*indio puro*" to Cultural *Mestizo*," traces the path that nineteenth-century Mexican Liberals chose and advocated for its indigenous populations: assimilation through *mestizaje*. It also concludes that in many significant ways, the project of *mestizaje* throughout Latin America failed, as evidenced by the indigenous groups that not only continue to fight for their rights in the twenty-first century but, according to Mignolo, have managed to take control of the production of knowledge and are moving from being the known—passive—to being the knower—active ("Epistemic Disobedience" 162).

Chapter 1

Altamirano as Indian and *Mestizo*:

Processes of Appropriation and Manipulation

In the nineteenth century, the conciliatory utopia offered by proponents of *mestizaje* served the purpose of trying to create a national identity for Mexico. *Mestizaje* attempted to “gather into one unique torrent the many rivers that converged in this physical and spiritual geography we call Latin America” (Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race* 3). The role of creating a national literature in Mexico led, as many literary and cultural critics have pointed out, to the appropriation of Mexico’s pre-Hispanic culture, thus subsuming it under the flag of nationalism while relegating the Indian to his colonial past and denying “su identidad como sujeto” (Cornejo-Polar, *Escribir en el aire* 13).

Many Latin American intellectuals of the nineteenth century were instrumental in promoting the *mestizo* as the ideal citizen of the new nations, forever changing not just how *mestizos* were viewed during Latin America’s colonial past but also how their image was projected into the future, as many Latin American countries continued to struggle with their treatment of their indigenous populations while promoting their *mestizo* make-up. More importantly, as this study demonstrates, the nineteenth century would prove devastating for many indigenous groups in Mexico, who would legally disappear under the Liberal agenda of *mestizaje*. However, as evidenced by current twenty-first century events, it is clear that the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the rest of the world have refused to be erased by the process of *mestizaje*.

This chapter explores how issues of *mestizaje* and indigenous identity come together in the life of one nineteenth-century “indio” intellectual, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, who serves as a case study for the complex issues of identity and nationalism in the nineteenth century. The question of how identity can and always has been manipulated by members of the subaltern and dominant groups will also be addressed. This manipulation has its positive and negative aspects, for manipulation implies a certain amount of control and power for the manipulator. However, it is quite a different story for those being manipulated. This analysis of Altamirano’s life and literary discourse, discussed throughout this study, reveals that he participated in the manipulation of the image of the Indian as well as in the manipulation of his own biography in order to promote the project of *mestizaje*.

Altamirano was born in the pueblo of Tixtla, in southern Mexico (present-day Guerrero), on November 13, 1834. Altamirano’s biographers have often depicted him as an “*indio puro*” who rose from his poor, rural origins to become an educated leader and writer. In 1984, a group of scholars in Mexico published an *homenaje* that would recognize Altamirano’s role in the evolution of a national literature in the nineteenth century. The way in which Altamirano is represented is revealing. Once more, he is the “*indio de raza pura*” who did not speak Spanish until the age of 14 (Tola de Habich x). He is represented in this *homenaje* as the son of illiterate, indigenous parents who, through the sheer force of his genius and character is able to attain success, that is, become educated alongside “los de razón,” the sons of the Spanish (xiv). As seen below, Altamirano himself contributes to this image of himself as the humble, poor savage who is rescued from his rural life through access to education.

Fernando Tola de Habich, the editor of this *homenaje*, questions these anecdotal stories, pointing out that Altamirano's father was, in fact, an *alcalde*, which meant the family had a certain amount of power and authority within their community. His father, Francisco Altamirano, a leader among the Chontales, was elected as *alcalde* of Tixtla in 1848, allowing Altamirano, then 14, to attend school with the children "de razón." It is also evident that Francisco had access to important men in power, such as the *mestizo* hero from Guerrero, Juan Alvarez, and Mariano Riva Palacio, governor of the State of Mexico (Letter from Juan Alvarez to Mariano Riva Palacio, November 13, 1849).

According to scholar Nicole Girón's introduction to *La obra educativa de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano* (1994), very little is known about Altamirano's education in Tixtla because the municipal archives were lost (1). As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, based on a close reading of Altamirano's writings in *Bosquejos*, it is evident that his own words have become the main source for later biographical representations of this period in his life.

Tola de Habich also expresses doubts that Altamirano did not speak one word of Spanish before going to school in Toluca at the age of 15. As discussed below, historian Peter Guardino maintains that during the late colonial and early Independence period, Tixtla's population was made up of a combination of indigenous peoples, *mestizos*, and mulattoes who together played an active role in the region's economic and political activities, thus lending credence to Tola de Habich's opinion that Altamirano probably knew some Spanish. Nevertheless, Altamirano's colleagues, peers, and supporters chose to glorify Altamirano's indigenous origins—both during and after his life—in order to emphasize how much he was able to accomplish by becoming formally educated. There

are sources in fact, that indicate that Altamirano was a biological *mestizo* whose family connections afforded him certain privileges not available to everyone. Scholar Jesús Sotelo Inclán, for example, notes that Altamirano's mother, Gertrudis Basilio, was often referred to as a *mestiza* while his brother Vicente was described as “de tez blanca y ojos claros” (20).

At the age of 15, Altamirano was awarded a scholarship by the well-known educator Ignacio Ramírez (1818-1879) to attend the Instituto Literario de Toluca, which Ramírez had founded.¹³ There, Ramírez would become a mentor to Altamirano, establishing a personal and professional relationship that would last until Ramírez's death in 1879. Despite the fact that Altamirano excelled in his studies, he was expelled in 1852 from the Instituto “por su participación editorial, juzgada subversiva, en el periódico escolar Los Papachos” (Girón, *Semblanzas del Estado de México* 384). In 1855, at the age of 21, Altamirano was awarded another scholarship to attend the famous Colegio de San Juan de Letrán in Mexico City, where he studied law. After completing his studies in 1858, Altamirano enrolled in the Academia Teórica-Práctica de Derecho and taught Latin at the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán (385). He married Margarita Pérez Gavilán,¹⁴ also from Tixtla, in 1859, and returned to live in Tixtla, where the interim governor of Guerrero, Vicente Jiménez, a relative of Margarita's, appointed him to oversee legal matters in the state of Guerrero (386).

During the 1850s and 60s, Altamirano began to attract national attention for his literary writings and his political *discursos*, and was invited several times to give the

¹³ Ramírez is often referred to as a *mestizo* who defended the rights of Indians. His father, José Lino Ramírez, was a *criollo*, and his mother, Ana María Guadalupe Sinforosa Calzada, was Indian.

¹⁴ Altamirano and Margarita did not have any biological children but did adopt children, including Catalina Guillén.

“discurso cívico del 16 de septiembre,” both in Mexico City and in Tixtla (385-86). He was also involved politically in the Guerras de Reforma (1856-1861), and, of course, the French Intervention (1862-1867). These tumultuous decades feature prominently in his body of work, including his 1888 novel *El Zarco*, his political essays, and his correspondence, as discussed in Chapter 2.

These biographical details raise certain questions about Altamirano’s manipulation of his own identity and background in order to emphasize in his writings, above everything else, his humble indigenous origins without also acknowledging his possible *mestizo* heritage and family influence. This manipulation of image and identity extends to his depiction of Tixtla as well. Altamirano’s representation of Tixtla varies throughout his writings, but most of the time his careful construction of Tixtla as an indigenous pueblo serves the same purpose as the construction of his own identity: to function as an example of how transformation of the Indian is possible through *mestizaje*.

Just as it benefited Altamirano to portray himself as an “*indio puro*,” so did it benefit his Liberal contemporaries to portray him as such during his lifetime. After his death in 1893, this myth of Altamirano as a pure, humble Indian is repeated numerous times throughout his biographies, homages, and in the introductions and prefaces to his works. As the present study contends, the resulting image of Altamirano as a great defender of the Indian, is not supported by many of his writings, which also demonstrate that he himself fell victim to the belief that the project of *mestizaje* had to be achieved at the expense of the contemporary Indian.

While it is not the intent to demonize Altamirano or his contemporaries in this analysis, exploring how nineteenth-century intellectuals interpreted and promoted

mestizaje and how they understood and portrayed the role of the Indian during the colonial period and after Independence is imperative in order to understand why many of today's indigenous groups continue to be negatively perceived in countries such as Mexico. There, citizens are proud of their noble indigenous past but are not always respectful to the Indian who exists in contemporary society. As the following chapters will demonstrate, in many ways, the nineteenth century would prove to be more of an obstacle to the legal and political survival of Mexico's indigenous peoples than 300 years of colonialism.

An analysis of this construction of Altamirano as a humble Indian is important because it has shaped the work of literary scholars who contend that Altamirano, as an indigenous Mexican, strove to include the Indian in the formation of a national identity and thus seek to identify examples of this in his works. In his article, "Indian Saints and Nation States: Ignacio Altamirano's Landscapes and Legends," for example, Edward N. Wright-Rios focuses on the rural versus the urban settings in Altamirano's works, in which he sees Altamirano seeking an "Indian-centered nationalism." He examines Altamirano's *textos costumbristas* in order to demonstrate Altamirano's desire to incorporate indigenous culture into Mexico's future. In her article "An Italicised Ethnicity" (2000), Erica Segre also discusses Altamirano's *textos costumbristas*. Like Wright-Rios, she sees these essays as a type of resistance to cultural centralism and sees the inclusion of these indigenous celebrations in his writings as an incorporation that resists homogenization (269).

In many ways, however, as seen in Chapter 2, Altamirano's nostalgic journey home to Tixtla resembles that of an outsider observing traditional indigenous/Catholic

symbiotic celebrations as a quaint tourist experience, an image aided by the fact that Altamirano is traveling from the urban center of Mexico City to several indigenous pueblos by train, a symbol of progress that, according to Altamirano, has brought hope and life to Mexico's poorest and isolated areas. Once more manipulating his own Nahua past and identity, he presents himself as an authority in proudly pointing out that his pueblo has preserved certain elements of its indigenous culture. Yet, contrary to Wright-Rio and Segre's observations, Altamirano always reaches the same conclusion: the "raza azteca" has achieved a genuine and sincere conversion to Christianity, and, thus, to a true *mestizaje*. While literary scholar Christopher Conway ("Ignacio Altamirano and the Contradictions of Autobiographical Indianism" 34) has noted in these *textos costumbristas* Altamirano's desire to promote a pre-Hispanic Indian lineage while struggling with the ability to embrace his contemporary "Indianness" publicly, he too fails to recognize that Altamirano is manipulating his "Indianness" and that of his pueblo as an example of how the noble Indian of the past serves to provide the indigenous component of Mexico's *mestizo* identity while the contemporary Indian must fade away in order to make room for the *mestizo*.

Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, several master's theses and dissertations have been produced about Altamirano. Not surprisingly, most are from the field of literary studies, since Altamirano is rarely referenced outside of that field. One example of a work produced in the field of history is Jason Denzin's master's thesis, "Writing the Nation: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Romantic Vision and Porfirian Development" (2006). Denzin utilizes an interdisciplinary approach in order to place Altamirano's life within the historical, political, and social context of the nineteenth

century. He examines Altamirano's writings in order to argue that Altamirano did not view Indians as obstacles to progress and concludes that he espoused a vision of Mexico that embraced the country's indigenous populations.

Denzin, however, does not address the complex issues or theories of *mestizaje* and rarely discusses Altamirano's personal relationship with his indigenous past or his own struggles with identity. More importantly, he fails to recognize that the type of "Indian" Altamirano foresees in Mexico's future is one that has, once again, been "civilized" and "converted" by the modernizing project of the Liberals. Although Denzin does focus on some of Altamirano's fictional writings, only two of his secondary sources come from the field of literary studies and, although he works with travel narratives published during the late nineteenth-and twentieth-centuries, no archival research was conducted.

Early master's theses in literary studies such as "Altamirano, el gran maestro indio" (1943) by Wilbur Walter Chappell contribute to the image of Altamirano as a humble Indian who until the age of 14 lived as an "indio sin más patrimonio que una milpa, una choza, unos asnos y una poca de voluntad para el trabajo" (2). Chappell's analysis also reiterates many of the ideas espoused by Altamirano regarding the colonial Indian, professing that during the colonial period Indians were poor, forgotten, and "desgraciados," living in shacks and barely able to raise corn (1). He does not provide any specific sources for this information, leading one to conclude that Altamirano's works are probably his main source.

According to Chappell, Altamirano never tired of speaking about the Indians and their condition and did everything possible to improve their situation (33). Nevertheless,

there is no attempt here to consult other primary sources that might contradict Altamirano's negative assessment of the nineteenth-century Indian's situation, nor is there any questioning of how Altamirano's solution—cultural transformation through education—would impact indigenous cultures. Instead, like many other works on Altamirano, Chappell concludes that Altamirano only wanted to guide the Indian “por el sendero del progreso material y espiritual” (98).

James Lathrop Garrard's 1951 master's thesis, “The Mexican Indian in Novels of Altamirano, Lopes [*sic*] y Fuentes and Azuela,” also explores the nineteenth-century educational programs proposed for Mexico's rural areas, but does not address their role in the Liberal project of “civilizing” the Indian (12-15), who, once more, is depicted as a victim of colonialism (32). Isis Sadek's 2002 thesis, “Los verdaderos patriotas: el diseño de una identidad nacional en *Clemencia* y *El Zarco* de Ignacio M. Altamirano,” continues to portray Altamirano as an “*indio puro*” (63) who, as a “sujeto transindividual,” is capable of coherently expressing the collective consciousness of his group (18). Sadek views Altamirano's didactic works, such as *El Zarco*, as his attempt to integrate the emerging middle class into Mexican society. This emerging middle class, Sadek concludes, is comprised of educated Indians like Nicolás in *El Zarco* and Altamirano himself (158). Sadek does not question Altamirano's self-defined role as an educated Indian who has given himself the right to speak for the voiceless subaltern.

Recent doctoral dissertations like “De bandidos, mendigos, campesinos e indios: ciudadanía y letras en la literatura mexicana” (2004) by José Salvador Ruiz begin to question the homogenizing project of Liberals like Altamirano, concluding that *El Zarco* demonstrates Altamirano's goal of acculturation for Mexico's indigenous population (8).

Ruiz's interdisciplinary approach allows him to view Altamirano's novel as a civilizing project that excludes the popular masses and indigenous groups (8). Nevertheless, Ruiz maintains that unlike other Liberal intellectuals, Altamirano did not view the Indian as an obstacle and concludes that Altamirano was one of the few nineteenth-century intellectuals concerned about the social situation of the Indian (209). As the present study demonstrates, however, Altamirano's body of work, as a whole, contradicts Ruiz's conclusions.

While Altamirano would promote *mestizaje* in a positive light as Mexico's future, it is important to note that the official project of *mestizaje* in nineteenth-century Latin America did not always imply the peaceful coexistence of the subaltern groups alongside the dominant culture. While for some scholars the twentieth-century concept of *mestizaje* implies a more flexible and less static relationship between the two groups, in the nineteenth century it involved the legal and biological erosion of autonomous indigenous communities while continuing the privileging of "whiteness" (Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race* 4). For nineteenth-century Liberals such as Altamirano, *mestizaje* and the formation of a national identity required the continued romanticizing of the indigenous subaltern group that was now relegated and confined to its pre-Hispanic noble past, thus dismissing its active participation in the formation of the new nation.

Altamirano's participation in this process of appropriation can be seen as a continuation of a practice extending back to the early colonial texts of Muñoz Camargo and Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and continuing with the late colonial texts of Sigüenza y Góngora. Sara McWilliams Harris has noted this same type of appropriation in her dissertation "La perspectiva criolla en el texto de las memorias de Fray Servando Teresa de Mier" (1993).

Harris uses the term “neo-aztequismo” to describe this process, which she defines as “la búsqueda de las raíces criollas en el indígena antiguo y noble” (26). For early-nineteenth-century Creoles such as Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, the focus of Harris’s dissertation, the contemporary Indian “formaba parte de una raza inferior cuyos rasgos principales eran ser borrachos, falsos y supersticiosos” (57). These negative characteristics attributed by members of the dominant culture to the Indians would become even more entrenched after Independence, when Mexican intellectuals struggled with what they perceived to be the problematic question of what to do with the contemporary Indian. Academic disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, continued to contribute to this colonial view.¹⁵

For art historian Magali Carrera, the attitude of late-colonial Creoles such as Fray Servando toward Indians was directly rooted in ideas of identity, racialization, and *calidad*. These late-colonial concepts helped shape Liberal views of the Indian, especially concerning what they perceived to be as a connection between the whitening of the indigenous race and social and economic progress. In her study of the eighteenth-century *casta* paintings of New Spain, Carrera reveals that Bourbon New Spain’s obsession with reform, imposing order, and clearly defining class differences was evident in the evolution of *casta* designations such as *indio*, *mestizo*, *lobo*, *mulato*, and *castizo*. Carrera points out that even as late as 1789, people were separated by race in the

¹⁵ For examples of the continuation of these on-going colonial views, see anthropologist Claudio Esteva-Fabregat’s *Mestizaje in Ibero-America*, published in 1995. James Lockhart notes that as an anthropologist, Esteva-Fabregat should have been aware of—and included—studies published after the 1960s that would have “revolutionized his approach.” Instead, because of his outdated sources, Esteva-Fabregat has produced a monograph full of contradictions and unrealistic stereotypes concerning the Spanish conquerors, their sexual relationships with indigenous women, and the resulting race mixture (Lockhart, review of *Mestizaje in Ibero-America* 170-71).

baptismal records (2). If they were of mixed blood, their names were recorded in the *libro de castas*, or *libro de color quebrado*. To appear in this record meant that you were not a “pure” Spaniard, although Carrera convincingly demonstrates that “purity” was determined not by skin color or hair texture but rather by *calidad*, which focused on a person’s “social body” as a whole and that of one’s family. This included a person’s occupation, wealth, and integrity, as well as place of origin (6).

In “Between *Mestizaje* and *Castizaje*: The Legacy of an Imperial View,” historian Joseph P. Sánchez points out that racial designations were important also in marriage, notary, and burial records, as well as in military records known as *filiaciones* and *hojas de servicio* (3). Many times, physical attributes such as skin color, hair and beard thickness and texture, and facial features were included in these records to help define race (4), thus making it difficult to ignore the physiological and phenotypical aspects of identity.

The *casta* paintings illustrate a desire in New Spain to track and label the offspring of all the peoples that found themselves living together and procreating under distinct circumstances. *Mestizo*, of course, was the label that applied to the offspring of a Spaniard and an Indian. By the seventeenth century, it was believed that a *mestizo* and a Spaniard would produce a *castizo* offspring. Interestingly enough, the offspring of a *castizo* and a Spaniard returned to Spanish *calidad*, essentially raising the offspring to the same status as a pure Spaniard (12). As Sánchez notes, after several generations only a trace of Indian blood would remain, which did not negatively impact a person’s social standing (7).

This “return” to pure Spanish blood could only be achieved with the whitening of the Indian/Spanish combination. This was not the case with mixing with Africans or their descendants. Carrera points out that throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, the Crown forbade Indian and Spanish nobles from marrying Africans and mixed-blooded persons. To them, “mixed-blooded” referred to descendants of Africans, not Indians. Miscegenation, defined as the permanent “corruption” by admixtures with African blood, was something that Creoles and Spaniards greatly feared (13). While a *mestizo* could escape that label by marrying a “pure” Spaniard, a mulatto “can never leave his condition of mixed blood” (13). Sánchez also contends that descendants of Africans suffered a “social stigma against them that was brutal in terms of them ever realizing their dreams” (5).

As scholars like Serge Gruzinski maintain, during the colonial period *mestizos* were able to move between the Indian and Spanish sphere. Indeed, as Sánchez notes, many were able to prosper economically and socially at a higher level because their Spanish blood meant they were considered to be *gente de razón*, or rational people, while Indians, mulattos, and Blacks were not. *Mestizos* participated socially and economically by holding offices in Church and State institutions as well as in the militia and regular army, and as shopkeepers and land owners. Indeed, according to Sánchez, some of them became quite wealthy (6). Nevertheless, Sánchez reminds us that, during the colonial period, labels such as *mestizo*, mulatto, sambo, octoroon, and quadroon were pejorative designations meant to relegate people to inferior social positions (9).

While the *casta* paintings tried to capture and portray certain physical features that would help distinguish the different racial combinations, Carrera rightly points out

that other elements such as clothing, jewelry, occupation, and setting played more of a role in whether someone was labeled an Indian, a *mestizo* or a Creole, both in the paintings and in reality. Thus, economic status contributed to determining one's social status, which, in turn, determined how one was racially identified. This ambiguity increased in urban settings like Mexico City, where people from different backgrounds interacted on a daily basis in the public areas of the city such as the Alameda and the Plaza Mayor.

Spaniards were aware that mulattoes could and did pass themselves off as Spanish, as did many Indians and *mestizos*, because certain physical characteristics became erased over time. What emerged in response to this inconsistency in labeling people were certain qualities that became connected with the *castas*. The *castas* were associated with illegitimacy, impure blood, debasement, criminality, poverty, plebian status, and manual labor. The elite Spaniards, in contrast, were associated with legitimacy, purity of blood, honor, law-abidingness, wealth, and nobility (37).

Sánchez also addresses the social implications of racial mixing in the New World. He writes: "Wealth, education, and other honors were exclusively the inherent right of Europeans, in this case, Peninsular Spaniards and *Criollos*. Spain's policies regarding the *castas* or the mixed bloods relegated colonial minorities to a social hell or a social purgatory" (2). While official policies attempted to define *casta* designations and to whom these labels would apply, the fact remained that identity was an ambiguous trait that could be easily manipulated by individual *castas*. Indeed, Spaniards and Creoles were well aware that Spanish identity could be and often was mimicked by individuals of mixed blood.

The concept of “passing for white” was nothing new in colonial society, yet even in the late 1700s, before Independence, it continued to reinforce feelings of panic over the inability to keep colonial people in separate and distinct spheres (Carrera 42). For *castas*, passing as Spaniards ensured access to more economic opportunities, certain restricted city spaces, and even clothing (43). For Creoles and Spaniards, it meant that they could not control the movement of these people, an unsettling thought, especially as New Spain moved towards Independence.

Carrera also explores the decline of the *casta* paintings after 1800, especially after Independence in 1821, which she links to bans such as the September 1822 decree forbidding the use of *casta* designations in legal records.¹⁶ With the 1824 National Constitution’s declaration of the equality of all citizens, *casta* differences were supposed to disappear, officially, which led to the decline of the *casta* paintings (137). Nevertheless, in the nineteenth-century literary discourse and in everyday life, there was a fascinating return to certain racial designations after Independence that practically ensured the survival of these labels—and their negative implications—rather than their demise. Once more, these labels became manipulated in order to serve personal and political purposes.

Carrera also notes that although Indians were considered socially inferior during the colonial period, their pre-Hispanic history had been appropriated by Creoles in order to justify their independence from Spain; after Independence, their history was appropriated by both Creoles and *mestizos* as part of the nationalist agenda of the 1800s (136). Carrera observes, for example, that in nineteenth-century artistic productions,

Indians were no longer portrayed as unkempt vagrants or barbarous hunters; rather, artists like José Obregón (1838-1902) depict the noble Indian of the pre-Hispanic or early conquest periods, whose history forms the basis of a “new discourse of origin and authenticity” (136). This return of the noble Indian is also evident in Altamirano’s novels, *El Zarco* and *Navidad en las montañas*.

The focus on the physical and racial component of *mestizaje*—specifically the biological degeneration of the indigenous races—continued well into the twentieth century. As discussed in the introduction to the present study, after the Mexican Revolution, political leaders and intellectual elites such as Manuel Gamio (1883-1960) and José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) seized on the ideas promoted by Liberal intellectuals that the *mestizo* would be the icon of racial and social integration. In her essay “From Mestizophilia to Biotypology,” historian Alexandra Minna Stern offers a fascinating view of just how certain negative stereotypes regarding the contemporary Indian in Mexico were resurrected and became entrenched in the early twentieth century. She analyzes the work of biotypologists such as Dr. José Gómez Robleda who, in 1939, led a team of psychologists, anthropologists, and doctors to Patzcuaro Lake in Michoacán to study a group of rural Tarascan Indians (187). Their purpose was to use biotypology’s methods to gather data about certain social groups without resorting to racial doctrines or categories. As will be seen, these types of expeditions date back to the mid-nineteenth century, when French positivism influenced Mexico and the rest of Latin America regarding ideas of the racial and biological superiority of the European races and the inferiority of indigenous peoples.

¹⁶ On October 19, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla issued a Bando Contra la Esclavitud that demanded the eradication of slavery and equal rights for *castas*.

These types of studies continued until the early 1960s, and their results were used to create certain government agencies, such as the Department of Psychopedagogy and Hygiene. These agencies greatly impacted how the Mexican government restructured its educational system in its cyclical efforts to modernize its indigenous population (200-201). Despite their desire to avoid any kind of racial classification, these scientists were unable to escape their Eurocentric influence regarding what was considered a “normal” or ideal biotype.

After studying these indigenous groups, Dr. Gómez Robleda concluded that many of Mexico’s indigenous groups were not the ideal biotype. For example, he reported that almost all the Tarascan men studied “suffered from hypothyroidism, were inhibited, prone to neuroses, excessively effeminate, and often bisexual.” The Otomís, who were put forth as representative of most indigenous groups, were “marked by dizziness, stupefaction, lack of imagination...manic depression and hypersexuality” (202). As Stern rightly points out, biotypology “promoted the revival of the ‘persistent stereotype’ of ‘the apathetic and resistant Indian’” (203). As the present study maintains, many of these “persistent stereotypes” emerge straight out of the nineteenth century. Fifty years after the conclusion of these studies, the dominant culture continues to use the stereotypes generated by these studies to justify its continued social, political, and economic oppression of many of Mexico’s indigenous groups.

Studies like the one by Stern point to the failure of certain aspects of the project of *mestizaje* in the nineteenth century. Despite concerted political and social efforts to promote *mestizaje*—in this case, the assimilation and whitening of the indigenous race—intellectuals failed to erase indigenous groups from Mexico’s present and future. The

presence of identifiable groups like the Tarascans and Otomís, among many others, speaks to their continued existence. Nevertheless, what we continue to see in early twentieth-century Mexico is an emphasis on the most negative traits of “being Indian,” a representation born, according to Altamirano, out of their status as a colonized subject.

In the nineteenth century, intellectuals such as Altamirano evoked images of the noble pre-Hispanic Indian in their literary discourse in order to construct a history of Mexico that could compete with the ancient histories of European countries. Altamirano participated in activities such as the compilation of the work *Hombres ilustres mexicanos: biografías de los personajes notables desde antes de la conquista hasta nuestros días* (1873), in which great attention is given in volume 1 to the “Peregrinación Azteca,” the conquest, and Mexica heroes such as Cuauhtemoc. Through his resurrection of Mexico’s indigenous history, Altamirano contributed to a historic dialectic that can be traced back more than 300 years. Paradoxically, this endeavor entailed a not-so-subtle rejection of the contemporary, “real” Indian who cannot compete with the idealized noble Indian lauded by *mestizo*, Creole, and nineteenth-century intellectuals.

In order to support the Liberal project of *mestizaje*, Altamirano offers himself up to the leaders of the new nation as a positive example of the cultural and social transformation possible through formal education. At the same time, he uses his literary works to exalt the contributions of pre-Hispanic Indians and to pave the way towards a *mestizo* nation. What becomes evident is Altamirano’s—along with his contemporaries’—manipulation of terms such as “indio de pura raza” in order to promote the project of *mestizaje*. Altamirano’s contemporaries’ image of him as the perfect example of how it was possible to convert an Indian into the ideal *mestizo* citizen of

Mexico became even more entrenched after his death in 1893, owing to the often over-zealous efforts of his biographers to promote the “official” version of Altamirano as “el hijo de padres analfabetos que, por la fuerza de su genio y el temple de su carácter llegó a encumbrarse tanto!” (Tola de Habich x).

The rejection of the nineteenth-century Indian in favor of the *mestizo* continued to focus on the biological aspects of the official project of *mestizaje*. In nineteenth-century Mexico, intellectuals like Justo Sierra, one of Altamirano’s students, proposed that Mexico’s future could only be ensured by attracting the right kind of immigrants from Europe to effect a genetic cross with the Indian. This was necessary to keep up the level of civilization and not regress to its former self (368).¹⁷ The goal of *mestizaje*, therefore, was to produce a subject so mixed that specific indigenous or Spanish traits could no longer be identified, thus eradicating “localidad” (a place with its own proper identification) per the Liberal agenda. Intellectuals like Altamirano fully embraced this idea, advocating that only through formal and social education and biological reproduction could “la raza infortunada” be rescued from its position as a colonized subject (*Escritos sobre educación* 69). The process of race and regeneration would result in the homogenization of indigenous populations seen in Altamirano’s works where he describes Indians in general, essentializing terms without naming their cultural and tribal identities.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Creoles were determined to position themselves as the rightful leaders of New Spain instead of the *peninsulares*, whose continual

¹⁷ This was also true of other Latin American countries like Argentina, which viewed their black and mulatto populations as an impediment to progress. See Chapter 2 below for a brief discussion on nineteenth-century Argentinian novels that address this issue.

arrival threatened the Creoles' economic and political power, especially under the Bourbons. In authorizing their presences, Creoles also had to portray themselves as superior and therefore more capable of governing than the indigenous inhabitants of New Spain, especially after Independence. In the nineteenth century, Altamirano takes a similar approach to the representation of Mexico's pre-conquest indigenous past and the contemporary Indian, but this time in order to justify the leadership roles of the *mestizo*—and not the Creole or the *peninsular*—in the formation of nationhood after Independence. Once more, the elevation of one group—the *mestizo*—continued to attempt to permanently displace the same group, the Indian.

As Mexicans struggled to form an identity that would distance them from their Spanish roots, it became paramount to represent the colonial Indian as a victim of the evil Spaniards, a role that the indigenous groups of nineteenth-century Mexico must continue to play. In his essay “Bosquejos. La escuela del campo” (published in 1871 in *El Federalista*), Altamirano describes the contemporary Indian as docile, gentle, and humble, victims of the colonial priests who did not bother to do more than teach them how to pray. Due to their colonial legacy, Altamirano fears that even after Independence the conquered race continues to find itself in a state of “idiotismo” (82). In his numerous publications, and in that of his contemporaries, there is a complete denial of any form of agency on the part of the indigenous groups, whether colonial or contemporary. Given Mexico's precarious political situation, they believed that this denial and continued victimization of the Indian was paramount in order to promote and justify a *mestizaje* that would forever confine the Indian to his noble, pre-Hispanic past.

We have already seen how the construction of the Indian in “Alboroto y motín” reveals how Sigüenza y Góngora, as a member of the dominant group, participated in the appropriation of the pre-Hispanic indigenous past while, at the same time, justifying the marginalization of the degenerated descendants of those cultures. Sigüenza y Góngora’s description of his part in the *motín* points to his role as an archivist and as a scholar. He is busy in his library, working with his books, when he is disturbed by the “rebellious Indians” outside. Sigüenza y Góngora rushes out to save the city’s most important archives. His concern is not with the Indian in the street but rather with rescuing the artifacts and documents he himself helped to collect. As demonstrated by their work with the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística discussed below, Altamirano and other nineteenth-century intellectuals participated in this same project of collecting indigenous artifacts, codices, and histories—of archiving the past while negating the presence of the contemporary Indian.

Throughout the colonial period, Mexico’s indigenous past—real and embellished—is taken up time and time again and presented as the patrimony of the colony and, later, of the burgeoning Mexican nation. The colonial works of Sahagún, Muñoz Camargo, Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Sigüenza y Góngora previously discussed form part of this narrative tradition of creating a mythified past in order to fulfill personal and political agendas, whether that is the perfect conversion of the Indians, obtaining land grants or political positions of power within the Creole world. These same works resurface in the nineteenth century, after Independence, and are appropriated by nineteenth-century intellectuals who need to show that they too are part of this genealogy that can be traced to an embellished

glorious indigenous past in order to justify their rightful role as *mestizo*, not Creole, leaders in the formation of the modern nation.

For nineteenth-century leaders, the past and the present must converge in order to move Mexico towards progress and modernity. As has been seen, however, this push towards the future was often undertaken at the expense of the subaltern groups. Angel Rama's last work written, before his death in 1983, addresses the role that members of the *ciudad letrada* in the nineteenth century played in appropriating indigenous cultures for their own agendas. In chapter 4 of *La ciudad letrada* (1984), "La ciudad modernizada," Rama explores how during the nineteenth century, intellectuals began to heavily promote the myth of progress, in which the illiterate and mostly indigenous youth could be transformed through education from rural, nonproductive individuals to productive urban citizens of the new nation.

In order to achieve this transformation, Rama notes, members of the *ciudad letrada* participated in the mythification and appropriation of Mexico's indigenous past that would provide the new nation with a worthy history while, once again, attempting to eradicate the contemporary Indian through cultural and biological *mestizaje*. In order to move forward in these efforts, intellectuals participated in many scientific undertakings such as geographic surveys, archeological expeditions, and anthropological studies. The creation of organizations such as the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística (SMGE) in 1833 (which still exists today) would be instrumental in the dissemination of these studies throughout the world.

Nineteenth-century intellectuals became driven by the idea of social, economic, and cultural progress and by the desire to promote their new nation as the equivalent of

nations such as the United States and France. The Sociedad was created by Vicente Gómez Farías, vice-president of the Republic, and Bernardo González Angulo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in order to map the boundaries of the new nation and assess its natural and cultural resources, as well as to study its population. Organizations such as the Sociedad recall the sixteenth-century *relaciones geográficas*, which were authorized by King Philip II in 1573 as a way of compiling data about the geography and populations of the Americas. Altamirano became an honorary member on December 17, 1868, along with notables such as Vicente Riva Palacio and Guillermo Prieto (Altamirano, *Memoria* 44). During the years following the French Intervention, the Sociedad struggled for several years to meet the quorum required to hold their weekly meetings. When Altamirano was named secretary on January 5, 1872, a position he held for eight years, he made it a personal goal to extend the scientific relationships between the Sociedad and other similar international organizations, as well as to expand its holdings (2).

Very little has been written about Altamirano's involvement in the Sociedad. His active role in the meetings, activities, and publications of the Sociedad reveal his participation in several projects that Rama has identified as those of the *ciudad letrada*: the appropriation of Mexico's idealized pre-Hispanic past, the resurrection of colonial texts such as those produced by Sahagún, Muñoz Camargo, and Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and the promotion of the whitening of the indigenous race through biological and cultural means. Although Altamirano often identifies with his Nahua background, his own writings and activities clearly place him as a member of the *ciudad letrada*, especially in its efforts to convert Indians into productive citizens through the process of cultural

mestizaje. As his work with the Sociedad demonstrates, Altamirano was far removed from his rural roots and firmly entrenched in the urban center of Mexico.

A history of the Sociedad itself reveals that Mexico was concerned with maintaining an international presence, especially in the scientific world. It was of paramount importance for Mexico to make other countries aware of its economic, social, and political progress, especially after years of the threat of foreign intervention. One way to accomplish this goal was to disseminate the publications of the Sociedad through its *Boletín*, which was distributed to similar organizations throughout the world in an effort to exchange scientific, geographical, and cultural resources. In an attempt to capture the important role of the Sociedad, Altamirano was instructed to write a history of the Sociedad, which took 10 years to complete. The *Memoria, presentada a la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, which Altamirano finished writing in 1880, includes several appendices listing the many maps, plans, and publications that the Sociedad had acquired since its inception, as well as the many works produced by members of the Sociedad. His own *Obras tomo I* is included in Anexo Número 3 (74).

As secretary and as president of the Sociedad (1881-1889), Altamirano was very much involved in promoting its projects, including the publication of its *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. The first issue of the *Boletín* was published in 1839 but its publication was interrupted until 1850, when it continued to be published on a regular basis until 1866. As Altamirano explains in his *Memoria*, it was not published again until 1869, “interrumpidos los trabajos de la Sociedad á causa de los acontecimientos políticos de aquella época [the French intervention]” (24).

The publication of the *Boletín* continued to be impacted by economic and political factors; from 1875 to 1878, publication of the *Boletín* was interrupted once more for two years, due to the cutting of their funding (26-27). The minutes from the Sociedad's May 12, 1888 meeting reveal that its publication was suspended again from 1882 to 1887, a fact noted by foreign societies such as the Sociedad Africana de Italia, who sent notice to the Sociedad that they had not received copies of the *Boletín*. During this meeting, and one held on May 26, 1888, demonstrating once more his commitment to this publication, Altamirano asked the members of the Sociedad to agree to pay for the publication themselves (Acta no. 11, p. 19, and Acta no. 13, p. 22v, in *Actas de enero 7 de 1888 a dic. 18 de 1890*, vol. 14, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE).¹⁸

The Sociedad was mandated not only to conduct original research regarding Mexico's natural and cultural resources and its population, but also to collect original maps, indigenous codices, paintings, and original editions of colonial texts and publications from all over Mexico. The Sociedad and its members, while concerned with current events and with conducting original scientific and anthropological studies, also became preoccupied with cataloguing and archiving Mexico's pre-Hispanic past.

Like the other members, Altamirano was very active in locating and collecting these types of works for the Sociedad's library, including the Códice de Jucutacato, a pre-Colombian historical document that survived the conquest (interview with Lic. Virgilio

¹⁸ Despite similar obstacles in the twentieth century, the Sociedad continued publishing the *Boletín* until at least 1991. A complete set of the *Boletín* is available at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Other libraries in the US have some of the issues, including Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico, but the collection is incomplete. In Mexico City, original copies of the *Boletín* are available at the Biblioteca Benito Juárez, run by the current SMGE. I have indicated which issues were consulted at the Biblioteca Benito Juárez.

Arias).¹⁹ Indeed, the Sociedad's library came to be very important to Altamirano. In his *Memoria*, Altamirano explains how by 1872, the Sociedad's library "apenas merecia tal nombre" (15). Its holdings were not very useful and only added up to a few hundred items. As secretary, Altamirano dedicated himself to improving the library's collections as well as the physical space they were to occupy. Many of the maps and books were bought from private *librerías* as well as from individual collectors. Many members—in Mexico and abroad—also donated works. By 1880, when Altamirano finished writing his *Memoria*, the collection numbered around 6,000, and, as he proudly wrote, the Sociedad could now claim "una Biblioteca pequeña pero escogida" (18).

Despite Altamirano's interest in acquiring indigenous relics, it is evident that the Sociedad's focus was not the current situation of the contemporary nineteenth-century Indian but rather Mexico's indigenous past. In Rabasa's analysis of "Alboroto y motín," he notes that Sigüenza y Góngora is a true antiquarian. He collects and preserves pre-Columbian artifacts and documents because it is the pre-Columbian past that interests him, not the contemporary Indian (73). This fascination with Mexico's glorious, pre-Hispanic past is resurrected by institutions like the Sociedad and by the collecting efforts of intellectuals like Altamirano.

As Chapter 2 demonstrates, the nineteenth century was full of indigenous activism, rebellions, and resistance to many of the governmental and educational policies put in place by intellectuals like Altamirano and his contemporaries, yet there is no mention of their participation in the studies published in the *Boletín* nor in the *actas* of the Sociedad's meetings. What the *Boletín* did publish, however, speaks to the overall

¹⁹ In 2006, archeologist and historian Hans Roskamp called for the removal of the *códice* from the Sociedad because

goals of the Sociedad and its members, as well as to the international influences to which they were exposed, especially from the French, concerning hybridity, *mestizaje*, and the current state of the Indian. Through their publications, societies like the SMGE played a vital role in shaping how Mexico's indigenous populations were negatively perceived in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth and even the twenty-first centuries. The Sociedad also focused on Mexico's colonial past, printing important colonial texts by people such as Sahagún and transcribing colonial documents concerning, for example, the conquest of Mexico (*Boletín* vol. 2, no. 4, 1870, pp. 254-61), the founding of different Mexican states (*Boletín* vol. 3, no. 1, 1871 p. [17]-25), and letters by Alexander von Humboldt.

Just before Independence and throughout the nineteenth century, there was a general rejection of Spain and *peninsulares* in Mexico that led to a negative view of all things colonial. Nineteenth-century intellectuals, however, needed to resurrect certain aspects of their colonial past in order to further their agenda of creating a seamless history of their new nation, from pre-Hispanic conquest through the colonial period and beyond Independence. Thus, by incorporating certain colonial texts and histories, as well as pre-Hispanic codices that told of their noble indigenous past, the members of the Sociedad were creating a genealogy of their country's history that justified Mexico's existence as an independent *mestizo* nation. This selective, almost revisionist, history is one in which Altamirano, as a member of the *ciudad letrada* and of the Sociedad, also participated.

he feared that the Sociedad was not able to fully care for it (Grecia Ponce, "El Lienzo de Jucutacato").

The influence of the French and the role that Positivism played throughout the nineteenth century is evident in the publications of the Sociedad. In 1865, for example, the *Boletín* published a Spanish translation of an essay by a French physiologist named Dennis Jourdanet, who was interested in Mexico's colonial past and its contemporary issues regarding its indigenous populations.²⁰ In his essay titled "De la Estadística de México: considerada en sus relaciones con los niveles del suelo y con la aclimatación de las diferentes razas humanas que lo habitan," Jourdanet proposes to address the question of which race "podría proporcionar el elemento más favorable á la propagación" (233).²¹

Jourdanet takes a methodical approach in examining the effects of climate and high altitude on the different races; he also addresses the issue of racial mixing and what it signifies for the future of Mexico. In this essay, he clearly links racial mixing, or *mestizaje*, with ideas of nation and progress. He presents his findings as scientific fact: "la debilidad física de la raza india de las mesas elevadas; la decadencia de la raza española pura en las mismas localidades; los progresos sensibles y las aspiraciones de la raza mestiza" (239). He concludes that time, climate, and the passing of generations has erased some of these inequalities and will eventually result "en caracteres de una originalidad uniforme y puramente nacional" (242). Adding to this is what he sees as a decrease in Mexico's indigenous population and an increase in the number of *mestizos*, who will be "el elemento dominante de la población de México, el elemento que será muy pronto el país entero." Finally, he concludes that the *mestizo* "es a quien está reservado todo el porvenir de estas ricas regiones" (244).

²⁰ In 1880, Jourdanet published a French translation of Sahagún's work: *Histoire générale des choses de la nouvelle-Espagne*, trans. D. Jourdanet et Remi Siméon. Paris: G. Masson, 1880.

²¹ This issue of the *Boletín* was consulted in the Biblioteca Benito Juárez of the SMGE in Mexico City.

In 1870, the *Boletín* published an essay by E. de Fleury that spells out clearly how the project of *mestizaje* can be advanced. In “Medios que deberán emplearse especialmente para la colonización del Estado de Sonora,” de Fleury writes:

Siendo el asunto de la *colonización* por medio de la emigración europea, uno de los mas importantes para la prosperidad y engrandecimiento de la República Mexicana, me tomo la libertad de someter al exámen de la honorable Sociedad de Geografía y Estadística algunas ideas sobre los medios que me parecen los mejores para favorecer la *colonización*, particularmente en el Estado de Sonora. (218, emphasis added).

Significantly, fifty years after Independence, Fleury is using the word “*colonización*” to refer to the positive impact that the dominant European culture can have on the state of Sonora, which, according to another article published that same year, is largely made up of the indigenous groups yaquis, mayos, opatas, pimas, pápagos, and seris (363).

Altamirano would use the same word—“*colonización*”—in his 1882 publication “*Revista histórica y política*” to positively describe the impact of European immigrants on Mexico’s economy.

In another article by Antonio García y Cubas, titled “Materiales para formar la estadística general de la República Mexicana. Apuntes relativos a la población,” the author conducts surveys of the Mexican states, carefully noting the ethnic breakdown of their populations and making observations about the various indigenous groups. Like Fleury, García y Cubas also uses the word “colonization” to describe how easy it would be to educate some of the more docile indigenous groups, thus “creando verdaderos ciudadanos que hoy solamente lo son por el nombre que nuestras leyes les otorgan”

(374). In a reference to what would become known as the Guerra de Castas (1847-1901), he also warns about the more bellicose groups, like the “raza yucateca” who has ruined the Yucatan Peninsula, an area that he feels is important to recover for the benefit of Mexico’s economic future. He writes:

Los indios yucatecas son de tal carácter, que si fuésemos á juzgarlos únicamente por sus costumbres, tendríamos ciertamente que calificarlos de estúpidos é incapaces de raciocinio. (374)

These are but a few examples of the *Boletín*’s publications that advocate the whitening—indeed, the continued colonization—of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

The writings of positivists like Jourdanet, Fleury, and García y Cubas are representative of the scientific expeditions that set out to “objectively” study Mexico’s indigenous population, concluding, in general, that they are physically and mentally inferior to *mestizos*.²² In the nineteenth century, the work of Jourdanet and other biologists and scientists working throughout Latin America helped support the ideas of intellectuals like Altamirano and Justo Sierra, and later Gamio and Vasconcelos, who openly advocated for *mestizaje* as the future path of Mexico.

If the articles published in the *Boletín* reflect the official position of the Sociedad in reference to the project of *mestizaje*, then a careful examination of its holdings, its members, and its meeting notes reveal even more about the Sociedad’s influences in and outside of Mexico. More significantly for the present study, they shed light on Altamirano’s role of support in the dissemination of its message advocating *mestizaje* through its projects and publications. Currently, many of the Sociedad’s invaluable

collections are housed in Mexico City.²³ Its collection of scholarly works—many of them original editions—is housed in the Biblioteca Benito Juárez and the Archivo Histórico Altamirano, which forms part of the library. The history of how these works came to form part of the Sociedad’s holdings can be found in the original *actas* preserved in the library, some of which were published in the Sociedad’s *Boletín*. According to Lic. Virgilio Arias, current member of the Sociedad and director of the library, during these meetings members often dealt with much more than just administrative issues. Members often examined documents for their collections and read and analyzed works written by their members as well as by potential new members.²⁴

These *actas* also reveal the extent of the Sociedad’s connections with other countries. In the meeting notes of April 23, 1888, presided by Altamirano, the secretary acknowledges receipt of several works from the United States of America, Germany, France, and Cuba. They also received works from other countries in Latin America and

²² As historian Alexandra Minna Stern has shown, these scientific efforts continued well into the twentieth century, resulting in the negative representation of Mexico’s indigenous population that persists even today.

²³ The Sociedad has inhabited its current location, a nineteenth-century building in Mexico City since 1933. Its members still hold regular meetings and, on a volunteer basis, continue to catalog its collections. Since its inception, the Sociedad has suffered several economic and political setbacks. During the French Intervention, many important documents were stolen from the Sociedad. When Benito Juárez discovered the theft, he ordered the Sociedad be moved to the Palacio Nacional and then awarded them an annual fund so that they could continue their work. He also ordered all members to volunteer their time to the Sociedad. Since then, funding has been sporadic. Since the year 2000, the Sociedad has not received any federal monies and is currently run on dues paid by its members and their volunteer work. In Mexico City there are about 900 members. The Sociedad is struggling to keep going because of their economic woes (interview with Virgilio Arias, member, SMGE, and director, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, Mexico City, July 2009).

²⁴ The Sociedad is comprised of scholars from all over Mexico and the world. In order to become accepted as a member, the individual has to prepare and submit an original, scholarly work that supported the Sociedad’s philosophy and goals. For example, in 1889 Gustavo Eiffel submitted a two-volume set of his designs and plans for the Eiffel Tower, which was built in 1890. This original work is housed in the SMGE in Mexico City. Other well-known members included Lucas Alamán, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Ignacio Ramírez, Benito Juárez, Alexander von Humboldt, and Albert Einstein (interview with Virgilio Arias, Mexico City, July 2009). The Sociedad also embraced important literary figures, such as, of course, Ignacio Altamirano and poets Guillermo Prieto and the U.S. nineteenth-century poet, William Cullen Bryant, who translated many Latin American political poems, including that of exiled Cuban poet José María Heredia and Mexican poet José Rosas Moreno. In his *Memoria*, Altamirano laments the fact that the building occupied by the Sociedad in in the 1870s was in such terrible shape that they were forced to ask the Escuela Nacional de Minas for a room in which to host “al distinguido poeta y publicista Bryant, miembro de nuestra

from other parts within Mexico, including the *Anales del Museo Michoacano* and the *Boletín de la Sociedad Agrícola Mexicana* (Acta no. 10, p. 17-18, in *Actas de enero 7 de 1888 a dic. 18 de 1890*, vol. 14, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE). Communication between the Sociedad and other countries was very swift. There is mention of a work from Germany, for example, whose publication date was noted as March 1888. Its receipt by the Sociedad was recorded just one month later. The Sociedad also kept abreast of events all over Mexico, as evidenced by the number of newspapers they received from Chiapas, Guerrero, Mexico, Morelos, Puebla and San Luis Potosí (Acta no. 11, p. 21, in *Actas de enero 7 de 1888 a dic. 18 de 1890*, vol. 14, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE). Notably, despite the numerous indigenous rebellions taking place throughout Mexico, there is no reference to them in the meeting notes.

Altamirano's active participation in the Sociedad came to an end in 1889. In the August 1, 1889 meeting, members announced the need for elections due to the temporary absence of "el Sr Altamirano de la República para ir a desempeñar el Consulado General de México en España, para el que ha sido nombrado por el Gobierno...." (Acta no. 6, p. 61, in *Actas de enero 7 de 1888 a dic. 18 de 1890*, vol. 14, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE). In the August 14, 1889 meeting, Altamirano informed the members that he was leaving on August 21, 1889 for Barcelona. This *acta* reveals important details about Altamirano's role in the Sociedad. In what reads like a farewell speech, Altamirano thanked the Sociedad for allowing him to be a member, given that he did not possess "los méritos científicos correspondientes," and for the confidence its members had shown in him over the last 18 years.

Sociedad" (13). According to Anna Brickhouse, Bryant's trip to Mexico City in 1872 was a landmark event, as he was

In turn, the members of the Sociedad thanked Altamirano for his dedication to the continued publication of the *Boletín* and in acquiring numerous historically significant works, which resulted in “aumentar su Biblioteca con más de ocho mil volúmenes y numerosas cartas y planos....” Altamirano urged the members to continue collaborating with other societies in order to ensure the Sociedad’s progress and offered his continued assistance once he was established in Europe. Altamirano also requested a formal letter of introduction so that he could present himself before the Sociedad de Geografía de París. Finally, he requested that the Sociedad allow his students to meet there during his absence in order to continue fostering their scientific and literary studies (Acta no. 7, in *Actas de enero 7 de 1888 a dic. 18 de 1890*, vol. 14, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE).

Four years later, Altamirano, who had been ill for some time, died on February 13, 1893, in San Remo, Italy. Demonstrating once more the speed in which news was communicated to the Sociedad, thanks to the telegraph, Altamirano’s death was announced three days later, during the February 16, 1893 meeting of the Sociedad, whose members immediately began planning a commemoration of his life and death:

Para honrar la memoria del Sr. Lic. D. Ygnacio M. Altamirano que fué miembro eminente de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, tenemos la honra de proponer lo siguiente:

- 1 La Sociedad se dirigirá al Gobierno General para que se sirva decretar la conducción á la República de los restos del finado.
- 2 La Sociedad organizará una velada en honor del Sr. Altamirano.
- 3 Se colocará su busto en el salón de sesiones de la misma

Sociedad.

4 Se enlutarán por nueve días la fachada del salón y la tribuna.

(Acta no. 6, in *Actas de enero 2 de 1891 a junio 14 de 1894*, vol.

15, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE)

Finally, Sr. García y Cubas, a member of the Sociedad and one of its published authors, declared that one of their members would be in charge of writing a biography of Altamirano. The next meeting of the Sociedad, held on February 23, 1893, was also dedicated to finalizing plans to memorialize Altamirano. Sr. Telesforo García, who was in charge of the celebrations, announced that numerous people from other similar associations around Mexico were interested in organizing “una gran manifestación de condolencia para honrar la memoria del ilustre Sr. Altamirano.” Sr. Brackel Welda proposed that a date be set for the event, that speakers and poets be scheduled, and that a commission be named that would be in charge of inviting dignitaries, associations, and other appropriate people to this special event. A date of March 4, 1893 was subsequently set for the special session honoring Altamirano (Acta no. 7, in *Actas de enero 2 de 1891 a junio 14 de 1894*, vol. 15, Biblioteca Benito Juárez, SMGE).

If the Sociedad’s appreciation of Altamirano is evident in their plans to commemorate his life, then Altamirano’s pride in the Sociedad’s accomplishments is just as palpable. As he wrote in his *Memoria*:

[la Sociedad] ha llamado á su seno á todos los hombres estudiosos que pudieran serle útiles...; ha iniciado pensamientos de pública utilidad que han sido fecundos en resultados, y puede decir con legítimo orgullo y con innegable fundamento que no hay un solo

proyecto grandioso y bueno, en pro del adelanto material y científico de México, que no haya tenido aquí su origen, que no se haya discutido en sus sesiones.... Esto sólo, sin necesidad de otros trabajos, bastaria para dar honra á la Sociedad de Geografía y para hacerla respetable ante la Nacion y ante el extranjero. (29)

Notably, during his involvement with the Sociedad, Altamirano did not appear to be critical of any of their publications advocating the whitening of the indigenous race, nor did he question the negative portrayal of Indians used in order to justify the project of *mestizaje*. Through his silence, but especially through his own writings, his support of *mestizaje* and assimilation as the only way to ensure Mexico's future is evident.

The concept of *mestizaje*—or the “cult of mestizaje” as Marilyn Miller calls it—continues to distinguish Mexico from its neighbor to the north (142). Under the increasing pressures of globalization in the twenty-first century, it is not clear whether indigenous groups will continue to make their presence and demands heard, or whether the process of *mestizaje* and the demands of late capitalism will prove to be the demise of the Indian, this time biologically as well as culturally. However, if, as Mignolo demands, we must know the past to speak the present, then knowing the past may also help us articulate the future.

One way to understand Mexico's current relationship with its indigenous population is through a careful analysis of the nineteenth-century literary and political discourse produced by Altamirano and his contemporaries, which, in turn, reveals much about their perception of Mexico's pre-Hispanic and colonial legacy and how that perception impacted their attitudes towards Indians and *mestizos*. Despite the nineteenth-

century official policy of complete assimilation through *mestizaje*, some five hundred years after the arrival of the Spanish in the New World, indigenous communities have managed to create a space for themselves in a global economy from which to speak. For scholars like Rabasa, today's acts of agency are part of a continuum of resistance since the arrival of the Spanish to the New World. For others, they represent indigenous peoples' desire to negotiate with the dominant culture without sacrificing their identity.

The following will discuss in detail Altamirano's body of work, including novels, correspondence, historical and political writings, and essays on education, in order to demonstrate that Altamirano did not live the life of an isolated, humble Indian. In other words, this was a man who was aware of, and participated in, political and social events throughout Mexico and, indeed, throughout the world. Thus, it becomes necessary to question, once more, his decision to represent the nineteenth-century Indian in his works as passive, ignorant, and barbaric when the nineteenth century provides numerous examples to the contrary. Patently absent from his writings are the indigenous individuals and groups who participated in the same historic events as he did, who fought against some of the policies he advocated, who negotiated with some of the same leaders he admired, and who rebelled against the threats to their way of life represented by many Liberal projects. Instead, Altamirano advocated a *mestizaje* for Mexico's indigenous populations that did not allow for the plurality of indigenous identities and voices that had survived colonialism but that almost did not survive Independence.

Chapter 2
Life, Politics, and Discourse
in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Mexico

The construction of a *mestizo* and Indian identity, both self-imposed and that imposed on Ignacio Altamirano by his peers and, after his death, by his biographers, becomes an important theme in Altamirano's work, which reflects the personal and political journey that will lead him far away from his rural beginnings in Tixtla. From the relatively young age of 20, Altamirano entered the tumultuous world of national and international politics, war, and policy, while at the same time becoming a key figure in the burgeoning nation's literary traditions. Altamirano's binary approach towards the representation of Mexico's indigenous population—the contemporary nineteenth-century Indian versus the “noble” pre-Hispanic Indian—dominate all aspects of his life, both literary and professional.

This chapter explores evidence of this binary approach in Altamirano's diverse writings, which includes novels, poetry, chronicles, journalism, epistolary, and history. His body of work serves the post-colonial purpose of providing Mexico with a historical genealogy that enables it to rise above its colonial past and to distinguish itself culturally from the European country from which it has just achieved political independence. Altamirano also utilizes his work to advocate for the Liberal project of *mestizaje* as a way for Mexico to complete its transformation from a colonial to a nation-state. During his lifetime, Altamirano was often praised for his intellect and his knowledge and depiction

of historical events. This recognition became even more pronounced after his death in 1893 and well into the twentieth century.

In Altamirano's more political writings, published as articles in several newspapers, the contemporary Indian is portrayed as passive, ignorant, superstitious, and as a victim of colonialism. This negative representation is also found in his other non-fiction works, such as histories and educational policies. For Altamirano, literature was, more than anything, a tool with which to teach Mexico's citizens not only about their history, but, more importantly, about the role they should play in the formation of the nation. Thus, a key theme in his works is the role of the Indian who needs to be formally educated in order to become the productive *mestizo* citizen that Mexico needs.

As a result of the importance of the *mestizo* to the Liberal political agenda, the contemporary Indian's "backwards" state is blamed fully on their colonized state as "victims." Altamirano and many of his Liberal counterparts deny them any agency; they fail to acknowledge their active participation, resistance, accommodation, and negotiation because such agency would not fit their view of progress. While some may question what knowledge Altamirano had about the role of the Indian under colonial rule and during the tumultuous years of conflict during the nineteenth century, the present study reveals that Altamirano's own formal education, participation in these events, and personal relationships indicate that he was indeed familiar with their important role yet chose to silence this indigenous agency in his works.

The use of the generalized term "*indio*" in many of the works produced during the nineteenth century demonstrates the elites' political need to group all indigenous Mexicans as one in order to facilitate the implementation of Mexico's official policies of

assimilation. This is also true of Altamirano; the term “*indio*” allows him to comment on what he sees as the overall negative condition of the Indian. Rarely does he specify the various ethnic groups to which these Indians belong. This applies to himself as well. The Tixtla area, for example, is comprised of mostly Nahuatl-speaking groups who are identified, among others, as Chontales, Coahuiltecos, and Mexica (Garza Merodio 119), yet Altamirano uses only the all-encompassing term of “*indio*” to describe himself.

Such self-identification gives him the authority and the right to discuss and determine the fate of the nineteenth-century Indian. Altamirano adopts the identity of an Indian in order to become the epitome of the Indian who can evolve into the productive citizen, a cultural *mestizo*. According to Altamirano and many of his Liberal contemporaries, this process can only be completed through a formal education that stresses learning Spanish and other Western languages at the expense of indigenous languages, abandoning traditional practices in order to adopt modern, progressive means of production, and by “whitening” the Indian race culturally and biologically. Only in this way could the Indian fully participate in the marketplace and in the political process, as Altamirano’s own personal story exemplifies. Through Altamirano’s carefully constructed life story, we see his evolution from a pure Indian into a cultural *mestizo*, one who has managed to overcome his humble beginnings as a monolingual Indian to become a lawyer, policymaker, educator, soldier, and the father of many of Mexico’s foundational works of literature.

For many Liberals, there was no question that the contemporary Indian must relinquish his current indigenous identity in order to become the *mestizo* citizen that is the true *mexicano*. Despite this call for erasure of the contemporary Indian, Altamirano,

like other intellectuals of his generation, and earlier ones, creates a space in Mexican history for the pre-Hispanic Indian—the proud and powerful Aztecs that give Mexico the necessary indigenous component of its new *mestizo* identity. Their past must become incorporated into their present and future. But what of the Indian of the nineteenth century? If contemporary Indians oppressed by colonialism can only be saved through modernization, then how does Altamirano account for their presence, their activism, indeed, their very survival, some 300 years after the arrival of Hernán Cortés? For, despite Altamirano's portrayal of the contemporary Indian as passive and as victim, their continued existence in the nineteenth century—and beyond—speaks to their adaptability and survival, something that he suppresses in his depictions. By turning to the works of today's historians, we can begin to bridge that gap between the manufactured representation of the nineteenth-century Indian and the reality of their agency during colonialism and after Independence.

In *Mexico's Indigenous Communities: Their Lands and Histories, 1500-2010* (2010), historian Ethelia Ruiz Medrano's research reveals that under colonialism indigenous groups often were able to take advantage of their status within the Spanish legal system in order to negotiate, compromise, and defend their rights without giving up their traditional ways and languages, something that was not always possible after Independence. She writes that "...the Indians' capacity to engage and steer through the complicated apparatus of the colonial legal system implied a certain measure of autonomy on their part. Since at least 1531, they had possessed the right, when bringing lawsuits before the courts and tribunals, to employ some of their own customs and traditions" (2).

By looking at indigenous representation in other Latin American countries, we can see that often *campesinos* throughout Latin America—not just Mexico—were often relegated to the “Indian sphere” if they were poor and landless, thus negating their agency, despite evidence that indigenous *campesinos* refused to give up fighting for their autonomy. In his recent article on the early nineteenth-century Ayopaya Rebellion in Alto Peru, historian Javier F. Marion addresses the fact that indigenous and *mestizo* identities were often determined by economic rather than by biological factors. He concludes that

In rural peasant societies, the poor and landless were equated as closer to the ‘Indian’ sphere, oftentimes irrespective of one’s phenotype, culture, or language. And unlike their landed neighbors—many of whom were themselves of mixed descent—the landless could not accentuate the benefits of their pluralistic backgrounds, as their indigence precluded them from doing so. Thus, they were relegated to the bottom of the social ladder, pushed further into the ‘Indian sphere’ and with little hope for change without a complete revolution. (370)

By relegating all poor *campesinos* to the “Indian sphere,” nineteenth-century Liberals were able to ignore the diverse social and ethnic make-up of rural Mexico. Marion’s reference to the need for “a complete revolution” is echoed by cultural critic Walter Mignolo, who observes that it is not until the twenty-first century that indigenous groups are able to empower themselves in order to leave behind Western ideals and choose the “decolonial” option, thus bringing about the beginning of true revolution, as discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Historian Peter Guardino’s work, *Peasants*,

Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857 (1996), focuses on the important role of the peasants—indigenous, *mestizo*, and mulattoes—in the formative years before and after Independence and into the mid-nineteenth century.

While Latin America may not have yet seen a complete indigenous revolution, scholars like Guardino, Ruiz Medrano, and Marion explore the active and important role that subaltern groups such as indigenous peasants played throughout Latin America's history. Specifically, Guardino is concerned with exploring the role that indigenous peasants in Guerrero played in the formation of the Mexican national state (2). His research reveals that pueblos like Tixtla were not isolated places of passive, indigenous inhabitants but rather inhabited by indigenous peoples, *mestizos*, and mulattoes who were brought together by ever changing, complex circumstances and who did not always agree on which side to serve.

Vicente Guerrero, the great mulatto hero of the Independence movement after whom the state was later named, was himself born in Tixtla.²⁵ Altamirano greatly admired Guerrero and often proudly proclaimed that they were from the same pueblo, indeed, from the same family,²⁶ but certain contradictions become evident in his writings when describing his hometown. When Altamirano is constructing a picture of himself as an “*indio puro*,” he describes Tixtla and his family as purely indigenous. Other times, he proudly references the mixture of races that existed in pueblos like Tixtla and the surrounding areas in order to draw attention not to individual identity but rather to the

²⁵ Altamirano was also a close friend with Guerrero's grandson, writer Vicente Riva Palacio, and often mentions him in his correspondence to Benito Juárez during the French Intervention. Altamirano's letters to Juárez and Riva Palacio are compiled in Sotelo Inclán, *Epistolario*.

²⁶ In a letter to Juárez dated 4 August 1866, Altamirano writes about traveling to Tixtla with Vicente Riva Palacio and explains to Juárez that “yo soy también tlixtleco y pertenezco, como Riva Palacio y como Jiménez, a la familia del general Guerrero” (Sotelo Inclán, *Epistolario*, 157).

mestizaje project of Mexico that would encompass everyone. Thus, Altamirano's varying descriptions of Tixtla and its inhabitants reveal the conflicts between his personal issues of identity and the political goals of the Liberal party.

Altamirano's essay on the Independence movement, "Morelos en Tixtla," which was originally published in the *Liceo Mexicano* in 1886, demonstrates his depiction of the Indian of Tixtla as a passive victim of royalist forces. In this representation of Tixtla, he also abandons, for a time, his portrayal of Tixtla as a purely indigenous town and replaces it with one that acknowledges its Spanish, *mestizo*, and *mulato* inhabitants. Altamirano writes that the Spanish and *mestizo* population of Tixtla had grown to fear José María Morelos, thanks to the fear instilled in them by the royalist priest Mayol. In reference to the indigenous population, Altamirano writes that they too experienced the same fear inculcated by the priest. For Altamirano, the topic of religion remained a complicated one throughout his life; his writings often reveal his struggles to separate his personal religious beliefs as a Christian from what he views as the destructive role of the Catholic Church in Mexico. Here, he portrays the Indians as victims of the royalist priest: "hasta de los numerosos habitantes indígenas, que profesaban la religión católica como verdaderos idólatras" (*Obras históricas* 181). He later writes that 400 Indians were armed to fight against the insurgents, "siempre bajo el mando de jefes españoles" (185).

Although Altamirano's primary focus in this essay are the activities of the royalist forces under Cosío and Guevara and the attack on Tixtla by Morelos and Vicente Guerrero in 1811, he also draws attention to certain racial issues regarding blacks. He portrays the royalists Cosío, Guevara, Garrote, and Mayol as racist. Mayol, for example, questions how Morelos "habrá podido convertir en soldados a esos negros infelices de la

Costa Grande, buenos sólo para sembrar algodón y tabaco” (192). The blacks and mulattoes portrayed in this account by Altamirano are admirably led by General Vicente Guerrero, alongside Morelos. Strangely absent, however, is any substantial reference to indigenous involvement in the wars for Independence. Altamirano only mentions the presence of Indians one more time in this essay. When Morelos and Guerrero take Tixtla, they are presented with 300 Indians taken as prisoners by the insurgents. Morelos asks Guerrero to address them, since he speaks “mexicano,” and tell them that they will be set free if they agree to fight against the royalists. They agree, after Guerrero “les dirigió palabras tan expresivas, que todos ellos pidieron seguir con los insurgentes” (209-10).

Thus, with just a few words, Altamirano has portrayed the Indians as either prisoners or victims, and then as easily swayed by Guerrero’s words. In other words, the Indians are easily manipulated by both the royalists and insurgents. By denying these Indians any true agency, Altamirano has denied that many indigenous groups had valid and well-thought out reasons for supporting either the royalists or the insurgents and, later, the Conservatives or the Liberals. As Ruiz Medrano points out, Vicente Guerrero would later gain indigenous support for his presidency not because they were gullible but rather because he offered them “a wider field of political participation” (163).

According to Altamirano’s version of the events, Morelos was not able to speak directly to the Indians, presumably because he and they did not speak the same language, only Guerrero could speak “mexicano.” Again, Altamirano is emphasizing the differences between the Indians and insurgents, in this case a linguistic difference that prohibits real communication between Morelos and the indigenous prisoners. As

Guardino's research indicates, however, there was much interaction and commercial activity between the various groups of *mestizos*, Creoles, mulattoes, and Indians in this region throughout the colonial period, and it is doubtful that the Indians could not communicate in Spanish. In his account of these events, Altamirano portrays the Indians not as active members of the community of Tixtla but rather as passive, simply going along with whatever group is in control at the time, first the royalists and then the insurgents. Guardino points out that peasants and other subaltern groups during this time period continue to be denied agency by twentieth-century scholars. Specifically, he mentions historians like Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol who have relegated these groups to a state of victimization of circumstances beyond their control (3) and who often portray them as opponents of state formation. Historians like George Andrews, David Bushnell, and Neill Macauley also deny that Mexico's lower-classes had any impact on political conflict (4) during and after Independence.

Guardino, however, claims that peasants were "central to both the destruction of the Spanish colonial state and the formation of the Mexican national state" (4). More importantly, they "seek to influence the form of the state and also use existing state institutions for their own ends" (4). Ruiz Medrano, too, writes that the Independence movement in Mexico "had its origins in the various Indian pueblo uprisings of the late eighteenth century" and states that the Independence movement was "composed of hundreds of thousands of the colony's Indians" (152). In contrast, however, Altamirano chooses to portray the Indian as passive and weak, not only in this brief account set during the struggle for Independence, but long after Independence, as he helps to define the role of the Indian in Mexico in other writings. In 1866, for example, he continues to

describe the colonial Indian as “bestia del encomendero y el esclavo del fraile.... ¡No había porvenir para esta raza desgraciada!” (*Discursos* 117-18).

It would be a mistake to see indigenous political involvement and resistance as simply a response to the wars of Independence. This too would negate the active and constructive role that peasants and other subaltern groups played in the formation of colonial and post-colonial society. Guardino points out that during the colonial period, peasant villages were some of the most important institutions in rural Mexico.

Indigenous peasants had relied on the established colonial legal system to make their demands heard in their political and private conflicts. However, their access to these rights and their power were undermined by the Bourbon state during the late colonial period, which only spurred their opposition to colonial rule. More importantly, as shall be seen, many special rights enjoyed explicitly by indigenous groups were eliminated during the Bourbon state and after Independence, which again motivated these groups to organize and fight back, both within and outside of the legal and political systems.

The use of the legal system by indigenous groups to make their demands heard dates back several hundred years over the course of colonial rule. Their role in uprisings as a form of protest, both spontaneous and organized, also can be seen from the days of early colonialism. Indeed, the threat of mass indigenous rebellion—both real and imagined—was one of the fears that the ruling class exploited during colonialism and after Independence in order to gather resources to repress the indigenous pueblos and other peasants. According to historian William F. Connell, “Uprisings, in general, provide useful clues regarding how power structures function and are therefore quite worthy of intense study” (373, note 11). In his analysis of the Mexico City uprising of

1692, for example, Connell concludes that the official narrative, including Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's "Alboroto y motín," that emerged from the trial records blamed the "*motín*" on irrational indigenous people who drank too much pulque (399) and were upset with the shortage of corn. Connell argues that trial testimonies instead reveal that the uprising was a "visible manifestation of a larger political problem" (374). Violence only broke out when the masses became frustrated with Viceroy Silva y Mendoza, the Conde de Galve, and his minister, who deliberately chose not to control the price of corn (374).

As discussed above, in his account of this event, however, Sigüenza y Góngora systematically denies any rationale that the urban masses had for rising up (378). Instead, he emerges as a hero and savior of the city archives while those involved—both indigenous and non-indigenous—are portrayed as weak-willed individuals who frequented *pulquerías*. Once more, the subaltern is depicted as swayed by emotion rather than reason, thus making it easy for the authorities to deny that there were concrete reasons for the uprisings that would continue to take place throughout the colonial period and the nineteenth century.

Indigenous rebellions played a major role in Mexican history during the tumultuous nineteenth century. However, while physical manifestations and sometimes violence was one tool utilized to make their demands heard, indigenous groups also actively sought political alliances with other indigenous pueblos and with their fellow *mestizo* and mulatto peasants in order to work within the existing legal system to bring forth lawsuits regarding land ownership debates, tax issues, etc. Ruiz Medrano's research demonstrates also that participation in the legal system occurred throughout the

colonial period and beyond, not just in the beginning when indigenous elites were vying for their place within the emerging colonial system. Like other scholars, Ruiz Medrano traces the use of traditional sources as evidence of rightful land ownership in various legal cases. In Oaxaca, for example, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indigenous communities “continued to present pictorial documents, along with maps and oral testimony, in disputes and litigation over land and property” (3). According to Ruiz Medrano, these sources “... enjoyed the same legal status as notarial deeds and records...” and adds that “furthermore, their oral testimony was given in the Indians’ language. A large number of translators or interpreters were invariably used in all judicial cases” (2).

Significantly, this practice continued up to and beyond Independence. Ruiz Medrano finds that during the nineteenth century, when new legislation threatened communal property, indigenous communities persisted in introducing pictorial documents in national courts: “In short, during the nineteenth century, a substantial number of Indian pueblos continued to negotiate with judicial officials for the use of both pictorial maps and historical narrative as legal arguments in conflicts over land” (4-5). In 1854, she notes, at the Archivo General de la Nación, a department of paleography was created for the purpose of producing copies of original Nahuatl and Spanish pictorial maps, codices, and other historical documents. Ruiz Medrano writes: “Of the hundreds of Indian pueblos whose existence is recorded in Mexico, a small number have failed to discover the historical documents that would uphold their claim to have possessed certain lands. The majority, however, have been successful in this endeavor” (4-5).

Ruiz Medrano's research spans the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well, and demonstrates that many indigenous communities continue to use pictorial sources and written historical accounts produced during the colonial period in order to prove that their possession of certain lands dated back centuries (5). She became involved in a 2003 case involving the Nahua pueblo of Atliaca in the state of Guerrero, where schoolteacher and lawyer Modesto Vázquez Salgado fought for several years to regain land that had been illegally taken by a wealthy *mestizo*. She concludes that "One of the strongest arguments that enabled them to win the case before the court was their ability to prove that the state had recognized Atliaca as a pueblo for more than half a century, under the communal lands system" (5). Ruiz Medrano's work traces indigenous resistance, activism, and participation in New Spain and Mexico for over five centuries. It is clear that, for centuries after the arrival of the Spanish and well into the present, many indigenous communities fought for and won the right to use their traditional pictorial and oral sources, as well as written historical sources, in their often successful negotiations within the dominant culture's legal system. For these pueblos, the land they fought for was "not only an economic resource but also a font of political rights and communal freedoms against the countervailing power of the state" (166).

Political alliances between indigenous groups, *mestizos*, and mulattoes often were possible, contends Guardino, because of the fragmentation of classes. Factors such as kinship, geography, and ethnicity made it possible to form alliances between different groups from within a class. In rural Mexico, for example, different ethnic groups from the peasant class found common ground on which to unite against what Guardino calls the "predominant moral code" presented by the dominant class as representative of the

“interests and sentiments of *all* classes” (9, emphasis added). The alliances formed between members of the lower classes during and after Independence required constant negotiation as conflicts arose, which, rather than working against the interest of indigenous pueblos, allowed them the space necessary to actively participate in these fluid political and economic relationships.

While these alliances could be dismissed as merely relegated to small local arenas, Guardino demonstrates convincingly that these peasant groups directly influenced greater regional and national politics throughout the nineteenth century. As he contends, “Rural life was not insulated from the economy and class structure as a whole” (15). The nineteenth-century rural social movements and rebellions in what would become the state of Guerrero were a direct response to national politics, especially concerning suffrage, local elections, taxes, and land rights. Moreover, these movements, which involved *mestizo*, mulatto, and indigenous members of the peasant class, would force the dominant class to heed many of their demands.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the dominant colonial class, made up largely of Spanish immigrants and Creoles, was an extremely small size, estimated at 110 families by Guardino (17). Below this class was a larger group made up of small merchants, priests, muleteers, hacendados, ranchers, and the wealthier members of Indian communities. The lowest tier of the late-colonial Mexican class structure was the poorest sector, including Indian villagers, Indian, *mestizo*, and mulatto sharecroppers, hacienda tenants, artisans, and day laborers (17-18).

The relationships between the various classes and the Crown at the end of the colonial period were complex and in flux, especially as the wars for Independence began

in earnest. The dominant class for the most part supported the Crown in the 1810-1821 wars for Independence, recognizing that its many economic privileges would be in jeopardy should Mexico gain its independence. The less cohesive “middle” class, on the other hand, had already suffered great economic losses due to the Consolidación de Vales Reales and did not have the same connections as the dominant class to meet the Crown’s demands.²⁷ The lowest class, the peasants, actually was somewhat protected from the economic crisis of the late colonial period because of their production of market crops. As Guardino points out, “Indian peasants had marketed production since before the Conquest,” which they continued to do under Spanish rule and well after Independence (19). Peasants produced market crops such as maize and other grains that were traded in regional markets, thus making them a vital part of their regional and national economy. As shall be seen, this contradicts Altamirano’s depictions in his novel, *Navidad en la montaña*, where Indians are portrayed as needing the help of a Spanish priest in identifying and cultivating crops for the marketplace.

During the late colonial period, the Chilapa-Tixtla area was made up of corporate villages in which Indian peasants lived alongside mulattoes, *mestizos*, and Creoles. Chilapa, the seat of the *subdelegado*, was considered an Indian republic²⁸ but was also the home of many Creole and *mestizo* traders, artisans, and landowners. It was a center for cotton, and the surrounding villages were centers for spinning. Indians held large quantities of land as *tierras de repartimiento* and *bienes de comunidades*. Tixtla itself

²⁷ The Spanish Bourbon Crown’s Consolidación de Vales Reales (1804-1808), required the repayment of all debts owed to the church and other royal institutions so that the capital could be lent to the Crown. This measure is considered one of the major impetus of the wars for Independence (Guardino 18).

²⁸ According to historian Alicia Hernández Chávez, “the matrix of colonial society was consolidated as a series of Spanish and Indian republics, each with its own legal code.” With its designation as an Indian republic, colonial Tixtla was granted rights to resources that included farmland, pasture, forests, and water (52).

was home to many muleteers involved in local and long-distance travel. The economic relationship between Tixtla, Chilapa, and other villages served to unite the area, making it a vital part of the economy. Guardino uses the cotton industry as an example of the complex and interdependent relationships between the various classes. Highland merchants would buy cotton from the coast of Acapulco from mulatto sharecroppers. Merchants would then take the cotton to Indian women in the villages where they would spin it into thread. *Mestizo* weavers would weave cloth for both the regional and larger markets. Other raw cotton was sent directly to Mexico City or Puebla (21). The Acapulco trade was key to supporting not just the textile industry but that of the muleteers in Tixtla and other villages in the highlands. Guardino shows that these types of interdependent relationships were common throughout the Tierra Caliente area and other areas of what would become the state of Guerrero (22).

The picture that Guardino paints is of a social and economic system in which members of various ethnic and social classes worked together to make a living. These relationships continued to evolve during and after Independence. Indeed, these alliances were strengthened when their economic survival became threatened by the Creole class after Independence. Generally, this type of alliance and cooperation between the various ethnic classes is absent in Altamirano's literary depictions of his hometown. When he does mention the different ethnic groups, it is in simplified terms—the easily influenced Indian, the racist royalist, and the mulatto hero.

In 1882, Altamirano published an essay in *La República* titled “Morelos en Zacatula,” in which he describes, in very romanticized and poetic terms, the state of Guerrero, specifically the regions of Tixtla and Chilpancingo. It is interesting to note

that whether he is writing letters from the battlefield or historical or political essays for the newspapers, Altamirano's literary training is never absent. His use of similes, metaphors, personification, and sometimes emotional style all attest to the influence of Romanticism in his writings. According to Marissa López, "Scholars have typically read Mexican Romanticism as primarily the search for and expression of intrinsic Mexican identity" (404 n. 9). Romanticism's emphasis on nature, intuition, and emotion allows Altamirano to idealize his depictions of Tixtla, as in this essay, as well as of Mexico's pre-Hispanic indigenous past, in his own efforts to establish a sense of Mexican identity through his writings. In this particular essay, he spends the first three pages describing the Zacatula river and its descent from the *sierra* to the Pacific Ocean. He describes the coast in the following manner: "La vegetación de la costa, hija del rocío, del sol y de las brisas del mar, más bien que de la lluvia, recibe al rey de los ríos surianos sobre una alfombra de flores y bajo un dosel de luz y de perfumes" (*Obras históricas* 132). As the river reaches its final destination, he writes: "El río parece entregar con sus dos brazos este paraíso al mar, que lo recibe con sus ondas de esmeralda" (133).

These poetic descriptions of the region of Tixtla serve as the preface to Altamirano's discussion of the historical events surrounding Morelos's 1810 visit to Zacatula. It is important to note that here, as in many of his historical writings, Altamirano is depicting events that occurred many years earlier, some 70 years earlier in this particular case. This distance of time accounts for the sense of nostalgia that is often present in Altamirano's writings about his home town. In 1880, Altamirano published a series of essays in *La República* depicting his journey during Holy Week, a journey that was both physical and metaphorical. In this trip back home, he seeks to leave behind the

noise, chaos, and *muchedumbre* of Mexico City in search of “otros cuadros de la vida mexicana” (*Textos costumbristas* 23). In 1883, at the request of his colleagues, Altamirano gathers these essays into one publication in order to educate his readers about the more isolated pueblos in Mexico that are now made accessible by advances in communication and transportation (21).

The railroad, one of Porfirio Díaz’s most ambitious modernization projects, becomes an important character in these essays, serving as a symbol of progress that has brought hope and life to Mexico’s poorest and most isolated areas. As he leaves Mexico City, Altamirano describes how the railroad has miraculously revived San Lázaro, a section of Mexico City that houses the most indigent of its citizens. Altamirano writes that San Lázaro is “el infierno en que se agitan el traperero, el mendigo y el perro desamparado; es el dominio de la malaria de México y el antiguo refugio de los desdichados...” (24). However, with the coming of the railroad, “San Lázaro saldrá de su sepulcro y se adornará con los arreos de la vida y de la circulación” (25).

As Altamirano heads southeast, his descriptions of the pueblos made accessible by train continue to be filled with brief histories of each place, explaining their pre-Hispanic and colonial history, focusing especially on the role of the Church and priests. He defends the presence of the early sixteenth-century Franciscans, who he contends were “los primeros amigos de los indios, los mensajeros de la ilustración, los héroes verdaderos de la civilización latinoamericana (29). Again, Altamirano’s complex relationship with the Church surfaces in these essays. While in many of his other writings he criticizes the colonial Church for its abuse of the Indians and for instilling in them the superstitious beliefs that he believes has made them passive victims, here he

applauds the Franciscans in these pueblos and the priests who came later for uniting the Indians, who come together to celebrate Holy Week in a way that for Altamirano epitomizes a true *mestizaje*. The rituals he describes demonstrate a religious syncretism that he presents to the reader as the ideal way to celebrate an indigenous past that over the course of 300 years has become intertwined with Catholicism.

In “La Semana Santa en mi pueblo,” originally published in 1880, he reminisces about the celebrations that took place during Holy Week during his childhood.

Altamirano acknowledges in this essay that memories formed as a child are unique and infused with emotion. He writes that “las impresiones de la niñez resisten al tiempo, a los dolores y a las convulsiones de la vida” (37). For him “la memoria...[es] la custodia de todo” (37). He describes Tixtla as “pobrísima, oscura y desconocida” (38)²⁹ yet proudly traces its pre-Hispanic roots as a “colonia azteca” which, after the conquest, became thoroughly mixed with Christian traditions (39).

Thus, sometimes Altamirano emphasizes Tixtla as a *mestizo* pueblo in describing its religious celebrations of Holy Week while at other times he emphasizes its indigenous identity. Again, Altamirano utilizes the fluidity of identity in order to support whatever argument he is trying to make. In this case, his desire is to demonstrate that in Tixtla there is an authentic Catholic celebration that embodies both Aztec and Spanish values. He writes, “Testigo de ello es la danza sagrada que aparece periódicamente durante ciertas fiestas católicas, la cual no se conserva en ninguna parte de la república y en que aparecen los *teopixcatin* aztecas, con el tipo, los colores, los paramentos, y las largas

²⁹ Altamirano chooses to portray Tixtla as unknown, despite the fact that it is the birthplace of Vicente Guerrero and Vicente Jiménez, an important general who fought during the French Intervention, and a relative of Altamirano’s wife, Margarita.

cabelleras de los viejos sacerdotes del templo mayor de México... (39). These celebrations in Tixtla, according to Altamirano, demonstrate that the “raza azteca” has genuinely embraced Christianity: “una vez convertidos al cristianismo, han abrazado sus principios y aceptado sus dogmas con el ardor febril de las organizaciones sacerdotales” (42).

Literary scholars like Christopher Conway recognize a certain ambivalence in Altamirano’s attitude towards the idealistic promises of the nation in contrast to the realities of the nineteenth century. In Altamirano’s writings, Conway identifies a struggle between Altamirano’s “Indian self” and his modern, Liberal one (“Ignacio Altamirano and the Contradictions of Autobiographical Indianism” 34). Conway’s acceptance of the premise that Altamirano was, indeed, an Indian from an indigenous pueblo who managed to rise in Mexican politics and society because of a transformation made possible through education informs his analysis of “La Semana Santa en mi pueblo.” According to Conway, this essay reflects Altamirano’s desire to promote a pre-Hispanic indigenous lineage while struggling with the ability to embrace his contemporary “Indianness” publicly. Altamirano’s writings, however, often reveal that he chose to appropriate an Indian identity when necessary in order to achieve a certain authority in the on-going debates concerning the role that the Indian should play in the new nation.

Where Conway sees “La Semana Santa” as an essay that demonstrates how the Indians of Tixtla have retained many of their pre-Hispanic practices, I see an attempt to show how an “indigenous” pueblo—not one comprised of *mestizos* and mulattoes—has successfully incorporated and embraced Christian beliefs and traditions in a true Mexican

mestizaje. Once more, Altamirano is utilizing his “Indianness” and that of his hometown as an example of how the noble Indian of the past provides the Indian component of *mestizaje* while the contemporary Indian must fade away in order to make room for the *mestizo*.

In these *textos costumbristas*, Altamirano describes the Indians and their customs and mentions the presences of *mestizos*, which he claims are the minority in his hometown. And although he proudly mentions Vicente Guerrero’s connections to Tixtla, he does not comment on the presence of mulattoes. As Peter Guardino has shown, the presence of both *mestizos* and mulattoes was quite evident in Tixtla and a vital part of its history, both economically and politically. Yet, they do not form a part of these essays because Altamirano’s intent is to once more emphasize how Indians from humble pueblos like Tixtla are culturally *mestizos* because they have embraced Catholicism while bringing to it some of their own indigenous practices, thus becoming the ideal Mexican citizen.

These ideas are present in Altamirano’s earlier writings as well, as seen in his novel, *Navidad en las montañas*, set and published in 1871. His descriptions of the people that inhabit this isolated, fictional pueblo in the mountains demonstrate once more his belief that while indigenous traditions can play a role in the new nation’s identity, they need to be developed and guided by the more progressive *mestizo* culture that embraces Christianity. The people of the pueblo, who are described as “gente ruda, pero sencilla y buena,” are under the care of a Spanish priest who, according to the young soldier narrating the story, genuinely cares about their welfare. We are immediately made aware that if it were not for the guidance and education provided by the priest the

indigenous inhabitants of the pueblo would not have been able to survive: “son labradores y ganaderos y a veces su cosecha y sus ganados apenas les sirven para sustentarse” (16).

The priest recounts how he has taught them what crops to grow and when and where, which has led to a certain prosperity for the pueblo. He explains that “sus habitantes vivían, antes de que yo viniese, en un estado muy semejante a la idolatría y a la barbarie.... Yo les he dado nuevas ideas...y el pueblo va saliendo poco a poco de su antigua postración. Las costumbres ya de suyo inocentes, se han mejorado.... Mi humilde pueblecito llegará a disfrutar de un bienestar que antes se creía imposible” (19).

Once more, this revealing passage reflects many of Altamirano’s beliefs regarding the role of Indians. Only when molded by those who represent progress can they learn to participate in Mexico’s economy. Only the priest can point out to them that their crops of beans and corn might provide them with enough to eat but not enough to prosper. Only he can tell them which crops are ideal for the climate and which will produce enough to be sold in the markets, thus earning them money. This representation contradicts what Guardino has shown for the pueblos in Guerrero, who since the colonial period successfully participated in the economy of the region through the sale of the very same crops criticized by the priest in Altamirano’s novel as unprofitable.

The priest also explains how happy he was when they were able to make bread rather than tortillas: “la primera vez que comí un pan de trigo y maíz...lloré de placer, no sólo porque eso me traía a la memoria los tiernos recuerdos de la patria, sino porque comprendí que con este pan, más sano que la tortilla, la condición física de estos pueblos iba a mejorar también (27). The soldier is very impressed with the progress that the

priest has brought to this rural area and agrees that “la buena y sana alimentación es ya un elemento de progreso” (27).

Examples abound throughout the novel of this paternalistic and even condescending attitude towards the Indians of this pueblo. No one questions the fact that obviously they were able to feed, clothe, and house themselves before the arrival of the priest. As a group, they are represented as childlike, naive, and grateful for the priest who has come to teach their children how to read and sing Spanish *villancicos* and *romances* composed by Lope de Vega. The indigenous culture is represented by an elderly Indian known as tío Francisco and described as “el patriarca montañés” to whom the Indians came to for guidance before the arrival of the priest. He is described as “vestido pobremente y de estatura pequeña, pero en cuyo semblante...podían descubrirse todos los signos de la raza indígena pura.... La mirada era humilde y serena.... El tipo en fin, era el del habitante antiguo de aquellos lugares, no mezclada para nada con la raza conquistadora” (57).

Tío Francisco is, in fact, the ideal Indian who is spiritually strong and a hard worker but who embraces what the priest has to teach them in order to prosper both economically and spiritually. He and his wife’s eager acceptance of the outside world is epitomized by their oldest son, who is currently away studying but who will one day return “y traer al sendo de su familia la ventura, tan largo tiempo esperada por sus padres” (60). It is their son, and the other children who are learning to read and write Spanish, along with the labor of the older Indians, who represent economic progress, ensuring their future participation in the *mestizo* world.

In addition to his literary production, Altamirano's body of work includes several works on Mexico's history. During his lifetime, Altamirano was often praised for his intellect and his knowledge and depiction of historical events. This recognition became even more pronounced after his death in 1893 and well into the twentieth century. In his 1984 introduction to Altamirano's *Obras históricas*, for example, Moisés Ochoa Campos writes that with the 1882 publication of "Revista histórica y política (1821-1882) in *Primer almanaque histórico, artístico y monumental de la República Mexicana* by Manuel Caballero, Altamirano "se convierte en *el primer historiador mexicano moderno*, imbuido de sentido social y que concibe la lucha de clases como motor de la historia" (9, emphasis added). Ochoa Campos also writes that Altamirano's historical essays are "cuadros históricos con calidad literaria, plenos de amenidad y que revelan el conocimiento de su autor en el desarrollo de aquellos sucesos" (12). Like many others, Ochoa Campos declares that, above all, Altamirano was a great defender of the working class, and "como historiador, es un patriota, un juez justificiero y un maestro en el más amplio sentido del término" (14).

Ochoa Campos is not alone in declaring time and time again that as a historian, statesman, writer, and educator, Altamirano focused on the struggles of the working and peasant class. What is lacking in these types of statements is perhaps a more critical analysis of Altamirano's numerous writings that might raise questions concerning his portrayal of Mexico's indigenous population and their role in the social and political struggles that were at the center of his work. Indeed, while Ochoa Campos mentions the class struggles prevalent in Mexico's nineteenth century, he himself, like Altamirano, fails to discuss examples of indigenous activism and rebellion that dominated much of

this turbulent period. The examples of nineteenth-century indigenous agency that the present study will identify highlight their pointed absence from Altamirano's writings. What becomes clear in analyzing Altamirano's body of work is a desire to present an idealized image of what the new nation of Mexico should be as it approaches the end of the nineteenth century, after several decades of political and social turmoil.

This can be seen in works like "Revista histórica y política," in which Altamirano covers Mexico's history from its Independence in 1821 to 1882. In this history, published in 1882, Altamirano declares that the Mexican republic now "reposa hoy tranquila.... La *colonización* extranjera está muy favorecida por el gobierno; algunas empresas han introducido ya gran número de colonos italianos, cuyas colonia recién establecidas ofrecen prosperidad." He explains that "Nosotros concluimos esta revista histórica y política de México cuando la paz y el progreso material animan a los pueblos con sus esperanzas y beneficios, al concluir el año de 1882" (*Obras históricas* 126-27, emphasis added). Thus, in 1882, peace and prosperity for Mexico and its pueblos are represented by foreign investments and Italian immigrants, reflecting a common nineteenth-century belief that only through the whitening of the Mexican stock via European immigration could this country achieve prosperity.

As previously mentioned, the works that Altamirano published during his lifetime often comment on historic events that took place years before. Thus, it is important to look at those writings he produced about the moment in which he was living, because they can capture certain aspects of Altamirano's thoughts that he has not had an

opportunity to edit due to the passage of time. Here, I am referring to Altamirano's correspondence, which has been compiled in several edited works.³⁰

In *Cartas, novela, poemas y otros escritos de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano* (2002), editor Valentín López González includes several letters written by Altamirano while he served in the military under Benito Juárez during the French Intervention (1862-1867). These letters provide a sense of the action, activity, and an up-to-date account of the struggles, conflicts, and battles fought during the French Intervention that are not present in the accounts Altamirano wrote years after the war. They also reveal the inner struggles experienced by Altamirano, who often expresses how tired, physically ill, and even depressed he feels at times, and the political struggles of the men with whom he served. Moreover, the letters reveal that he is not afraid to express his anger over the actions of some of these men that he feels betray the new republic. He is also quick to warn his friends serving alongside him against the French, even if it means being openly critical of Juárez. As we shall see, Altamirano's relationship with Juárez was a complex one, and it is fascinating to compare his attitude toward Juárez in these letters, written during the actual events of the French Intervention, with what he writes about Juárez, for example, in *El Zarco*, written about twenty years after the end of the French Intervention.

These letters also demonstrate that Altamirano played an important political role during the French Intervention, enjoying direct access to Juárez, other important Mexican military leaders, and U.S. diplomats. This was not a man who lived isolated among his

³⁰ Many of the original letters are housed in the Archivo General de la Nación, The Latin American Library at Tulane University, and the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. Other than the edited compilations cited here, not much analysis has been undertaken on Altamirano's correspondence as a body of work.

books but rather one who was well aware not only of what was going on in his own country but also around the world.³¹

The correspondence between Altamirano and Juárez also has been compiled and published as part of the series “Obras Completas” vol. XXI: *Epistolario (1850-1889)*. Many of the letters written between the two were discovered by Jorge L. Tamayo, while he was compiling the multivolume work *Benito Juárez. Documentos, discursos y correspondencia*. Among other things, the correspondence between Juárez and Altamirano reveals that Altamirano faced many obstacles from members in the Liberal party, especially from General Diego Alvarez, the son of the *mestizo* leader, Juan Alvarez. Although Altamirano would remain a supporter of Juan Alvarez until Alvarez’s death in 1867, his ideological differences with Diego Alvarez would result in many future political problems for Altamirano, for Diego Alvarez considered Altamirano an anarchist and a threat to the future of the Liberal party, as he expressed in letters to Juárez (Sotelo Inclán 44).

Over 140 letters are included in *Epistolario*, covering a variety of subjects, although the majority touches on the French Intervention. Again, it is interesting to note the absence of any mention of the contemporary nineteenth-century Indian, an absence reflected in many of Altamirano’s other works. When referring to himself in these letters, Altamirano often describes himself as “hijo del sur” (57), “originario del estado

³¹ Altamirano’s letters during the 1860s also reveal his level of contact and communication with officials such as José A. Godoy, the Mexican consul in San Francisco who often served as an intermediary between Altamirano and Juárez. José Godoy was a journalist who had edited several newspapers in Mexico. He was appointed the Mexican consul in 1864 in San Francisco. He died in San Francisco on September 29, 1869, where he was a respected representative of Mexico. According to a U.S. newspaper article announcing his death, “During the French occupation of Mexico he was untiring in his labors for the party of resistance. ...He had equal faith in the future of his country and the destinies of her people. He believed that they would yet rise to a position among the nations worthy of the noble traditions of their ancestors” (“Sudden Death of Senor Jose Godoy”).

de Guerrero” (58); or with the “corazón de un suriano” (61). Tixtla is mentioned several times yet he does not comment on its indigenous inhabitants, although we will see that indigenous Mexicans did indeed participate in, both in support of and against, the French Intervention. His descriptions of other pueblos in these letters as “rudos y supersticiosos” (66) also calls to mind the pueblo in *Navidad en las Montañas*.

When Altamirano writes about his family in his correspondence, he mentions that they are poor and that they have suffered because he had not been compensated by the government for his services to his country. Altamirano’s dissatisfaction with the government often stemmed from his financial straits, yet his correspondence also clearly reveals a more ideological conflict with government leaders during the French Intervention. In “Carta de Ignacio M. Altamirano al general Francisco Leyva, Iguala, julio 31 de 1863,” Altamirano writes to Liberal commander General Francisco Leyva, After expressing his sympathy for a battle that Leyva lost, Altamirano proceeds to warn Leyva against going to San Luis to join some of the other military leaders:

Eso sería anonadarse y nivelar una figura militar, joven y de acción con esas tristes muestras de inacción y de enervamiento. Usted comprenderá, con su buen juicio, que el gobierno no lo va recompensar tan bien, como era justo, y que además de las mortificaciones que va a tener, su espíritu va a tener que deplorar la todavía fatal apatía del gobierno que según su política tradicional, se deja arrastrar por los acontecimientos, en vez de prevenirlos y dominarlos. (10)

In closing, Altamirano informs Leyva that he is going to meet with Eutimo Pinzón and friends, who will certainly be more helpful than “esa cáfila de mezquinos intrigantes que

rodea al presidente” (11). Altamirano’s distrust in, and lack of respect for, Mexico’s leaders is quite evident. His description of Leyva as a young, military leader of action juxtaposed with that of the apathetic, rudderless establishment is one that is repeated time and time again in his letters. Although Altamirano does not mention Juárez by name in this letter to Leyva, he is clearly frustrated with Juárez’s lack of leadership; his opinion of the ineffectiveness of Juárez and other leaders surfaces when he writes *El Zarco* some twenty-five years later.

These letters thus reveal that Altamirano was not afraid to state his personal opinions about or to Juárez. In a letter written to Benito Juárez dated 30 October 1865, Altamirano expresses his feelings of disappointment and anger over the betrayal of Miguel Negrete, who had served under Juárez as Minister of War from March 1864 through August 1865 and who had, in the midst of the French Intervention, switched sides to support Jesús González Ortega in his 1865 presidential aspirations (Thomson and La France 134). Altamirano writes, “Las noticias de la separación de Negrete es desagradable, no porque ella importe nada en la cuestión actual, sino porque siempre disgusta un acto de ingratitud y de desmoralización.” He continues: “Los hombres hoy no valen nada” (López González 17). In a seemingly unrelated matter, Altamirano closes his letter by asking Juárez to appoint Juan Torres as *teniente coronel de Caballería*. He describes Torres as a good friend, almost like his brother, who is eager to fight alongside Porfirio Díaz. Altamirano then explains that, like himself, Torres is a man of action:

“Nuestra inacción le mata, en suma él pertenece, como yo, a otra esfera de acción y audacia” (18, emphasis added).³²

It is important to recall that just two years earlier, in his 31 July 1863 letter to Leyva, Altamirano expressed his distrust of Mexico’s leaders and his disdain for their lack of action. Additionally, in a letter written to Juan Alvarez on 11 September 1861, Altamirano again states his frustration with Juárez. He writes, “Todos los desaciertos que se pueden cometer, los ha cometido el señor Juárez en su gobierno que se va haciendo la plaga de la sociedad. Yo no sé qué le sucede a este hombre; pero el caso es que el disgusto del partido liberal hacia él es ya completo. Ninguna de las esperanzas que se concebían de su gobierno ha realizado” (Sotelo Inclán 94). Four years later, in the letter to Juárez, he again makes the distinction between men of action, including himself, and those who do nothing.

Although Altamirano does not state directly in this letter that Juárez belongs to the second group, his opinion concerning Juárez is quite evident. His frustration with the inaction and lack of leadership during the years before and during the French Intervention will surface again in *El Zarco*, when he writes that men like Martín Sánchez Chagollán have no choice but to act as vigilantes against the bandits who have taken over the countryside because of the ineffectiveness and inaction of the government and military. It is quite possible that in writing about Negrete’s betrayal to Juárez he is

³² According to a letter written a year later (June 13, 1866) from Diego Alvarez to Benito Juárez, Juárez complied with Altamirano’s request concerning Torres. Indeed, it appears that Juárez often took Altamirano’s advice under consideration, much to the dismay of Alvarez, who warns Juárez that Altamirano’s suggestions “engendra[n] disensiones entre los servidores de la República.” Indeed, Alvarez claims that not everything Altamirano is describing in his letters to Juárez about his own involvement is true: “el repetido individuo [Altamirano] no ha tenido ningún participio en la marcha que ha seguido el estado...” (Sotelo Inclán, *Epistolario*, 165). This letter is one of many in which Diego Alvarez and Altamirano both write to Juárez, complaining about each other and asking for his support.

warning Juárez that he too should be aware of how certain actions can be construed as “un acto de ingratitud y de desmoralización.”

While the correspondence included in López González’s *Cartas, novela, poemas y otros escritos* helps us to see Altamirano as a military man of action, right in the middle of the events of the French Intervention, the editor’s prologue is also quite revealing about the complicated matter of Altamirano and his ethnic identity. As previously mentioned, Altamirano often presents himself as an “*indio puro*” from the indigenous pueblo of Tixtla. This carefully constructed image of an Indian who has risen to superior levels of leadership in the military, politics, and academia served Altamirano and the Liberal party well in promoting the idea that an educated Indian, now culturally a *mestizo*, could make great strides in becoming a full-fledged citizen of the young Republic.

This construction of Altamirano’s identity as an “*indio*” became even more ingrained after his death, to the point that his supporters created—and continue to create—almost a mythical character. The prologue to *Cartas, novela, poemas* includes a brief biography of Altamirano written by Alberto Leduc, a Mexican writer who died in 1908.³³ This biography, first published in 1910, reveals that the “Indianization” of Altamirano and other leaders was fully entrenched just 17 years after Altamirano’s death in 1893. Leduc writes that Altamirano was born of “*raza indígena*” and that, along with other Indians such as Benito Juárez and Ignacio Ramírez, “han reivindicado a favor de la raza indígena el prestigio que legítimamente le pertenece” (*Diccionario de geografía* 6).

³³ Although López González does not provide the complete reference in his prologue, the biography was first published in Alberto Leduc, Luis Lara y Pardo, and Carlos Roumagnac, *Diccionario de geografía, historia y biografía mexicanas* (Mexico: Librería de la Vda de C Bouret, 1910).

This same language is present in Mario Ceballos Novelo's preface to *Cartas, novela, poemas*, published in 2002. Ceballos Novelo describes Benito Juárez as an "indio puro, [quien] aprendió el español ya en plena adolescencia" and writes that Altamirano is "otro indio puro originario de Tixtla, Guerrero, que también aprendió el español cuando menos varios años de su nacimiento" (3). He also refers to Altamirano as an "*indio guerrerense*" and goes on to state that both "Juárez y Altamirano son preclaros ejemplos de que los hijos de nuestros abuelos indios, son no solamente gentes de razón lo que se les había negado por los conquistadores hispanos, sino ejemplares ciudadanos que defendieron a su país de la intervención francesa" (3). More than one hundred years after their deaths, both Juárez and Altamirano have become completely imagined as indigenous heroes, on the one hand, and as exemplary *mestizo* citizens, on the other.

The prevailing representation of Altamirano and Juárez as Indians must be examined because they are portrayed as the ideal Indian of the new nation, one that all of Mexico's Indians should aspire to emulate. Like Altamirano and Juárez, they should relegate their indigenous identity to the past and utilize it in the present only as necessary in order to prove how far the Indian can come with the proper formal education. They must sever their ties with the contemporary nineteenth-century Indian while maintaining a strong link to their pre-Hispanic noble indigenous ancestors. It is for this reason that the nineteenth century emerges as perhaps one of the most detrimental times for indigenous peoples in Mexico, as negative stereotypes about them become ingrained and perpetuated well into the twentieth century. Indeed, as historians have shown, Independence and the Liberal party politics that emerged over the course of the nineteenth century often proved to be detrimental to the rights of many indigenous

pueblos. Despite the fact that some scholars have questioned his “pure Indian” identity, it is evident that, given the language utilized in Leduc’s biography of 1910 and, almost 100 years later in Ceballos Novelo’s prologue to the 2002 edition of *Cartas, novela, poemas*, it is an image that is difficult to challenge.

A little-studied theme that emerges in Altamirano’s body of work is that of the absence of contemporary nineteenth-century indigenous agency in his literary representation of the Indian. Like his fellow Liberals, Altamirano appropriates the mythical, noble, pre-Hispanic Indian as a rallying call to unite all of Mexico’s citizens. At the same time, in order to prove how devastating colonialism had been to the “Indian” and thus generate support for the Liberal project of *mestizaje*, it became important for leaders and writers like Altamirano to portray the nineteenth-century Indian as uneducated, superstitious, and apathetic.

While it cannot be denied that colonialism changed the fate of the indigenous peoples of the Americas forever, we must not ignore the fact that the nineteenth-century leaders of the liberated Latin American nations often played a role in perpetuating, indeed, in promoting, the negative stereotypes that abound today about indigenous peoples everywhere. In many of Altamirano’s works, we either read about the heroic pre-Hispanic Indian or about the brow-beaten nineteenth-century Indian but not about the acts of indigenous resistance and activism. In his preface to *Cartas, novela, poemas*, Ceballos Novelo briefly notes that, in the battle of Puebla (May 5, 1862), Commander General Ignacio Zaragoza beat the French with help of the Zacapoaxtla Indians, yet Altamirano’s correspondence does not include any mention of the role that Indians played during the French Intervention, either against or for the French.

In 1987, French historian Jean-François Lecaillon published an article about the often overlooked role of Mexico's indigenous groups during the French Intervention. According to Lecaillon, traditional Mexican historiography has either forgotten or has chosen to ignore the fact that many indigenous groups in Mexico fought on the side of Maximiliano. He maintains that under colonialism, Indians had achieved a certain social and political position that they were not necessarily willing to give up after Independence. Indeed, the nineteenth century represented a danger to their status, and indigenous groups fought to challenge many of the new ideas ushered in after Independence, as they had often done throughout the colonial period. They were quick to utilize political upheaval and unrest in order to gain an advantage in making their demands heard.

As Lecaillon points out, despite what the traditional historiography tells us, some Indians collaborated with the French against the central Mexican power that often did not have their best interests at heart, in spite of Benito Juárez's own ethnicity (19). He calculates that around 40 percent of indigenous communities supported Maximiliano and his troops. The active groups included, among others, the coras, huicholes, ópatas, yaquis, mayos, tepehuanes, náhuas from Puebla, tarascos, and chiapanecos (20). Many others served as guides, spies, or messengers.

Although Altamirano does not mention these indigenous groups in his writings concerning the French Intervention, Lecaillon notes that other Liberals angrily acknowledged that they did not have their support. In a letter to D. Cabrera, dated August 25, 1864, General Negrete complains that "estos indios imbéciles se dejan seducir por los franceses" (20). In 1867, historian Pedro Pruneda writes that "Los indios le

manifestaron a Maximiliano en todas partes un fanático entusiasmo” (cited in Lecaillon 20).

In his *Historia de la guerra de Méjico, desde 1861 á 1867* (1867), Pruneda describes the Indians as eagerly awaiting Maximiliano’s arrival: “Con tal naturalidad se espresaba el pobre indígena, que como todos los de su raza, guardaba viva en su corazón la supersticiosa creencia que de padres á hijos se había transmitido, y según la cual llegaría un día desde el Oriente un jóven de blonda barba y de ojos azules, bajo cuyo reinado su raza se levantaría de su lamentable decadencia. Este jóven prometido era para los indios el archiduque Maximiliano, y de aquí el fanático entusiasmo que en todas partes le mostraba aquella pobre y desgraciada raza” (256). Once again, the Indians are dismissed simply as superstitious, driven by the same myth that foretold the presumed Aztec interpretation of the arrival of Cortés in 1519 as the return of Quetzalcoatl. This also brings to mind Altamirano’s description of the Indians that supported the royalists at the beginning of the war for Independence as easily swayed and manipulated.

Lecaillon points out that even Liberal poets like Guillermo Prieto, who fought along with Altamirano against Santa Anna and during the Guerras de Reforma, were guilty of promoting these negative images of Indians. Prieto compares them to “chancros” (warts) and describes them as “primitivos,” “refractorios al progreso,” “tontos, supersticiosos y borrachos” (cited in Lecaillon 20). Altamirano’s correspondence sheds light on his personal relationship with Prieto, who he considered to be a mentor and a father figure, not just to him but to other Liberals like Ignacio Ramírez. On February 10, 1886, Altamirano writes a letter to Prieto wishing him a happy birthday and applauding Prieto’s contribution to his country and its citizens. Altamirano is well

aware of Prieto's place in history and notes that the admiration he receives equals immortality. He writes: "¿Que es [usted] el padre, el modelo, el guia...de la juventud? ¿Que es [usted] para mí un padre que concentra[?] en sí esa [?] paternidad...que me formé desde mi juventud de Ramírez y de [usted]?"

In a second letter written from Paris and dated December 10, 1890, Altamirano congratulates Prieto for the "ovación" that Mexico has paid him and mentions that the articles published for this occasion are very good, especially the one written by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera "que es brillante" ("Letters to Prieto, 1886-1891").³⁴ The year 1890 is also the same year that Altamirano declared Prieto to be the Father poet of the Nation.³⁵ Again, Altamirano's correspondence reveals not only details about his friendships with other literary figures like Prieto and Nájera but his admiration for their work.

It is clear that, as a group, Mexico's nineteenth-century Indians were denied agency by writers, educators, and politicians who refused to acknowledge that these indigenous groups were in fact aware of the negative political implications of Liberal policies after Independence. They chose to respond through active participation, resistance, and rebellion. Indeed, their role during the French Intervention is just one example that belies their depiction as a passive, "pobre y desgraciada" race.

Lecaillon maintains that the Indians were not necessarily pro-French but rather anti-"Mexican," a label with which they did not identify. Despite the Liberal party's

³⁴ In this same letter, Altamirano informs Prieto that he wants to nominate him as an honorary member of a group that has formed in Paris called "Grupo de la América Latina" whose goal is to "propagar en todos sentidos la instrucción popular en América y particularmente en Mexico...." This group was part of a larger group called "Liga Ynternacional de la Enseñanza."

³⁵ Altamirano's diary of 1889-1890 is full of references to his friend Prieto as well as other literary figures of that era, including Gutiérrez Nájera, who kept in touch with him via telegrams and correspondence while he was in Paris. "Diary of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano: October-December, 1889 and January-April, 1890." Available at <http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/36242?show=full>.

manifiesto that after Independence all people in the new nation were “mexicanos,” for many of these indigenous groups, “mexicanos” included the Creoles and the *mestizos* but not them because they were denied the right to be different and to govern themselves. According to Ruiz Medrano, this form of cultural resistance was evident since Independence, when indigenous groups expressed “a sense of separate ethnic identity, a feeling of belonging to a different community, a distinct indigenous religious sensibility...” (153).

Twenty years after Independence, indigenous groups were fighting against Liberal party actions such as La Ley Lerdo de 1857, which took away communal indigenous lands; appropriation of their resources, for which they were not compensated; and military levies. More importantly, they were fighting against a centralized government: “se oponen a todo lo que viene de la capital, autoridad centralizadora, uniformizadora y ‘mexicana’” (21). For them, the nationalistic trends of the nineteenth century represented an immediate threat to their way of life that they had managed to sustain throughout the colonial period.

As Lecaillon points out, for a brief period between 1862 and 1867, under French occupation, indigenous groups were able to regain certain rights and privileges that had been taken away after Independence: restoration of their sovereignty, preservation of their land and properties, and respect for their identity as separate from that of the Creoles and *mestizos*. Unfortunately, the end of the French Intervention saw an increase in atrocities against indigenous groups, such as the execution of 450 yaquis by Colonel Bustamante in the town of Bacum, Sonora, in 1868. Up until the late 1980s, history had ignored the role of indigenous groups during the French Intervention because it

contradicted the myth of a united Mexico fighting and victorious against foreigners. It was thus easier to represent the Indians as passive against the French invasion or to portray them as easily manipulated by foreigners. As Lecaillon concludes, we must confront another lasting myth about the Indian: “el del indio definitivamente tonto” (21).

In recent decades, historians have begun to address this often overlooked topic of indigenous participation in the French Intervention, either on the side of the Liberals or in support of Maximiliano. Historian Florencia Mallon’s 1995 publication, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru*, describes how the Indians of the Sierra de Puebla first negotiated their alliance with the Liberal *mestizo* leader Juan Alvarez prior to the French invasion. In exchange for their support, the Liberal party agreed to recognize the Xochiapulquenes’ claims to the land of Xochiapulco and La Manzanilla and also would declare them an independent municipality (Mallon 30). When the French army entered Mexico in 1862, the Xochiapulquenes, along with other indigenous allies, formed the majority of the battalion that defeated the French army in Puebla on May 5, 1862. Mallon writes that oral tradition, supported by written sources, emphasizes the importance of the role of the Indian soldiers in the Liberals’s victory that would delay the French takeover of Mexico City by an entire year (43-44).

Scholars often have noted the close and personal relationship between the *mestizo* leader Alvarez and Altamirano. In 1850, when he was a student at the Instituto Literario del Estado de México, in Toluca, Altamirano wrote a letter to Alvarez asking him to intercede on his behalf because he had been expelled from school (Letter from Altamirano to Juan Alvarez, August 29, 1850). According to scholar Nicole Girón, this letter indicates an early and probably close relationship between Altamirano and the great

mestizo leader Alvarez, speculating that perhaps they were related. As Jesús Sotelo Inclán, editor of *Epistolario (1850-1889)*, demonstrates, Altamirano and Alvarez were, in fact, related by marriage. Altamirano's brother, Vicente, was married to Alvarez's granddaughter (19-20). Altamirano's correspondence in later years reveals his continued admiration of Juan Alvarez, who had supported him throughout the years with letters of recommendation and even money for his education.³⁶

Historians like Guardino have noted that Alvarez often fought for the rights of not only the *mestizos* but of indigenous groups to be represented in regional and national politics. Alvarez was aware that he needed the support of Guerrero's indigenous pueblos in order to win the constant battles against the Conservatives and he thus entered into many negotiations and alliances with the various indigenous representatives. It is clear that, given his relationship with Alvarez as well as his continuous and ever evolving role in the nation's politics, Altamirano must have been aware of the indigenous groups that fought for and demanded a voice in the future of their country, making their absence in his works even more problematic.

Despite Alvarez's recognition of the need for indigenous support, the patronizing, negative attitude towards the nineteenth-century Indian was prevalent throughout the Liberal party, which suffered many ideological differences and internal conflicts especially between Liberals in the eastern and western sierras. Liberal Rafael Cravioto's

³⁶ There are several letters that date back to 1849 and 1850 written by Juan Alvarez in which he expresses concern for Altamirano's well being and financial situation. In one letter written to Governor Mariano Riva Palacio, Alvarez asks him to extend Altamirano "su mano protectora" while he is studying in Toluca. In this same letter, it becomes clear that Altamirano's father, Francisco Altamirano, himself knew Alvarez personally. Alvarez writes, "...acabo de saber por el padre de Don Ygnacio Altamirano colegial en esa ciudad y recomendado mio..." (Letter from Juan Alvarez to Mariano Riva Palacio, November 13, 1849). Alvarez also supported Altamirano's campaign for representative of Guerrero to the National Congress in 1861. In that same year, Altamirano arranges for the National Congress to declare Alvarez "Benemérito de la Patria" (Girón, *Semblanzas del Estado de Mexico* 387).

actions in the western sierra in 1863, for example, epitomize certain Liberal patronizing attitudes towards their indigenous allies. In desperate need of money, Cravioto's forces entered the indigenous village of Chiconcautla to collect the national guard tax for the month, to which the Indians had previously agreed. Nevertheless, the Indians, tired of having to endure more Liberal taxation, sought assistance from the French troops in Zacatlán and rebelled against Cravioto's forces (45).

Although Cravioto tried to attribute their treachery to having fallen victim to French propaganda, like Lecaillon, Mallon concludes that it was much more than that. Her research reveals that representatives from the pueblo of Chiconcautla had already been meeting with Conservatives in order to discuss protection from excessive taxation, which the French were offering. Cravioto's reaction to the "treachery" of the Indians further strengthened the indigenous communities' support of Maximiliano. After the French forces left Zacatlán, he killed the political leaders in Tepeixco, burned Chiconcautla, imprisoned leaders, and imposed even more taxes (46).

Ruiz Medrano also notes that indigenous support of Maximiliano was born not out of naïveté but rather as a direct result of the struggles they had endured since the Guerras de Reforma over the loss of their communal lands. During his brief stint as emperor, Maximiliano demonstrated a genuine interest in indigenous culture, and his policies restoring communal landholdings, providing legal assistance, and granting public audiences greatly relieved many indigenous communities. Ruiz Medrano writes that "These initiatives, warmly received by many Indian pueblos, resembled those followed during the colonial period, when a special tribunal existed to consider indigenous affairs" (180-81). Thus, Maximiliano's reign represented a brief opportunity to regain and

restore the indigenous authority and land that had been lost after Independence and which would face its greatest threat after the French were defeated.

Indigenous participation in the French Intervention is only one example of their activism, ability to negotiate, and ability to choose whom to support politically. These were not the passive, ignorant Indians portrayed by Altamirano in his works, which he produced with the explicit intent to educate the Mexican citizens about their history and about the future of Mexico. The themes of *mestizaje*, indigenous representation, history, education, identity, and citizenship all come together in Altamirano's foundational novel, *El Zarco*. Altamirano sets the novel in 1861, a time when Mexico was struggling to emerge from the continued internal conflict and chaos that it had endured since before Independence. When the novel's events take place, the country was preparing for yet one more battle, this time against the French and the Conservatives that supported their presence in Mexico.

Altamirano wrote *El Zarco* in 1888, almost 28 years after the end of the Guerras de Reforma (1856-1861) and 21 years after the conclusion of the French Intervention (1862-1867). He chose 1861 as a pivotal year in order to highlight the many conflicts that the Mexican people had endured for years within their own government as well as against the foreign governments that waited in the background, ready to intervene in Mexico's affairs under the guise of enforcing peace. As he hints in the novel, the internal conflicts between the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the various factions within each group were just as damaging as the foreign interventions. Yet in his novel Altamirano also presents a vision of Mexico's future, a vision much in keeping with his Liberal views on education, progress, modernization, and, of course, citizenship.

This last category is of special significance because, 67 years after Independence, Mexico was still struggling to identify what it entailed to be a good citizen. Who should the new Mexican citizen be? Indeed, while each Latin American country dealt with its own specific issues after Independence, the question of citizenship and participation was universally addressed by many nineteenth-century writers throughout Latin America.³⁷ José Mármol, for example, in *Amalia* (1851), utilizes the romantic relationships between Amalia and Eduardo and Daniel and Florencia to present his vision of the future of Argentina in which positivism, through education, will win out over determinism. Amalia, cultured and formally educated and from an aristocratic family, is presented as the ideal woman. Eduardo also is presented as the ideal educated male who spends his time reading the poetry of Lord Byron to Amalia in their private Eden.

As a contrast to their idyllic relationship, Mármol introduces the character of Manuela, the unfortunate daughter of the Argentinean dictator José Manuel Rosas and “la primera víctima de su padre” (226). Unlike Amalia, Manuela has not been formally educated; rather, Rosas either ignores his daughter or humiliates her, forcing her to interact with the mulattoes of the household. Manuela exemplifies how her environment and family history (*gauchos*) overpower any natural talent she might possess. The mulattoes here are represented as grotesque and vulgar and, together with the *federales*, represent “la barbarie.” In turn, “la civilización” is represented by Amalia and the *unitarios* who through education will secure Argentina’s future.

³⁷ The eighth edition (1894) of the novel *María* by Colombian writer Jorge Isaacs includes three essays called “juicios” by Altamirano, Guillermo Prieto, and Justo Sierra. Indeed, Sierra dedicates his essay to Altamirano, who had died in 1893. This collaboration is just one of many examples of Altamirano’s connections with the literary world outside of Mexico. His *Memoria, presentada a la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* lists the 1882 edition of *María* as part of the Sociedad’s library holdings.

In his novel *Martín Rivas*, Chilean Alberto Blest Gana also focuses on the role that education can play in overcoming differences, in this case the differences between classes. According to editor Guillermo Araya, Blest Gana's works serve to demonstrate "cómo debe ser el mundo" (17), a common thread in many nineteenth-century novels. In his capitalistic view of the world, Blest Gana sees education as a means to increase personal wealth.

Don Dámaso and his family represent the new aristocracy because of their wealth, while Martín Rivas represents the poor bourgeois class. Nevertheless, Blest Gana makes it clear that through education Martín will be able to improve his economic status and thus conquer the class differences between him and Don Dámaso's daughter, Leonor. Although Don Dámaso does not initially accept the idea of marriage between Leonor and Martín, Leonor defends him, telling her father that "Martín, aunque pobre, tiene alma noble, elevada inteligencia" and that he is "un joven de esperanza" (420). This description is similar to Altamirano's description of the noble Indian Nicolás who also represents, through education, the hope of the nation. Like Blest Gana, Altamirano too supports the idea that education will ensure that Mexico's subaltern populations will be productive citizens and participants in the marketplace.

Like other Latin American writers, Altamirano uses historical figures and real political events, as well as fictional situations in his novels, in order to educate his reader. According to scholar Doris Sommer, Altamirano and other nineteenth-century Latin American writers recognized that the novel was the most popular genre of their time and that love stories could be utilized to relay a message of patriotism (230). Through the novel, intellectuals could share their political ideologies with a public that perhaps was

less interested in reading newspapers or political essays (230). In keeping with his didactic goals, Altamirano fashions certain archetypical characters that reflect both the ideal and the not so ideal citizen of the new, modern Mexico.

The elevation of the archetypical *mestizo* as the new ideal for a modern, independent, self-sufficient Mexico displaced the Indian. The Indian no longer had a place in Mexico's present or future. Instead, he must be relegated to a glorious, mythical past, where his culture can function as "the monument to Mexican Nationalism," which is what historian Alan Knight refers to as the logic of later revolutionary *indigenismo* (Knight 99). This is very much in evidence in *El Zarco* in the portrayal of the indigenous *campesino*, Nicolás, who represents the malleable ideal Indian that can be reeducated and constructed as a new citizen. Significantly, in this novel as in his other writings, Altamirano chooses not to portray the Indian that refuses to fade away in order to make way for the *mestizo*.

As a writer, Altamirano also creates an exciting novel of war, kidnapping, thievery, and love, very much in keeping with the genre of the romantic novel of the nineteenth century. Bandits ravage Mexico's countryside: they have free reign to steal, kidnap, and murder because the central government and its tattered army are unable to put a stop to their actions.³⁸ Middle class families like that of the young Manuela and her mother Antonia are forced to remain in their country home in the pueblo of Yautepec, Morelos, in constant fear, and unable to reach what they perceive to be the safety of Mexico City. Manuela is the beautiful, light-skinned young woman who is superficial,

³⁸ In a letter written to Alvarez in 1861, Altamirano expresses this same fear of the bandits. He explains to Alvarez that he would like to send him photographs and gifts for Alvarez's wife but that it is not safe to do so: "...los bandidos podrían robarse todo y no quiero" (Sotelo Inclán, *Epistolario* 108).

weak-willed, and greedy. Also living in the pueblo is the young orphan Pilar, Antonia's goddaughter, who is represented as "la hija humilde del pueblo" (Altamirano, *El Zarco* 37). The two women form two parts of the obligatory love triangle; the third part, at least at the beginning of the plot, is the young Indian Nicolás, who is in love with Manuela.

Manuela rejects Nicolás because he is an "ugly Indian" and a simple peasant, a sentiment she makes clear time and time again. For Altamirano, however, Nicolás is the ideal Indian. He is humble but not servile, hard working, brave, and a man of action. Altamirano emphasizes these positive characteristics in order to communicate his vision of how the Indian can evolve to become Mexico's ideal citizen. Through Nicolás, Altamirano imparts his views on the role that education needs to play in the formation of the new citizen. Because Nicolás is still at the beginning of this process of formation, he is represented as someone who has some education, although he considers himself unlettered. His educational background is important here because it is imperative that the reader perceive Nicolás as a humble Indian but one who is also "un hombre culto" (32). Thus, Altamirano creates a figure that is very much in keeping with what the role of the Indian should be in Mexico after Independence as he moves towards a cultural and biological *mestizaje*.

In her study on the feminine characters in *El Zarco*, Jacqueline Cruz observes that Pilar is portrayed as an angel, brave and pure. In contrast, light-skinned Manuela violates the moral code of the nineteenth century, selling her body and soul for blood-stained stolen jewelry given to her by El Zarco, the cruel leader of the bandits that exemplifies the chaos and terror that enveloped Mexico at this time (Cruz 75). In keeping with the traditional nineteenth-century novel, the female sinner is punished in the end, and the

angel, who can see beyond what Manuela characterizes as the “ugly” features of the Indian, reaps her reward through marriage, which functions as an instrument of cohesion, and looks forward to future motherhood (79).

Nicolás’s and Pilar’s marriage is acceptable because Altamirano posits their union will produce the new ideal citizen of Mexico: a true *mestizo*. Cruz makes an interesting observation when she points out that both Pilar and Nicolás are orphans. They are no longer burdened by their histories, no longer contaminated by their historical inheritance. They will become the new parents of the nation (83). According to Dorris Sommer, the novel genre also reflects a “tradition of marriages between politics and passions” (231). It is through literature, specifically the novel, that Altamirano, like other nineteenth-century Latin American writers, hopes to educate Mexico about its imagined history, present, and future.

In her article on literary nationalism in Altamirano’s work, Grazyna Grudzinska explores Altamirano’s views on the important role that literature plays in a nation’s formation. She writes that, according to scholar José Luis Martínez, Altamirano wanted Mexico’s literature to be a faithful expression of its nationality and an active element in cultural integration (Grudzinska 248). Altamirano insisted that the novel belonged to the masses and thus should reflect their reality. Of course, as the author, he determined which aspects of reality should be emphasized and which should be reshaped in order to fit his vision of the new nation, according to his Liberal philosophy.

Grudzinska works with David A. Brading’s premise that nationalism is a reaction to a foreign threat that threatens the integrity or the identity of the natives and which forces one to search the national past in order to find lessons and inspirations for the

present and the future (247). This is very clear in Altamirano's novel. Many times, however, the threat is not a foreign one but one that arises from within. As Mexico is struggling to form its own identity, that threat is identified as the rural, peasant masses that cannot progress towards modernization without a formal system of education.

Threats can also be found within the different divisions of the Liberal party. For Altamirano, the past is composed of both the cruel legacy of colonialism and of the pristine, pre-Hispanic glorious past that the Spanish destroyed and corrupted. This past must be explored in order to identify and conserve only those positive attributes that will aid in the formation of the *mestizo*, the new national hero. However, it is also a past that must be repressed, isolated, and, at times, denied if any progress is to be made. Again, both Pilar and Nicolás personify these ideas. Pilar is "la joven morena...que se aleja del tipo español sin confundirse con el indio" (Altamirano, *El Zarco* 110-11), while Nicolás embodies humility, respect, and bravery, characteristics that Altamirano admires and attributes to the pre-Hispanic Indian.

The noble Indian is an important theme in Altamirano's work, as exemplified in *El Zarco* by Nicolás, an Indian that has been "enoblecido por el trabajo." The Indian can contribute his labor to his new nation and thus become a productive citizen. At one point, Nicolás revisits his past by reminiscing about his indigenous family, who has bestowed upon him these ideas of honor, of remaining pure of character. According to Altamirano, it is in the Indian's nature to prefer death to dishonor. This romanticizing of the indigenous past emerges again when Altamirano presents a brief Aztec history of Xochimanca, an abandoned hacienda that is now the bandits' hideout. It used to be a place of beauty where flowers were grown for the gods; now it is a place of torture and

death. Altamirano refers to the Indians of that past as “los inteligentes y dulces indios” (264). Again, they are relegated to a romanticized and imagined past with no place for them in Mexico’s future.

Indeed, for Altamirano, the pure Indian no longer exists except in the past. Yautepec and the surrounding regions used to be populated by peaceful, hardworking Indians, but now the population is made up of *mestizos*: “los indios puros han desaparecido de allí completamente” (101).³⁹ For Altamirano, the indigenous past is real; it should be acknowledged, however, only so that it can be left in the past. By acknowledging his indigenous roots, Nicolás can now move beyond that to become a good citizen by moving towards *mestizaje*. This is the only way that Indians like Nicolás can participate in the new emerging Mexican society.

These idealized descriptions resonate with depictions of the Indian as the noble savage throughout the colonial period. The binary representation of the pre-Hispanic and the contemporary Indian becomes entrenched especially after Independence, as intellectuals like Altamirano across Latin America struggled with the question of the role that the Indian should play in the new national identities. In many ways, Altamirano is mirroring the Creoles of New Spain—before and after Independence—like Sigüenza y Góngora and Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, who sought “las raíces criollas en el indígena antiguo y noble” (Harris 26). The need to claim a noble indigenous ancestry was a way to provide Mexican Creoles with the history that would give them rights over the Spanish that threatened their place in New Spain’s political and economic spheres.

³⁹ This sentence has been eliminated from some editions of *El Zarco*. See, for example, the 1933 edition edited by Raymond L. Grismer and published by W. W. Norton and Company. The original, hand-written manuscript copy of *El Zarco* is housed in the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. On folio 8, this line has

As previously discussed, Sigüenza y Góngora participated also in appropriating a noble indigenous past while dismissing the Indians of seventeenth-century Mexico City as part of the masses that must be controlled and contained by the Creoles in order to maintain order. Creoles negated the contemporary Indian by representing him as superstitious, barbaric, ignorant, and passive, as seen in Fray Servando's damning descriptions of the early nineteenth-century Indian. Like these Creoles, Altamirano appropriates the same indigenous past, but this time it is in order to give the *mestizos* a claim to the new nation against the Conservatives, whose politics were linked with those of the Creoles before Independence.

Thus, the nineteenth century represents a pivotal period in the evolution of how indigenous peoples are presently perceived in the twenty-first century. Although intellectuals like Altamirano portrayed colonialism as a negative rupture for indigenous groups in Mexico, a close examination of nineteenth-century writings reveals that many of today's negative stereotypes of Indians in Mexico actually become reinforced and institutionalized during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the very people that claim to defend indigenous peoples.

Altamirano's didactic goals of educating the Indian in order to produce a productive *mestizo* citizen had far-reaching effects beyond his death in 1893. His student, Justo Sierra, would go on to shape many of the Liberal educational policies introduced by Ignacio Ramírez and Altamirano. Historians Michael Meyer and William Beezley have written that during the Porfiriato many continued to believe that Mexico's indigenous population could be transformed through secular, public education, but only if they were

clearly been crossed out, presumably by Altamirano himself. A facsimile copy of the original manuscript is also

willing to abandon their superstition-ridden past, ideas echoed many times by Altamirano and his peers (Meyer and Beezley 402). Justo Sierra, author of *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, served as secretary of Public Instruction under Porfirio Díaz.⁴⁰ The dissemination of primary schools across the country, an ambitious project that was seen as the only way to reach the rural and peasant indigenous masses, is considered one of his greatest achievements.

In *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People* (1969 translation of *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano*, published between 1900-1902), Sierra presents Mexico's history and its political and social evolution, from its pre-Hispanic origins to the eve of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Like the younger revolutionaries of the Liberal party, Sierra also believed that the Mexican was the son of two peoples, two races—the Spanish and the Indian. The *mestizo* this union produced is a “type of man that has played a special role in history” (xviii). Again, with the emphasis on the *mestizo*, one must ask what happened to the Indian. Sierra writes that, during the colonial period, the Indian was kept in a state of servitude, and was and in many places still is “the serf of the globe, of the soil” (122). This also is reflected in Altamirano's novel, *El Zarco*, where Nicolás is described as tied to the soil. Although he has managed to elevate his status from mere laborer to foreman of an hacienda, he is still in a position of having to serve. It is not his own hacienda that he runs but that of a member of elite society.

available at Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

⁴⁰ The relationship between Justo Sierra and Altamirano went beyond that of mentor and student. Joaquín Casus was married to Altamirano's adopted daughter Catalina Guillén. Joaquín's granddaughter, Catalina Sierra Casus, was also the granddaughter, on her mother's side, of Justo Sierra. It is because of these family connections, especially the personal collections of letters and photographs that belonged to the Sierra Casus families, that these sources are now available to scholars (Sotelo Inclán, *Espistolario* 51-52).

Much like Altamirano, Sierra sees the Indian of the eighteenth century as the victim of a corrupt clergy; only the *mestizo* as a dissident has glimpses of enlightened ideas (129). Sierra turns to Alexander von Humboldt's description of the indigenous population to support his views. In the nineteenth century, the Indian continues to be portrayed as isolated, remaining the serf of the Church. While recognizing that the Indian and the *mestizo* often occupy the same rural space, the *mestizo* has a higher social status in an urban setting because he has access to education. Sierra continues to view the Indian at the end of the colonial period as passive and submissive, as a victim of three hundred years of colonization.

Similar to Altamirano, Sierra does not acknowledge any active indigenous participation, resistance, or negotiation that would indicate quite the opposite of submissive behavior, although he does hint at it when commenting that during the seventeenth century Indians defended their land with many lawsuits (122), and again when he explains that in the early nineteenth century attempts were made to extirpate the indigenous custom of converting religious festivals into "pagan orgies and farces" (207). Ironically, these attempts to extirpate indigenous customs, traditions, and languages well into the nineteenth century speak to the very fact that indigenous groups maintained many important identity markers, even after so many years of colonialism, yet this is not viewed in a positive light by nineteenth-century Liberals.

In describing events after the 1840s, Sierra mentions in passing the Mayas who rose up in Yucatan, "fierce and indomitable" (250). In the north, he describes the raids of Apaches from Sonora to Tamaulipas that paralyzed trade and agriculture (253). These images stand in contrast to the Indian that he characterizes as passive, isolated, and

abandoned to servitude and superstition. According to Sierra, Miguel Hidalgo, the father of Independent Mexico, hoped to “emancipate the Indian by opening for him a road to liberty through employment in industry” (152).

As Sierra explores the events of the nineteenth century in his work, he continues to focus on the image of the rural masses as inert and ignorant, portraying them as virtual slaves, as mute animals. Sierra’s portrayal of the Indian also extends to his description of Benito Juárez and his various roles in Mexico’s continuous struggles after Independence. Sierra comments on Juárez’s great soul, his stoical serenity, and his faith, but not the blind faith of the submissive men of his race. Rather, his faith is that of those men of his race who aspire to civilization and emancipated thought (320). This description of Juárez is very similar to Altamirano’s description of Nicolás in *El Zarco*. Civilization is something to which the Indian can aspire because in his natural state he is not yet civilized. According to Sierra, Juárez felt it was his duty to raise the indigenous family from superstition, from ignorance, and from alcoholism to a better life through the schools (358). Through education, both the Indian and the lower-class *mestizo* could become social assets (352).

It is clear that Sierra greatly admired Juárez. Both fought against the constant danger of having Mexico return to a monarchy. Juárez also plays an important role in Altamirano’s novel. However, as seen in *El Zarco* and in his personal correspondence, Altamirano’s views of Juárez are more complicated than those of Sierra’s, who considers him a true national hero.

Like Altamirano, Juárez too has been portrayed as an almost mythical Indian leader, a hero and defendant of indigenous peoples. Altamirano’s depiction of Juárez in

El Zarco and in his correspondence reveals Altamirano's own involvement and knowledge of the many struggles that Juárez faced during his lifetime. The Juárez that Altamirano portrays in *El Zarco* is that of a man beleaguered by more economic, political, and social crises than he can handle. In 1861, Juárez no longer has the financial or political resources to protect his people or his country. Having just emerged from the Guerras de Reforma, Juárez is now preparing to face the French who plan to install Maximiliano as emperor. In *El Zarco*, he represents a central government that is too divided and bankrupt to protect its own people against the bandits that are terrorizing innocent people, let alone against a foreign army. This image of Juárez is one that surfaces repeatedly in Altamirano's letters, as we have seen. Indeed, the following quote from a letter he writes to Diego Alvarez in 1863 could be taken directly from *El Zarco*: "La apatía del gobierno, ese mal que puede causar nuestra ruina, ha hecho que esos bandidos organizados en gruesas partidas de doscientos y trescientos hombres puedan venir a robar hasta a tres leguas de México sin ser inquietados" (Sotelo Inclán 111).

Writing his novel from the perspective of 30 years of hindsight, Altamirano's opinion of Juárez has not changed and has become perhaps more entrenched: Juárez is the leader of an impotent government and military who is unable to protect the Mexican people from dangers both internal and external. That job is left, by default, to certain individuals such as Martín Sánchez Chagollán, who is authorized to act as a vigilante, killing on sight anyone they suspect of being a bandit.

These ugly developments bring to the forefront some of the political battles being waged within the Liberal party. Because Altamirano wants to educate his readers, he often interrupts the narrative flow of the novel to remind his readers that this was the

reality in the 1860s—one of chaos, fear, and vigilantes with extraordinary powers granted by the president. Although Altamirano fought for the same principles as Juárez in the Guerras de Reforma, by 1861 he was one of 51 deputies who signed a petition asking Juárez to renounce his presidency (Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 320, note 3). Here he is especially critical of Juárez's granting of extraordinary powers to Sánchez Chagollán, a foreshadowing of a short time later when Juárez would grant himself these same powers that would basically turn him into a dictator.

As seen previously, these are the same concerns that Altamirano hints at in his letters to Leyva, Alvarez, and Juárez in the 1860s. Sierra is less critical of this development; like Juárez, he felt that the central government had to be strengthened in order to maintain peace and order. Thus, when Juárez's term as president ended in 1865, the only way for Juárez to save the Republic was by sacrificing the constitution of 1857 and declaring himself a dictator. Sierra claims that the majority of the Republicans applauded this move (Sierra 331).

Although Sierra, Juárez, and Altamirano all belonged to the Liberal party, Altamirano viewed these events quite differently, as seen in his own history of Mexico, "Revista histórica y política." In this essay published in 1882, about six years before writing *El Zarco*, Altamirano emphasizes the many conflicts, both internal and external, the many changes in political systems, and the confusion of laws that dominated Mexico during the late nineteenth century. Citing the poet Ignacio Rodríguez Galván, Altamirano writes, "Cada año un gobernante, cada mes un motín" (*Obras históricas* 48).

At first glance, it would appear that literary scholar Moisés Ochoa Campos is correct when he concludes that Altamirano covers up Juárez's faults, never doubts his

patriotism, and considers him the father of their second Independence (11). It is true that when writing about Juárez being granted extraordinary powers, Altamirano explains that this was forgivable, given the circumstance of the time (93). And Altamirano is quick to point out that after the French were defeated, Juárez held elections in 1867 for the presidency, thus proving that he was not indeed a dictator. However, the perspective of time and distance awarded Altamirano a certain insight into Juárez's actions after the French were defeated. He criticizes Juárez's treatment of political prisoners after the war: "en el castigo de los culpables ni se mostró justiciero ni fue magnánimo" (98). Juárez also assigned friends to lucrative positions, while persecuting those that had supported the young Porfirio Díaz against him, thus leading to even more divisions within the Liberal party.

Juárez was nominated for reelection in 1871, a nomination Altamirano wishes Juárez had declined, noting that Juárez preferred "los encantos peligrosos del poder" (100-01). With his reelection, Juárez became more unpopular because the election represented the power of the government, not the public's wishes. According to Altamirano, this meant that a new civil war was unavoidable. Thus, Juárez becomes the dictator that Altamirano had feared all along, refusing to compromise with the revolutionaries and relying on the military to gain control (105). Although this portrayal of Juárez does not emerge until after the French Intervention, glimpses of Altamirano's opinion of Juárez and other leaders can be seen in the letters he writes in the 1860s. And it is this image of Juárez that Altamirano chooses to depict in *El Zarco* on the eve of that war. Juárez represented the failures of the Liberal party for which Altamirano had fought so hard. All progress came to a stop, according to Altamirano, because of Juárez, and it

is only with his death that the civil war comes to an end, a fact that even Sierra, Juárez's great admirer, acknowledges (Sierra 352).

Altamirano's final comments on Juárez's political life are that he introduced practices and precedents that paralyzed the democratic regime. He did not support primary education as he should have, had he truly been interested in raising the Indian to civilization, and he had no great love for science, literature, or the arts. As a result, no progress was made in those areas of education. While Altamirano says time and again that he cannot come to any firm judgments about Juárez, and that only time will tell how history will judge him, it is clear that by the time he writes *El Zarco* in 1888, he is quite disillusioned with Juárez.

In *El Zarco* Altamirano represents Juárez as a man whose decisions left Mexico vulnerable to internal and external interests. The Juárez administration's decision to stop paying its foreign debt in 1861 set the stage for foreign intervention and ultimately a takeover by the French (Meyer and Beezley 380). In 1867, after Maximiliano's execution, Juárez began efforts to increase central control, which he and his allies saw as imperative to modernizing Mexico. However, at the same time, many factions, pueblos, and states were advocating for more autonomy from the federal government (Meyer and Beezley 394). With the benefit of hindsight, Altamirano foreshadows these continuous internal conflicts in his novel, and it becomes clear that in his opinion the central government failed to accomplish what the local governments and individuals like Nicolás and even the violent Sánchez Chagollán were capable of achieving.

As seen in his correspondence, Altamirano is also critical of the military. In *El Zarco*, the army serves as yet another reflection of the national government's inability to

act against the chaos that is enveloping the country. He portrays the military under Juárez as not only inept but also as so poorly organized and ragged that not even the bandits waste their efforts to attack them. Altamirano's assessment of the military is shared by others who served under Juárez. In 1878, General José Vicente Miñón presented a detailed "Hoja de Servicio" covering over 40 years of his military service, starting with the war for Independence and ending with his involvement in the French Intervention. Concerning Juárez, he writes that "En todo el tiempo que ocupó Juarez [sic] el Gobierno son constantes los padecimientos que han sufridos los militantes" (Hoja de Servicio del Señor General de División José Vicente Miñón, fol. 25).

In exploring the theme of the individual versus the government, in *El Zarco* Altamirano highlights the impotence of the national government and military to act. The bandits, for example, leave Nicolás alone not because they fear what the military will do to them but because they know that Nicolás has armed himself and has surrounded himself with men who will protect him. They also know that he will fight to the death and that he is not petrified by fear as is almost everyone else. Because of the government's ineffectiveness, others in the pueblo of Yautepec see Nicolás as their only protector. In contrast, the military is represented as unwilling to protect the people against the bandits. Instead, they are criticized for taking food, arms, and horses from the people under the guise of fighting for the very same people, leaving them unable to defend themselves.

The military is also represented as weak. They are greatly outnumbered by the bandits and many times choose not to go after the bandits because they know they will lose. In one scene, the military commander refuses to go after El Zarco and instead states

that Nicolás should do it, as he has already volunteered. When Nicolás challenges the commander, he is arrested, thus supporting Altamirano's opinion that the military targets innocent people instead of fighting for them (206-11).

Scenes like this one epitomize Altamirano's views on local vs. central authority, a divisive issue within the Liberal party. The *prefecto* of Yautepec is moved to action by Nicolás's arrest, and, as "la primera autoridad política del distrito," he insists on following the military commander to Mexico City, where he will confront the national authorities. He makes it clear that Nicolás and the people of Yautepec are not acting aggressively, but rather defending their rights (220). Again, Altamirano is highlighting the actions of an individual man, of an individual pueblo, who are willing to fight for their rights. They succeed in their efforts, and, after much time and money, Nicolás is freed and the military commander is ordered to Mexico City to explain his actions. According to Altamirano, "eran cosas frecuentes en aquella época de guerra civil y de confusión" (223). He makes similar references throughout the novel, referring to the fact that normal life during this time was not only full of danger but that Mexico's citizens could not turn to their federal government for help.

In their book *Patriotism, Politics, and Popular Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (1999), historians Guy Thomson and David La France highlight the divisions within Mexico's Liberal party during this time. Significantly, they focus on the role that various indigenous communities and leaders played in the ever-evolving conflicts between the different factions. From the 1850s to the 1880s, the Liberal party in the Sierra districts of Zacapoaxtla and Telela had popular support among the peasants. They helped the Liberals defeat the Conservatives in the Guerras de Reforma, they helped

defeat Maximilian, and they aided Díaz in his rise to power in 1876. Yet the Liberal party rewarded their efforts by trying to control regional and state politics and by opening up the area to economic development through common land privatization, angering many of the indigenous groups that had previously supported them (Thomson and La France xii).

Thomson and La France also note Juárez's use of his emerging powers after 1864 to discipline the states and point to the increasing divisions between the two factions of the Liberal party—the moderate Liberalism associated with the provincial elites, and the radical Liberalism that advocated for individual liberty, popular sovereignty, and municipal autonomy. What is intriguing about their analysis of the events of this era is the role that indigenous communities and indigenous leaders played in the same internal and external conflicts that Altamirano and Sierra write about in their works, yet curiously absent are any stories about the active role of these indigenous groups.

By portraying them as passive, submissive, and atrophied, victims of three hundred years of colonization, Liberals like Altamirano and Sierra denied the indigenous communities any agency in determining their role as citizens of this new nation. Indeed, Thomson and La France write that “Liberal leaders such as Benito Juárez and Ignacio Altamirano, both of Indian descent, were intolerant of the hermeticism of Indian communities” (9).

Like other scholars, Thomson and La France point out that it was the Liberal ideals, rather than the Conservatives, that posed more of a danger to autonomous indigenous communities: “the Liberal blueprint for a strong secular state and a regime of individual private property posed a direct threat to four central elements of Indian

community life: patriarchal government by elders, the system of compulsory offices and community services, the exuberant external celebration of the cult under the patronage of the clergy and confraternities, and communal control of land” (9). As Ruiz Medrano notes, for Liberals like Porfirio Díaz, indigenous communities and communal land ownership presented a serious obstacle to Mexico becoming a liberal, modern nation, and Porfirian laws often left Indian pueblos landless (8, n. 8).

Historical studies continue to demonstrate that many indigenous communities played a vital and active role during the colonial period, quickly learning how to use the legal system, for example, to make their demands heard. Many indigenous peoples also manipulated European ideas of racial and cultural identity to their benefit, allowing them to move more freely between the different worlds, sometimes as *indios*, as *mestizos*, or even as white. For the nineteenth century, Thomson and La France demonstrate again how many indigenous communities fought for their right to decide what their own role was to be in the new Mexican republic, and it was not always in conjunction with the views of the Liberal party, who claimed to liberate them from the colonial yoke.

As part of their research, Thomson and La France discuss the work of historian Florencia Mallon, who has shown that in the Puebla Sierra between 1854 and 1876, there are certain patterns that can be discerned in the response of peasant communities to regional, national, and international events. Peasant communities in central and southern Puebla Sierra, for example, enlisted the help of local intellectuals and bilingual teachers in gaining concessions from the Liberal state and succeeded in modifying the Liberal reform program to fit their local needs. Mallon also demonstrates how these

communities incorporated modern Liberal republican ideas into their older language, which invoked immemorial communal rights (Thomson and La France xvii).

Thomson and La France also show that, from the 1820s, village elders of indigenous communities in what is now Guerrero asserted their right to appoint their own justice of the peace and establish new autonomous municipalities. In the late 1830s, these same villages gave their support to regional caciques who spearheaded the revival of federalism that led to Liberal triumph in 1854. Additionally, Nahua leaders in the Liberal party like Francisco Agustín Dieguillo and Juan Francisco Lucas ensured support for other regional leaders like Juan N. Mendez and Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla, which in turn meant more control over wider politics in the Puebla Sierra (xiii). According to Mallon, Juan Francisco Lucas and his father, Manuel Lucas, “became known as the most important sierra supporter[s] of the Liberal cause” before the French intervention, fighting alongside Juan Alvarez, “the radical leader of the 1855 Revolution” (30). Indeed, Mallon considers the pueblo of Xochiapulco in Puebla, the home of Manuel and Juan Francisco Lucas, “the most important village in the region during the resistance against the French” (276). Thus, there is a great deal of evidence that the nineteenth-century Indian had not disappeared, as Altamirano claims in his novel, nor does this support Sierra’s portrayal of the Indian as a servile peasant who continued to be controlled by the Church.

Just as Altamirano’s relationship with Juárez reflects the divisions within the Liberal party, Thomson and La France point out that Liberal reform was not always in accord with the way of life in indigenous communities. Peasant communities were considered by nature to be conservative and averse to major changes. Thomson and La

France identify four central elements of indigenous communities that were often threatened by Liberal reforms: patriarchal government by elders; the system of compulsory offices and community services; the external celebration of the cult under the patronage of clergy and confraternities; and the communal control of land. For these reasons, Juárez and Altamirano were often intolerant of what Thomson and La France call “the hermeticism of indigenous communities” (9). Yet, many indigenous leaders managed to work within the Liberal blueprint to ensure their continued participation in the new Republic. For example, for some indigenous groups, fighting against the French is remembered as Tzinacapan’s moment of entry into the modern Mexican nation state, with Nahua leader Francisco Lucas freeing the maseualmej (Indians) from the analtekos (foreigners), and leading them in their patriotic sacrifices and guaranteeing their rights to citizenship (309).

As Ruiz Medrano points out in her conclusion, the history of Mexico’s indigenous peoples is not one of defeat (290). Rather, a careful study of their participation, resistance, and activism throughout the last five centuries shows that well into the nineteenth century, “the Indian pueblos continued to manifest a notable ideological flexibility in which their traditional customs and cultural practices played an important role” (286). Indeed, as Ruiz Medrano demonstrates, Indians often developed strategies to preserve certain aspects of colonial government in their pueblos (287). Historians like Ruiz Medrano, Guardino, Lecaillon, Thomson, La France, and Mallon, just to name a few, have successfully shown how, after Independence, Indians fought against a succession of governments that viewed them as an obstacle to the creation of a modern state (287). Their work reveals a stark contrast between their research and the

literary representation of the Indian in Altamirano's works as either absent or superstitious, victims, passive, and in need of rescuing from their colonized state.

The historical and literary sources analyzed in this study reveal that the absence of the independent, active Indian in many nineteenth-century works served the Liberal agenda of progress and modernization through *mestizaje*, often at the expense of Mexico's indigenous populations, who refuse to be simply erased. The absent contemporary Indian is replaced with the ideal *mestizo*, whose indigenous origins are relegated to Mexico's pre-Hispanic past. In works like *El Zarco*, Altamirano calls for a united *mestizo* race that does not allow for a multiplicity of voices, people, and cultures. In his novel *La Navidad*, the Indian is depicted as eager and grateful for the opportunity to participate in modern society, willing to undergo a social transformation through education.

Historical essays like "Morelos en Tixtla" demonstrate yet again that when Indians do warrant mention, it is to portray them as fearful and easily manipulated by the dominant culture, while Altamirano's *textos costumbristas* feature an indigenous rural population, including that of his pueblo, Tixtla, which he contends is indeed already *mestizo* because they have genuinely embraced Catholicism. Yet, the reality not portrayed in Altamirano's works is that Mexico's indigenous peoples continue to forge spaces within the dominant culture for their customs, religion, and language, and continue to fight for their legal rights. While Liberal leaders like Altamirano, Juárez, and Sierra maintained that it was necessary to guide them towards citizenship according to their Liberal agenda, it is clear that Mexico's indigenous peoples were fully capable of carving out these rights for themselves.

Chapter 3

The Indian, the *Mestizo*, and Education: The Path to Civilization

For the Liberal party, Ignacio Altamirano served as an example of how secular education could transform indigenous communities into “liberal citizenry,” one individual at a time. Educational policies and writings produced between 1850 and 1880 by intellectuals such as Altamirano and his mentor, Ignacio Ramírez (1818-1879), demonstrate that during the latter half of the nineteenth century, secular schooling became instrumental in extending the Liberal party’s political agenda and control at the village level (Thomson and La France 19). These policies often focused on how to “rescue” indigenous communities through education, especially the education of indigenous children. In *Bosquejos de educación para el pueblo*, a compilation of Ramírez’s educational policies of the 1850s and 60s and Altamirano’s essays on education published in the 1870s, Ramírez and Altamirano particularly advocate for the establishing and funding of primary schools in indigenous pueblos throughout Mexico.

The Liberal party’s goal regarding secular education was to produce educated, productive citizens trained in reading, writing, math, history, geography, botany, and zoology. The issue of language became an important one for the Liberal party. Although Ramírez and Altamirano recognized that Mexico’s indigenous populations still spoke numerous distinct languages in late nineteenth-century Mexico, educators like Altamirano believed that Mexico must have a single unifying language, Spanish, with an added emphasis on teaching English and German. Indeed, the United States and

Germany figure prominently in Altamirano's writings as prime examples of countries whose educational system Mexico should emulate.

Both Ramírez and Altamirano address the role that indigenous languages should play in Mexico's future and in the process of assimilation, recommending that teachers learn the indigenous language of the pueblo they have been assigned. Nevertheless, it quickly becomes evident that for Altamirano this is simply another way to more effectively communicate with the indigenous populations in order to better prepare them for patriotic citizenship. To that end, Altamirano frequently references the sixteenth-century Spanish missionaries that came to the New World to convert the Indians. He admires the way in which these priests dedicated themselves to learning the various indigenous languages in order to ensure a "true" evangelical conversion. Over three hundred years later, he suggests that by learning indigenous languages, teachers will have better success in educating the indigenous masses. As scholar Sergio Pérez Sánchez points out, Altamirano called for the training of bilingual teachers who would use their knowledge of indigenous languages in order to help spread the use of Spanish among the indigenous populations: "con la idea de generalizar el español y no de traducir a las lenguas indígenas" (Pérez Sánchez 77).

In addition to a formal education, Altamirano believes that indigenous populations needed to be taught about the different kinds of crops and goods they should be producing in order to participate in the marketplace and thus become productive citizens. He reiterates this idea in both his essays on education and in his literary works like his 1871 novel, *Navidad en las montañas*. As in his other numerous writings, Altamirano returns once more in his educational writings to the idea that colonialism is to

blame for the “backwardness” of Mexico’s indigenous populations. His didactic writings reveal an image of the Indian as a victim, oppressed, ignorant, and superstitious. At the same time, he depicts the Indian as humble and hungry for knowledge, ready to escape his colonized state and to embrace Western modernity if given the opportunity.

Absent from Altamirano’s writings are the nineteenth-century indigenous leaders that played an active role in determining how secular education would develop among the pueblos. Historians Guy Thomson and David La France, for example, show that indigenous leaders sought to control the Liberal educational network, especially at the pueblo level. During the nineteenth century, for example, Nahuatl leaders Juan Francisco Lucas and Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla created a statewide network of secular schools, with a new generation of bilingual teachers who would spread the word of their constitution rights, along with patriotic duty and reward (22).⁴¹ Both Lucas and Bonilla, ardent supporters of Liberal ideals, also fought for indigenous rights not only as teachers but as military leaders, intellectuals, and political mediators (Mallon 33). They worked closely, for example, with Juan Alvarez during the 1850s, supporting his military campaigns, and later organized troops against Maximilian’s troops. Historian Florencia Mallon’s research demonstrates that Lucas was a successful intellectual who remained true to his village, someone who proved to be an effective mediator between the local, regional concerns of his pueblo and the national arena (303-04). Lucas, Bonilla, and the countless other indigenous activists were certainly not the passive, victimized Indians that Altamirano depicts in his works.

⁴¹ Juan Francisco Lucas of Xochiapulco, Puebla, had been trained as a schoolteacher in Veracruz, where his father, Nahuatl merchant and leader Manuel Lucas, had taken him to further his education (Mallon, *Peasant and Nation* 33).

As previously noted, the wars for Independence brought about the legal end of the *pueblos de indios* and the *cajas de comunidades*. There were no more Indians, legally; they were now equal to all other citizens of Mexico. Proclamations like this one, however, often had little effect on the real situation of indigenous groups. Although not legally recognized any longer as separate from the other groups that made up Mexican society, Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, along with other scholars, shows that throughout the nineteenth century, indigenous groups continued to practice many of their political, religious, and cultural traditions, such as coming together as a community in “las reuniones que acostumbraban hacer...con el objeto de tratar sus negocios” (Tanck de Estrada, *Pueblos de indios* 595). Indeed, Altamirano and Ramírez’s own writings reveal the prevalent existence of indigenous languages.⁴² Although the Liberal party viewed this linguistic diversity as an obstacle to progress, indigenous groups had evidently managed to retain this important aspect of their identity, despite the best efforts of Liberal leaders to impose one national language.

Maintaining their language was simply one indicator of how indigenous groups refused to assimilate. According to Tanck de Estrada, indigenous groups found ways to maintain their social and political cohesion in order to make their demands heard and to develop alternative solutions to the problems that affected them on a daily basis (*Pueblos de indios* 596). Historian James Lee, for example, writes about the indigenous intellectuals who in 1828 demanded that the Colegio de San Gregorio, which had been established in Mexico City in 1586 by prominent indigenous leaders and the Jesuits (228), remain open after Independence. These Nahuatl leaders saw a need for a separate

⁴² According to historian James Lee, about 38 percent of the population spoke more than 150 indigenous languages and

school for Indians who would otherwise face discriminatory treatment if they attended school with the whites. According to historian Susan Schroeder, during the colonial period indigenous students were recruited from all over central Mexico to attend the *colegio*. In this way, the Jesuits hoped to create important relationships with indigenous populations beyond the valley of Mexico (“Jesuits, Nahuas, and the Good Death Society” 53-54). The goal was that once they had completed their education, these students would return to their pueblos and become teachers. After Independence, Altamirano, Ramírez,⁴³ and other Liberal leaders would expound these same ideas, hoping that an educated Indian could teach his people how to attain a higher level of civilization.

According to Lee, for Nahua leaders an education at San Gregorio was also a way for Indians to resist “the liberal demand for complete cultural assimilation” (245-46). Indeed, Schroeder points out that after 1739 there was a marked increase in Nahuatl-language entries in the record books of the Good Death Society, established by Jesuits for the Nahuas at the Colegio de San Gregorio (“Jesuits, Nahuas, and the Good Death Society” 64). Thus, despite the official stance on teaching Spanish to the indigenous as a way to assimilate them, this religious and educational institution served as a place where Nahua texts were produced and indigenous practices were preserved (73-74). Indigenous leaders continued to fight for the *colegio* until 1853, when Santa Ana turned its funds and property over to the school of veterinary medicine (Lee 252). Although the school was never reestablished, its history, along with its ardent indigenous supporters, revealed to Liberal leaders that the indigenous population was not going to assimilate as rapidly as

many of these Indians also understood Spanish (237).

⁴³ Ramírez, in fact, although identified as a *mestizo*, attended the Colegio de San Gregorio in 1835.

they had hoped (253). Additionally, Lee suggests, the indigenous rebellions in the Sierra Gorda (1848-1849) and the Yucatan caste wars (1847-1850s) served to remind Liberal leaders that Mexico's large indigenous population was prepared to rise up in defense of their rights. This fear, according to historian William Connell, was the same one shared by Creoles throughout the colonial period. These examples of activism and resistance are notably absent from Altamirano's writings and stand in stark contrast to the image he constructs of the docile Indian eager to become assimilated through a Western education.

The question of education played an important part in Altamirano's life, both as a young boy who was allowed to be formally educated along with the children of "gente de razón" in his pueblo and then later granted a scholarship to continue his formal education away from his home, and as an adult who utilized his writings as a tool for educating literate Mexicans about their history and about their ideal role as citizens. In accord with the agenda of the Liberal party, Altamirano's works emphasized the fact that Mexico's citizens, especially its indigenous populations, had to embrace a *mestizaje* that did not allow room for the contemporary Indian who insisted on maintaining a separate identity from the dominant culture. Thus, as seen in his novel *El Zarco*, the disappearance of the Indian not only reflected his legal eradication as stated in the 1812 Constitution but also his disappearance from daily life in Mexico. In other novels like *Navidad en las montañas*, he writes about contemporary indigenous pueblos but does so in order to show how indigenous lives have been improved by the presence of a Spanish priest, who has taken it upon himself to point out the error of their ways regarding agricultural productivity and who has improved their cultural knowledge by introducing Spanish poetry and music.

Although intimately familiar with rural indigenous life, Altamirano chose not to write about the individual indigenous groups and people who were fighting to maintain their identity and autonomy after Independence, or about the many nineteenth-century indigenous—not necessarily activists but ordinary people—who still spoke their native languages, thus maintaining strong ties to their culture. Instead, any resistance to adopting Spanish as their dominant language is seen as an on-going challenge for the educational system in their efforts to convert them into the cultural *mestizos* who are the true Mexicans for Liberals such as Altamirano.

The Liberal project of *mestizaje* incorporated many of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Creole elite's practices of appropriating Mexico's indigenous mythical past while relegating the contemporary Indian to museums (Rabasa 52). Writers like Altamirano used their works as a way to educate the literate population, while government leaders formed educational policies that they hoped would pave the way for indigenous groups to embrace *mestizaje*. As a young child growing up in a rural pueblo after Independence, Altamirano became an ideal example of the benefits of these educational policies. As an adult, Altamirano became a proponent of on-going efforts to educate Mexico's indigenous population. His relationship with his mentor, Ignacio Ramírez, would play a key role throughout his personal and professional life as a writer and educator.

The works collected in *Bosquejos de la educación para el pueblo: Ignacio Ramírez e Ignacio Manuel Altamirano* (1985) are a revealing compilation of the Liberal policy, thoughts, and attitudes that dominated the nineteenth century. The first half is dedicated to the educational policies proposed by Ramírez while the second half is

dedicated to Altamirano's works that focus on education, including *Navidad en las montañas* and several essays published in newspapers and other serial publications. Before turning to a discussion of Altamirano's education policies, a close look once more at his novel *Navidad en las montañas*, in comparison with a series of late-colonial documents concerning rural indigenous life in Oaxaca, reveals that Altamirano and his Liberal contemporaries shared many of the same concerns about the "backwardness" of indigenous peoples as their colonial predecessors. They also shared similar ideas regarding how to "resolve" these issues, demonstrating that in many ways Independence—indeed the entire nineteenth century—did not represent much of a positive change for these groups.

Altamirano's literary representation of an indigenous, fictitious, rural pueblo in *Navidad*, set in 1871, closely resembles the ten rural Oaxacan parishes depicted in a set of late-colonial questionnaires utilized in a series of *visitas* to these parishes, of which Nochistlan was the *cabecera*, or head mission (Questionnaires from parishes, BANC MSS 73/127 m). Many of these indigenous parishes were established in the 1540s. The formulaic question-and-answer format provides a glimpse into the complex issues of education, religion, and language with which the colonial Church grappled. They also reveal important details about the relationships between indigenous groups and the dominant group, represented here by the priests.

The *visitas* to these Mixtec pueblos took place in 1803, nearly 300 hundred years after the arrival of Cortés and only a few years before the beginning of the wars for Independence. While the purpose of the questionnaires was to provide an official account of population figures, agricultural production, and educational efforts, historical

documents, such as the Oaxacan questionnaires of 1803, demonstrate the complex—both positive and negative—relationships between the indigenous population and the priests, the sometimes negative attitude of the priests towards the Indians and their “vices,” and the continued usage of the Mixtec language throughout the ten parishes.

The documents also reveal that many indigenous, especially the men, had, in fact, appropriated the Spanish language: “El Ydioma que se habla en la Cabezera y en cada uno de sus Pueblos es el Mixteco...los mas Yndios mis Feligreses principalmente los hombres hablan bien el Castellano, y son bastante ladinos” (fol. 2). The use of the term “ladino” also indicates a certain level of linguistic and cultural adaptation by these indigenous men, who appeared to have maintained a fluid relationship between the dominant culture and their own, without losing their own language and identity.

The ability of many indigenous groups both to adapt to and resist complete assimilation can be traced throughout the colonial period, accounting for the fact that these documents, produced in 1803, contain many references to the continued usage of Mixtec by these groups. Almost 70 years later, Altamirano’s novel, *Navidad*, as well as his writings on education, makes continuous references to Mexico’s on-going official efforts to teach *castellano* to these indigenous groups. Although it was probably not Altamirano’s intention, given his didactic motives regarding *mestizaje*, what emerges in his writings is an image of the Indian not as a passive victim of colonialism, but rather as one who has adapted and survived 300 years of colonialism with his language intact and who now must survive the well-intentioned, although from our perspective, often misguided efforts of the Liberal party.

The issue of language—subaltern languages versus dominant—is an important one in questions of identity and assimilation. Language played an important role in Altamirano’s own life, or rather, the mythification of his life. As discussed above, he has been portrayed as someone who did not speak a word of Spanish until the age of 14. While that is possible, it was probably an exaggeration, given that Tixtla, in fact, was a *mestizo* pueblo with many economic connections that brought it into contact with the Spanish-speaking world. On the other hand, it is evident that Altamirano did speak Nahuatl and indeed incorporated some Nahuatl vocabulary in some of his writings, especially his poetry. Nevertheless, he limited his usage of Nahuatl in his literary works, especially in his novels, using it sparingly in order to make a connection to an indigenous past while showing preference for Spanish while describing the present. As Angel Rama has pointed out, members of the *ciudad letrada* appropriated and incorporated the oral culture of the rural populations in order to urbanize and educate them (*La ciudad letrada* 87), and Ramírez’s and Altamirano’s educational policies are no exception. For them, the inclusion of indigenous languages in the secular curriculum was simply another way to reach marginalized populations and more efficiently pave the way towards citizenship.

One might argue that the existence of indigenous languages in the nineteenth century among rural populations is not surprising. After all, isolation and lack of contact with the metropolis would account for the continued usage of their native tongues. Nevertheless, recent studies by historians like Margarita Ochoa have shown that these patterns of maintaining native languages are also evident in urban settings such as late-colonial Mexico City. Ochoa’s work addresses the question of whether it is possible to speak of “distinctly indigenous cultural customs in Mexico City” after 300 years of

Spanish presence (vii-viii). Her analysis of a variety of Nahuatl and Spanish documentary sources demonstrates that even after Independence, the indigenous residents of Mexico City “maintained cultural, gendered, and legal customs...which marked them as distinctively ‘Indian’ within their mainstream, non-indigenous urban milieu” (Ochoa viii).

Regarding language, Ochoa points out that Nahuatl was spoken throughout central Mexico into the late colonial period, “functioning alongside Spanish as a *lingua franca*, presenting the latter with a powerful rival within urban indigenous culture” (Ochoa 15). While scholars like historian Susan Kellogg have noted a significant diminishing of written Nahuatl in legal disputes by the end of the seventeenth century, which could arguably indicate the success of the Spanish dominant culture (34), Ochoa demonstrates that the bilingual urban Indian lived multiple identities, which enabled him to function and inhabit distinct spaces, both private and public, without necessarily abandoning their indigenous culture. She concludes that “The consideration of this ability of natives to belong simultaneously to more than one urban cultural status and to behave accordingly is a new understanding of indigenous culture” (Ochoa 156). While Ochoa’s study extends only to 1829, her conclusions can be readily applied to the late nineteenth-century Mexico inhabited by Altamirano.

The issue of indigenous language as a marker of identity surfaces in the 1803 Oaxacan questionnaires. The presence of the Mixtec language is prominent, especially in the numerous place names referenced in the documents. The documents reveal that the priests were quite aware of the role that the Mixtec language played throughout these parishes. Often they take the time to document what certain place names signify in the

Mixtec language and how they differ from the Spanish versions. Many times the current place names reflect a combination of the two languages. For example, one of the pueblos visited is called San Matheo Coyotepeque. According to the questionnaire, the Mixtec name for this pueblo is Yucu Ñaña. Ñaña means “coyote,” a Spanish word derived from the Nahuatl word “cōyotl.” Spanish Christianity is also reflected in the Spanish name—San Matheo *Coyotepeque*—of the pueblo (fol. 3, emphasis added). This is just one minor example out of many concerning the connections between the two languages, Mixtec and Spanish. The issue of language is brought up numerous times throughout this document by the priests, making it difficult to ignore the fact that Spanish colonial officials continued to face the dominant presence of indigenous languages in late colonial Mexico.

The presence of indigenous languages concerned government and Church officials throughout the colonial period. According to historian Tanck de Estrada, in 1753 Archbishop Rubio y Salinas ordered that “escuelas de castellano” be established in all indigenous pueblos so that children could learn Spanish, study Christian doctrine, and learn to write. Additionally, indigenous adults should be taught doctrine in Spanish. Despite this mandate, many missionaries continued to believe that priests should learn and teach in the various indigenous languages in order to more completely evangelize their indigenous charges. In turn, some indigenous argued that their children would only understand the true meaning of Catholic prayers in their own indigenous language.

Tanck de Estrada writes that in eighteenth-century Oaxaca, schools were established in 29 parishes but the only subject taught in Spanish was Christian doctrine; reading and writing was taught in one of the 21 indigenous languages spoken in the diocese. She also provides an example of at least one indigenous pueblo that sued and

won the right not to have to pay for “una escuela de castellano” (Tanck de Estrada “Tensión en la Torre de Marfil” 38-39). Thus, as Tanck de Estrada points out, both colonial priests and indigenous pueblos—inadvertently and through legal means—contributed to the preservation of indigenous languages, traditions, and practices (“Tensión en la Torre de Marfil” 36), leading to the on-going usage of indigenous languages noted in these 1803 Oaxacan documents and beyond. Fifty-three years after Archbishop Rubio y Salinas’ order regarding the establishment of “escuelas de castellano,” Spanish officials continued to view the existence of indigenous languages as an obstacle that must be overcome through the establishment of schools whose priority would be to teach Spanish, and it was an issue that Ramírez, Altamirano, and their Liberal contemporaries continued to struggle with throughout the nineteenth century.

The 1803 Oaxacan questionnaires reveal the active role of some of the indigenous inhabitants in the educational and religious efforts of the parishes. Don Domingo López, one of the priests at Nochistlan, is described as an “Yndio, natural del Pueblo de Sn. Pedro de los Cantares” (Questionnaires fol. 2). He appears to have been well regarded by the pueblo and was in charge of the schools in the *cabecera*, Huautlilla, Amatlan, Chachoapam, and Cantaros, where Spanish was taught (fol. 3). Another priest is described as a cacique, “natural del Pueblo de Santa Cruz Tayata, Dna. de Tlaxiaco, Provincia de Teposcolula, Mixteca Alta” (Questionnaires fol. 8). There is a long, detailed description of this 51-year-old Indian who studied first in the Ciudad de Oaxaca, then later at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, where he studied grammar, philosophy, and theology. Finally, he went to Mexico City, where he studied for seven

years at the Real y Pontificio Colegio Seminario, under the care of “Sor. Dr. y Mro. Dn. Jose Serruto, obispo electo de Durango” (Questionnaires fol. 8).

The role of the educated Indian was to return to his parish and teach Spanish to the rest of the indigenous inhabitants, a recurring theme of these documents and in Altamirano’s works. According to the questionnaires, there were schools established in the *cabecera*, Santa Lucia, San Andres, and in Los Reyes (fol. 17). Don Mariano Jazinto de Aguirre, the *cura propietario* of the pueblo of Ytundujia, points out that it was important for the Indians to learn Spanish because the priests needed to communicate with them and have them participate in their ideas and spiritual teachings (fol. 17). According to Father Aguirre, it was difficult for the children to learn Spanish because they only attended school for a short time in the morning and spent the rest of the day and night speaking their native language. Only those who had left their pueblos and parents at a young age learned Spanish.

Timotheo Antonio Pérez Bonilla, “Sor Cura Coadjutor de Ytundugia,” points out that “Misteco” is spoken throughout this region in Oaxaca and that when he first arrived no one spoke a word of *castellano* (fol. 18). Reminiscent of the early colonial Franciscans like Bernardino de Sahagún, Father Aguirre states that priests must become familiar with the language of the student or they will never accomplish the goal of teaching him Spanish: “El que (enseña) a hablar un Ydioma deve hazerlo comprender, si ignora la del dicipulo nunca lo consiguira” (Questionnaires fol. 17). A few of the priests point out that they indeed have studied indigenous languages in order to better communicate with the indigenous inhabitants. Fr. Manuel Alcalá from Tlaxiaco explains that his parish was probably established around 1543 by priests who knew the language

of the Indians (fol. 22). Two-hundred-and fifty years later, he states that they need four *ministros* who speak Mixteco and two that speak *castellano*, thus making it clear that this indigenous language has never been vanquished by the dominant language (fol. 23).

Throughout the colonial period, and well into the nineteenth century, a chronic lack of funding is often given as the reason why there were not very many schools established and why there were not enough “maestros de razón.” These documents reveal that often it was an educated Indian who taught both Spanish and *doctrina* (fol. 25). The issues of language, doctrine, and education highlighted in these documents bring to mind the rural pueblo described by Altamirano in *Navidad*, where progress is marked by the number of Spanish *villancicos* the children can sing and represented by the son of the indigenous patriarch who is away studying but who will one day return to his pueblo, bringing with him the promise of prosperity. These same issues figure prominently in Altamirano’s educational essays, in which he advocates for a secular education while at the same time reminiscing of a return to the teaching methods of early Spanish missionaries like Sahagún.

Scholar Vicente Mario González Gallegos points out that Sahagún also stressed the importance of social, religious, and familial education, in which was taught humility, love for work, respect for your elders, and honesty (32 n. 6). In many ways, Altamirano shared these same goals, as seen in the idealized image he creates of the noble Indian Nicolás in his novel *El Zarco*. Nicolás is depicted as a humble, hardworking Indian, dedicated to the memory of his indigenous past but eager to learn and participate in Mexico’s future. Altamirano resurrects this image of the noble Indian throughout his

writings as he defines the role of indigenous peoples in advancing Mexico's economic and social progress.

In *Navidad*, much emphasis is given to the issue of progress, which is marked by education and economic prosperity. The Spanish priest is very proud of the fact that he has been able to teach the indigenous inhabitants which crops they should be growing, favoring wheat over corn and pointing out that cultivating beans and corn will never lead to economic success. These same attitudes are expressed by the priests in the Oaxaca questionnaires. The priest at Nochistlan explains that the *naturales* are not accustomed to planting, cultivating, or harvesting these crops because they rely on nature to provide for them. The Indians do not realize that they have to cultivate the land in order to produce the crops: “quieren que la naturaleza lo haga todo, sin auxiliarla como se debe” (Questionnaires fol. 4).

As in *Navidad*, the priests ignore the fact that for hundreds of years, indigenous peoples have worked the land and cultivated the necessary crops in order to subsist and thrive. Nevertheless, according to the dominant culture, they have failed to prosper because they are not willing to incorporate the agricultural advice and techniques of the Western world. In the late nineteenth century, this is seen as a failure to produce enough goods for the marketplace and therefore failing to become productive citizens. Neither the priest in *Navidad* nor the priests filling out the questionnaires acknowledge, as Guardino has pointed out, that before, during, and after the conquest, Indian peasants, in fact, played an active role in their regional and national economy through the trade of crops such as maize and other grains (Guardino 19).

The questionnaires reveal common criticisms of the Indians concerning their lack of work ethic, their vices, and their imperfect practice of Christianity. The priest at Nochistlan writes that “La obra de Boveda estaría mas adelantada si los dichos Naturales trabajaran con mayor empeño...” (Questionnaires fol. 7). Father Jazinto de Aguirre, from the pueblo of Ytundujia, for example, states that their most common vices are drunkenness, stealing, and lying, although some are more common than others, depending on the pueblo. He also expresses his exasperation at the natives’ conflicting attitudes towards religion. Sometimes their faith appears to be quite strong, he explains, but other times it is more incredulous than that of the Pharisees: they ask the priest for a blessing to combat a witch; they ask for advice on how to deal with superstition; they believe that God can condemn them but also believe that the owl is a gloomy prophet of death and other evil things; they cover altars with flowers but do not attend mass; they request sermons at their fiestas but do not study doctrine; they cry before statues of saints, which are often old, worm-eaten, with missing arms and a head, but will not kneel before the Holy Sacrament (fols. 16-17). It is clear that the priest is frustrated by the lack of complete acceptance of Catholic doctrine by the indigenous population.

Aguirre’s words echo those of the early nineteenth-century Creole, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, who also lamented the Indians’ drunkenness and superstitions (Harris 57). Nearly 70 years later, these attitudes and beliefs concerning the Indian had not changed: the Spanish priest in *Navidad* explains that when he first arrived he found the native inhabitants in a state of idolatry and “barbarie” but that, happily, he has been able to help them escape this negative state (*Navidad* 19). Once more, there is no acknowledgement that what the priest is encountering in 1871, and what the priests are

reporting in 1803 in Oaxaca, is a religious and cultural *diglosia* that points to the survival and adaptation of Mexico's indigenous population after centuries of colonialism.

In her article on the Jesuit Good Death Society in the Colegio de San Gregorio in Mexico City, historian Susan Schroeder notes that religious syncretism explains the appeal of *cofradías* like the Good Death Society among the Nahuas, who readily accepted them as a “popular expression in collective festivities, including the celebration of the liturgy and religious pageantry” (“Jesuits, Nahuas, and the Good Death Society” 49). Moreover, she points out, the Jesuits themselves incorporated many Nahuatl traditions in Church services and festivities (45 n. 8). This is just one example of what Martin Lienhard calls cultural *diglosia*, in which the dominant culture is permanently changed by the subaltern one.

Many indigenous groups adopted Christian practices and beliefs sincerely, yet often returned to their indigenous rituals when Spaniards were not present. Thus, the same individuals can be found participating in both Christian and indigenous practices. Lienhard does not view this practice as one of transculturation or accommodation, nor as syncretism, which implies that the practices have merged into one. Rather, he sees that individuals are choosing the most adequate practices, depending on the specific situation. For him, these are acts of “*inteligencia estratégica*” that ensure the survival of the Other (“*De mestizaje*” 75).

These issues of indigenous language, religion, and education all come together in Altamirano's essays compiled in *Bosquejos de Educación*. According to the editor of the 1985 edition, María Teresa Bermúdez de Brauns, the indigenous population of Mexico around 1870 numbered 6 million out of a total of 10 million people. In her introduction,

Bermúdez de Brauns portrays the nineteenth-century Indian in a manner very similar to Altamirano. She explains that “el brusco choque sufrido con la conquista seguía vigente y los indígenas vivían inmersos en una sociedad en la que *servían pero que no entendían*” (Bermúdez de Brauns 10, emphasis added). The Indian is once more labeled as a victim of colonialism and put in the role of serving and not capable of understanding the society in which he lived.

Turning to Altamirano himself, Bermúdez de Brauns once more resurrects the image of the timid Indian. She explains that Ramírez had arranged for the granting of “becas de gracia” to indigenous students like Altamirano, which allowed him to leave Tixtla and continue his studies at the Instituto Literario de Toluca. Altamirano, she writes, “tímidamente se acercaba a aprender” (Bermúdez de Brauns 11). It is an image of himself that Altamirano would exploit in his own writings—the humble, monolingual Indian waiting for someone to give him an opportunity to become educated, thus contributing to the mythification of his own life.

Bosquejos de educación includes a variety of Altamirano’s works compiled by the editor, Bermudez de Brauns, including excerpts from *Navidad en la Montaña* (1871), *Cuentos de invierno* (1880), and a series of essays on education published in the newspapers *El Renacimiento* and *El Federalista* between 1869 and 1877. The *Bosquejos* were originally published in *El Federalista* under the general title of *Bosquejos* between 1871 and 1877, with each one focusing on a specific theme concerning education in Mexico. In “Crónica de la Semana,” published in *El Renacimiento* (1869), Altamirano calls for the Mexican government to turn its focus to the education of its children by establishing and funding elementary schools throughout the country; the education of

children especially rural, indigenous children, would become a recurring theme for both Ramírez and Altamirano. Altamirano writes:

En todo país civilizado, pero principalmente en las Repúblicas como la nuestra, la base en que debe apoyarse el sistema de gobierno y en que pueden fundarse las esperanzas de grandeza y de Gloria futura, es la instrucción pública...difundida en las masas, extendida hasta a las clases mas infelices, comunicada de la ciudad populosa al pueblo pequeño, a la aldea humilde.... (*Bosquejos* 73)

Only through educating its youth will Mexico be able to rise above the misery, revolutions, and chaos that seem to be its recent legacy. According to Altamirano, a true patriot and good citizen will recognize the importance of education in combating the ignorance that still prevails in Mexico's pueblos:

Triste, muy triste es considerar que en nuestra República hay todavía pueblos enteros sumidos en esa crasa ignorancia que coloca a los hombres muy cerca de las bestias, y que sin embargo, podrian muy bien hallarse en un estado de instrucción y de prosperidad envidiables.... (*Bosquejos* 74)

With the end of the French Intervention came peace, which brought an opportunity to spread civilization to these pueblos whose inhabitants find themselves in a state of "crasa ignorancia." As seen in *Navidad*, and as reflected in Altamirano's other writings, at an individual level, a true patriot and good citizen might be the young Indian or *mestizo* who leaves his pueblo to study and then returns home to educate and civilize his people. At a governmental level, Altamirano believed that true patriotism is created and maintained by the number of schools established: "Así se comprende el patriotismo,

así se rinde culto a la humanidad, así se funde la grandeza de los pueblos! Pocas Universidades, millares de escuelas primarias; eso es lo que necesita una nacion para ser grande” (*Bosquejos* 75).

Although Altamirano’s focus is largely on the state of education in the pueblos, he also offers commentary on the schools in urban settings like Mexico City. In 1868, for example, Altamirano counts 170 public and private institutions in Mexico City with approximately 4,441 students. The schools established at this time in Mexico City include the one established by the Sociedad Filarmónica, which, in addition to teaching music, taught geography, French, Italian, and Nahuatl. Altamirano points out that this music conservatory is the only institution where “el idioma mexicano se guarda como el fuego sagrado, la enseñanza del rico idioma de nuestros padres” (*Bosquejos* 78).

Although this comment about Nahuatl can be perceived as an attempt to preserve indigenous languages, it also, in some ways, reflects Altamirano’s elevation of “la raza azteca” as the indigenous origin of Mexico’s pre-Hispanic past and the promotion of the Nahuatl language as spoken by the indigenous fathers and not necessarily by the children, who, after all, represent Mexico’s future.

In his 1871 essay, “La escuela contemporánea – La escuela libre,” Altamirano revisits the issue of education in Mexico City. He notes that although certain private organizations like the *Compañía Lancasteriana*, the *Sociedad de Beneficiencia para la Instrucción y Amparo de la Niñez Desvalida*, and the *Sociedad Católica* focused their efforts on primary education with some support from the government, the Mexican government continued to ignore public primary education, which was declared free for everyone after the Constitution of 1857 and the *Leyes de Reforma* but was not

universally available due to lack of financial support and because of long distances to get to the nearest schools.

Altamirano also expresses concern that many private schools remained wary of government involvement and refused to open their schools to public scrutiny (97).

Although Altamirano understands that this resistance comes from “las viejas doctrinas de la escuela antigua,” he worries that these schools are teaching hatred for the Republic and authority instead of patriotism, another common theme in his writings. Using as a source the work *Nuestros hijos* (1870) by French historian and educator, Jules Michelet (1798-1874), Altamirano calls for using schools to inculcate patriotism in its children, “no sólo por medio de la enseñanza directa de la tradición nacional, sino como una madre por su justicia exacta y atenta”⁴⁴ (97). For Altamirano, teaching patriotism and loyalty was almost as important as teaching literacy in order to mold children into productive citizens.

Altamirano often focuses on how the present state of education in Mexico would impact its future, and thus, many times what emerges in his writings is an idealized vision of what Mexico could be if only it could harness its resources in the present. Mexico’s most important resources were, in his opinion, its children, who were a blank slate waiting for instruction. He writes, “...he vuelto los ojos a la escuela primaria, como a la santa piscina, cuyas aguas maravillosas encierran solas el secreto de nuestra curación radical” (83). Always looking to the future, he adds, “...se nos imponía también el deber de levantar en seguida el nuevo y glorioso edificio del porvenir, bajo las sólidas bases de

⁴⁴ Altamirano encouraged Mexico’s congressional members to read this work by Jules Michelet, whom he greatly admired, in the hopes that they would use it as a model for their own educational system.

la libertad y de la civilización” (84). His call to his fellow educators and government officials is summarized in his conclusion of “Bosquejos: La escuela en 1870”: “Ha llegado el tiempo; la República levanta su frente victoriosa, y la reforma comienza a florecer, a pesar de las maldiciones impotentes de sus enemigos. Es la hora, pues, de la reconstrucción y de la consolidación” (84). Despite Altamirano’s criticisms of Juárez post-French Intervention, he still continued to believe in the good done by Juárez’s “Leyes de Reforma,” which included the secularization of schools.

In order to lend support to his plea for continued educational reform in the 1870s, Altamirano turns to a time before the Plan of Ayutla (1854), before the Constitution of 1857, and before the Guerras de Reforma (1856-1861) in order to showcase the horrible conditions of schools during the first half of the nineteenth century. All of these historical events represented significant developments in Mexico’s educational policies. In his essay “Bosquejos: la escuela antigua,” Altamirano examines the state of education before the 1850s, when school was nothing more, according to him, than a house of horrors, full of physical and moral torture for all children.⁴⁵ Although Altamirano does not provide exact dates for what he considers “la escuela antigua,” he does explain that he is talking about approximately 30 years earlier, around 1840. His descriptions of education in the 1840s are based on what friends and colleagues have described to him, while he uses his own personal experiences to describe the 1850s, before the changes

⁴⁵ Altamirano also comments on schools before Independence, which were, according to him, even worse. Altamirano refers readers who are interested in learning about late colonial schools to the journalistic works and novels of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, “El Pensador Mexicano.” According to Altamirano, “Fernández Lizardi ha dejado en descripciones gráficas y que son eminentemente populares, una imagen viva de la instrucción y educación que se daba al pueblo en aquel tiempo de lúgubre memoria” (*Bosquejos* 93). In *El Periquillo Sarmiento*, Fernández de Lizardi has one full chapter poking fun of his protagonist’s teachers, who are ignorant or malintentioned or both.

brought about by the Guerras de Reforma: “puede asegurarse que hace todavía veinte años [1850], la escuela era, como acabo de describirla, con muy poca diferencia” (93).

As a Liberal who fought against Antonio López de Santa Anna in 1854, Altamirano did not hold a very positive view of the Conservative party, especially regarding their educational policies. Nevertheless, as historian James Lee shows in his 1974 dissertation, “Nationalism and Education in Mexico, 1821-1861,” it was under Santa Anna’s presidency that the national government began to focus on public schools throughout the country. Following the model of the Lancasterian company already established in Mexico City, Santa Anna and his advisors worked to create a unified and efficient system of administration (72). In 1842, by decree of Santa Anna, the Lancasterian Company became the Bureau of Primary Instruction (73). This is the same Lancasterian Company that Altamirano applauds for focusing on primary education in the 1870s. In a goal shared by the Liberal party of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Lancasterian Company employed a teaching method that government officials wanted implemented across the country in order to “transform the dream of universal literacy into reality” (Lee 72).

In the early 1840s, the national government established laws that stipulated that at least two schools should exist for every 10,000 people, for both boys and girls (73). Lee points out, however, that the vagueness of some of the articles, the continued focus on teaching Catholic doctrine, and the lack of control over private schools led to Mexico’s failure to realize the full potential of a national system of public education (75).

Additionally, *departamentos* like Yucatán, Michoacán, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, and Sonora resisted and, indeed, rebelled against the Centralist policies, including those concerning

education. Thus, as Lee concludes, Mexico's attempt at a new centralized educational system failed long before Santa Anna was ousted for the first time in 1844 (76-77).

Lee identifies many of the same serious problems in the 1840s educational system emphasized by Altamirano in "La escuela antigua." Altamirano writes that children in poor rural areas were taught only Catholic doctrine, which they had to memorize and recite, with no room for intellectual analysis or growth. They were physically punished and humiliated by their teachers—the priests—on a daily basis (86-91). Altamirano turns his attention to how the educational system functioned in the pueblos, especially indigenous pueblos like his own, Tixtla, in order to examine the structure of the "escuelas antiguas."

Although Altamirano never identifies the student as himself in this section, this brief description of a young indigenous student's experiences in Tixtla has been appropriated and repeated by his biographers as the principal source for the mythical, biographical story of Altamirano's early education. He explains that before the educational reforms of the 1850s, students were divided by *castas* into two groups, "niños de razón" and Indian. The indigenous children were only taught doctrine in poor Spanish and were not allowed to learn how to read. If an indigenous student was fortunate enough, however, he might just be given an opportunity to study with the children of "la gente de razón":

A veces, el capricho del maestro, *una lisonja al alcalde indio cuyo hijo iba a la escuela*, o singulares disposiciones en que paraba la atención del dómine cuando no era muy ignorante, ni muy torpe, hacían que un niño indígena fuera trasladado del banco de su raza al banco de la gente de

razón, y de este modo el pobrecillo podía probar los goces de la lectura, de la escritura y tal vez los de la ciencia. (*Bosquejos* 93, emphasis added)

Once more, although he does not name himself here, he is clearly writing about himself, the son of an *alcalde* lucky enough to be afforded the opportunity to learn how to read and write. He concludes by stating that for the indigenous student not as fortunate as the one in his story, “quedaba condenado a la excomuni3n que pesa todav3a sobre la raza infortunada” (94).

Altamirano’s depiction of the Indian as a member of “la raza infortunada” becomes entrenched in his next essay, “Bosquejos: La escuela del campo,” an important essay for an overall analysis of the representation of the Indian in Altamirano’s body of work. Indeed, many of the ideas that Altamirano expresses in this essay, in which he lays out what he sees as the reasons for the “backwardness” of the nineteenth-century Indian, are reiterated in his literary works. Here, Altamirano turns his attention to the schools in the pueblos, which he considers to be in a state much worse than those of the cities. In the indigenous pueblos, “que son los m3s numerosos en la Rep3blica,” the Indian never learned to read, which explains “su estado actual de barbarie y de abatimiento” (101). Returning to some of the same ideas expressed in “La escuela antigua,” he states that in the few schools found in some of these indigenous pueblos, the Indians were only taught to recite certain prayers in Spanish, which they did not even understand because they were never taught Spanish. Given this situation, “se comprender3 el por qu3 la raza ind3gena permanece en la idolatr3a m3s repugnante” (101).

Altamirano is concerned with what he sees as a continued idolatry among the indigenous population, which must be eradicated because it is “un obst3culo enorme que

se opone al desarrollo de la Reforma, y que a toda costa es preciso destruir, si queremos que la inmensa mayoría de la Nación se ilustre y sea útil para los trabajos de la República” (102). According to Altamirano, the only way to destroy this idolatry is through the educational system: “Para mí, la escuela es el único medio de lograr este objeto esencial” (102). Altamirano turns, once more, to the early Spanish missionaries as examples of the ideal teachers that incorporated effective methods among the indigenous populations of the sixteenth century.

Basing himself on the writings of Motolinia, Padre Durán, Padre Torquemada, Padre Vetancourt, and Mota Padilla, Altamirano expresses admiration for the work of the early Spanish missionaries who, moved by sincere evangelical spirit, and thanks to the docile and gentle nature of the Indians, “procuraron con celo ardiente instruir a los indios, no sólo en las nuevas doctrinas de la religión sino también en las artes liberales” (102). Unfortunately, these early priests were replaced by the cruel and ignorant priests described by Altamirano in “La escuela antigua,” thus ensuring that these “razas desdichadas” would enter Independence in “un estado próximo al idiotismo” (103-04). In contrast, the Spanish priest in Altamirano’s novel *Navidad* closely resembles these early missionaries—kind, compassionate, and eager to civilize the docile and grateful Indian by implementing a European cultural and formal education.

In both *Navidad* and “La escuela del campo,” Altamirano also addresses the difficult role of the teachers, who he claims were often poor *mestizo* martyrs who had learned to read in the city and then were obligated to return to their pueblo as teachers. Unfortunately, many times they were too busy serving the priests to dedicate themselves to teaching: “Barría la iglesia, arreglaba los ornamentos, confeccionaba las hostias,

ayudaba en la misa, era cantor...y en sus horas de ocio el infeliz tenía la obligación de divertir al cura, al vicario y al alma de llaves. Qué dignidad iba a tener un desdichado semejante, para ejercer el importante magisterio de la enseñanza!” (104).

He continues to paint a negative picture of how *mestizo* teachers were treated and paid. The pay ranged from 5 to 20 pesos per month, which was not enough money to live on. According to Altamirano, these teachers often suffered from hunger and died young, leaving behind starving wives and children (105). Altamirano states clearly that he hopes this description will horrify the reader because he is describing present—not past—conditions in these pueblos. He criticizes the government for sending the *mestizo* teacher to the indigenous pueblos as a convict and pariah instead of as “apóstol del progreso...sacerdote del porvenir...preparador de veinte generaciones” (105). He portrays the Indians in these rural pueblos as oppressed, sad, stoic, and discriminated against, yet eager to learn (105), if only provided with the right opportunities. Altamirano’s novel *Navidad* represents an idealized version of what could be the future of the pueblos. In the novel, the teacher is a young Indian who is eagerly learning Spanish as well as other subjects in order to return to his pueblo, whose children are awaiting instruction.

Altamirano’s description of the *raza indígena* and their role in the future of Mexico summarizes much of what his other works reveal about his educational philosophy regarding indigenous populations. Under the right circumstances, they will be able to prosper and become productive citizens. For Altamirano, the education they receive is the most important element, and within that education, the question of language becomes paramount.

Both Ramírez and Altamirano acknowledge the numerous indigenous languages spoken throughout Mexico at this time. While their policies and writings reveal an attempt to find some room for indigenous languages in the evolving Mexican nation, it is evident that both thinkers strongly advocate for the teaching of Spanish as the dominant and unifying language. Once more, reminiscent of the early Spanish priests he admires, Altamirano calls for teachers to learn the different indigenous dialects and even produce texts in these languages in order to more easily and completely educate the Indian. He makes it very clear, however, that Mexico can have only one official language, Spanish, and that it must be taught “a todas las razas.” He writes, “Mientras esto no se verifique, la civilización de la raza indígena será imposible” (110). Once again he offers the United States and Germany as examples of countries that have prospered and unified under one language: “Así, la gran superioridad de los Estados Unidos consiste en que allí todo el mundo habla inglés.... En Alemania sucede lo mismo” (110).

Altamirano offers specific examples of what education has achieved in some pueblos in Mexico. In Zumpango del Río, Guerrero, the teacher he describes as excellent managed to completely transform the pueblo, “transformándolos de aldeanos cerriles en ciudadanos inteligentes; a casi todos enseñó a leer y a escribir, y muy bien; a casi todos hizo vestir mejores trajes” (108). By learning Spanish, he explains, an Indian can even join the military, become a sergeant or an officer, and enter into dealings with *hacendados* and *prefectos*. An educated pueblo can educate its children and produce delegates, magistrates, and judges, thus ensuring that, come election time, it will be well represented. Once more, although he does not state it, Altamirano is probably referring to his personal experiences, an example of an “Indian” that became a soldier, lawyer,

delegate, and educator: “Así es como se levanta un pueblo; así es como los norteamericanos han logrado hacer de su nación un país grandioso, que dentro de poco no tendrá superior en el mundo...” (115).

Clearly, Altamirano’s ideas concerning the education of the Indian were not limited to simply teaching them Spanish. The complete education of the Indian involved teaching him how to dress properly, what crops to grow, and even what artistic goods to produce for the marketplace. An educated Indian will be able to go to the cities to sell his goods, but not “artículos miserables” like wood and wild fruits; instead, they should produce and sell “hortalizas, lana, tabaco...cereales de todas clases y aun obras de arte que son muy estimadas” (107). In many ways, Altamirano’s words echo those of Archbishop Lorenzana who, in 1768 and 1769, wrote to King Carlos III about the importance of teaching Spanish to the Indians in order to help them learn how to “cuidar su casa...cultivar sus tierras, [y en] cría de ganados, y comercio de sus frutos” (cited in Tanck de Estrada, “Tensión en la Torre de Marfil” 48-49). Altamirano emphasizes these same ideas in *Navidad*, where the priest proudly explains that in addition to establishing schools for the adults and children, “se ha introducido el cultivo de algunas artes mecánicas” (58).

Although Altamirano blames the contemporary Indian’s economic straits on their colonized state, according to historian Mary K. Vaughan, rural Mexicans had lost their means of supporting themselves in the late nineteenth century, thanks to state agrarian legislation that allowed for the occupation of public and ancient village lands by large foreign and national landowners (14). This left many rural pueblos vulnerable to

educational policies “designed to increase the productive capacity of a hierarchal class society while insuring loyalty to the existing social order and nation-state” (14).

While Altamirano calls for state and local governments to formalize and support schools and teachers, he also reminds the reader that education can be achieved through other means such as newspapers, history books, and even “ciertas novelas históricas” (115). Although he does not mention his own contributions specifically, it is evident that he is calling attention to his own role in educating the masses: “Todo a contribuido a despertar a las masas y a hacerlas tomar interés en las cuestiones nacionales” (115). Through education “la felicidad de México está hecha” (116) but, he warns, this will not happen unless Mexico addresses the role of the teacher, the topic of his next essay, “Bosquejos: El maestro de escuela.”

In this essay, Altamirano begins by addressing, once more, his concerns about the role of the teacher in the pueblos. Here he relates a series of events that occurred in 1863, as he traveled in his role as a delegate to San Luis de Potosí where the Mexican Congress was meeting. On his way there, he stopped at a large indigenous pueblo, in “un Estado de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme” (117). Written almost like a vignette, Altamirano’s essay depicts a negative image of a well-fed priest who yearns for the return of a monarchy that will once more elevate the role of the Catholic Church.⁴⁶ The priest invites Altamirano for dinner, where he also meets the *alcalde*, an Indian who acts as the priest’s servant, and the pueblo’s teacher, a man who “parecía la imagen de la tristeza y de la angustia” (121).

⁴⁶ Historian Mary K. Vaughan writes that after the economic devastation of the wars for Independence and the U.S. invasion, nineteenth-century Conservatives “despaired of the republican experiment and looked to the monarchy to solve the country’s ills” and to restore the Church hierarchy (9-10).

The image of this teacher reinforces Altamirano's earlier essay on the mistreatment of rural teachers. He describes him as thin, with sunken eyes, poorly dressed, and obviously starving. In contrast, Altamirano describes the priest as "robusto...regordete, colorado y de carácter alegre y decididor" (117). The teacher later shares with Altamirano that he has not been paid in 4 months, his family cannot leave their home because they are naked, and his children do not even have enough strength to study. They owe everyone in the pueblo money and thus cannot borrow any more to buy "ni un grano de maíz" (121). Meanwhile, in what Altamirano describes as a typical meal for priests in all Catholic countries, the priest, his two nieces, and Altamirano are served beef, chicken, fish, salads, fruits, and several desserts. Altamirano, obviously uncomfortable with the disparity between the lives of the priest and the teacher, only partakes of dessert.

The differences between the priest and the teacher become even more evident when discussing the indigenous residents of the pueblo. The priest blames them for the teacher's misery, complaining that they are "agarrados," who claim to be poor in order to not pay the teacher. The priest also states that the Indians have no desire to learn and that after 40 years of paying for a school, "ninguno de ellos sabe leer" (122). He goes on to declare that they are "unos animales, que ni aprenden bien, ni sacarían provecho de la lectura, ni de la escritura" (123). The teacher, in turn, defends his students, whom he describes as having good dispositions and who are eager to learn but are hampered by the lack of books. Despite his best efforts, he tells Altamirano, he cannot continue to teach without pay and without the proper supplies. Altamirano promises to help him find another job, for which the teacher is grateful. At the same time, however, the teacher is

sad to leave his students, “a mis pobres inditos, tan buenos, tan hábiles, tan aplicados” (130).

The dire financial straits described by the teacher echo the state of the educational system prior to Independence. Lack of funds hampered the establishment and upkeep of schools throughout Mexico’s rural areas during the colonial period. After Independence, Mexico’s financial woes continued. On a national level, indigenous rebellions, the Mexican-American War, and the French Intervention had bankrupted the country, leaving few resources for schools. On a regional level, some pueblos were forced to use funds that had been set aside for schools to buy seed and build wells in order to provide food and water for their inhabitants (Staples 132). Thus, although education was seen as a way to secure Mexico’s economic progress, its on-going financial problems hampered its efforts to build and staff schools in every pueblo.

This “bosquejo” also illustrates Altamirano’s negative image of a system that, despite the achievements of the Guerras de Reforma, continued to allow priests to take advantage of their position of power to ensure a comfortable life for themselves while teachers and their families nearly starve to death in the pueblos. There are certain similarities between this vignette and his novel *Navidad*, both written around 1870. In his novel, Altamirano takes the same setting—a rural, indigenous pueblo—and converts it into an idealized image of what a pueblo can become if governed by the right people. In *Navidad*, the priest also plays a prominent role, but unlike the priest in the *bosquejo*, he takes a genuine interest in the Indians and, along with the teacher, takes an active role in helping to civilize them by teaching them about marketable crops and Spanish culture. Together, this *bosquejo* and the novel serve as examples of a corrupt system that

victimizes its poor but that can be transformed in order to truly educate and prepare Mexico's indigenous populations for citizenship.

In the last sections of *Bosquejos*, Altamirano focuses on what the Mexican government must do in order to bring about this transformation. Once more, he emphasizes the importance of primary schools, especially in the rural areas, and on the role of the teacher. In the schools, he writes, there must be separation of religion and education, part of the legacy of the *Leyes de Reforma* (134). Teachers must be respected, paid well for their work and well educated (136). They should be trained to teach reading, writing, math, grammar, morality (not religion), political history, constitutional law, geography, botany and zoology.⁴⁷ When it comes to languages, in addition to the importance of Spanish, “se consideran de preferencia el inglés y el alemán” (138). He reiterates this point a few pages later.

Significantly, although Altamirano calls for teachers to learn indigenous languages as part of the curricula in the normal school for teachers, he makes no mention of including them in the curriculum for students. Instead, Spanish will serve as the unifier of Mexico's peoples, rural and urban, indigenous and *mestizo*. A unified country and a unified educational system will produce citizens that not only can read and write (79) but that will embrace education. Once more, he offers as examples the United States and Germany, where “la escuela es el paraíso” and where children go to bed smiling, thinking about their schoolwork, and wake up, eager to go to school “alegres y felices, como si fueran a estrechar el seno de una madre cariñosa” (95).

⁴⁷ The teaching of religion in public schools was formally abolished in 1874 (Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* 19).

Ignacio Ramírez's educational policies, compiled and published in 1889 by the Imprenta del Gobierno, also specifically targeted Mexico's rural indigenous population, especially the children. He emphasizes the importance of establishing an educational system in which "las primeras letras," or primary education, would be available to everyone, especially for "las clases menesterosas, a las que pertenecían los grupos indígenas" (15).

Ramírez recommends that all children learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and a trade, but also points out that they need to go beyond a basic education: they must also study history, science, music, and languages (20-23). Like Altamirano, he too addresses the issue of language, recognizing that indigenous languages continue to thrive throughout Mexico. Despite the diversity of indigenous languages, Ramírez's focus is specifically on Nahuatl, whose continued existence, he writes, recalls "el paso de los aztecas, en un tiempo como vencedores y despues como humildes colonos ó como tribus disperas" (47). Also echoing the efforts of the early Spanish missionaries, he explains that they are currently paying a young scholar from Jalisco to study and write a complete dictionary of Nahuatl: "la obra es nueva, la obra es necesaria.... Para proteger la obra, se ha ofrecido al autor un empleo con veinticinco pesos mensuales"⁴⁸ (51).

This focus on the Aztecs and their language, instead of on the numerous other indigenous languages spoken throughout Mexico, speaks to the Liberal project of looking back to a glorious, noble pre-Hispanic past that would serve as the foundation for a modern national identity. Historian James Lee writes that during the wars for Independence, many Creole insurgents identified their struggles with the ancient Aztec

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, neither he nor the editor of *Bosquejos* identifies the scholar by name.

empire, yet quickly abandoned any genuine desire to learn about significant indigenous contributions once Independence was won (232). As a result, nineteenth-century writers “tended to treat Indian civilization as an exotic precursor of Mexican national culture, not as an important element in the formation of the latter” (Lee 232-33). This is seen in leaders like Ramírez who calls for the establishment of institutions like the Sociedad de Geografía y Estadística, discussed above, to research and write about Mexico’s indigenous past in a systematic manner because “la sabiduría nacional debe levantarse sobre una base indígena” (52).

Ramírez’s educational policies do allow for the teaching of other indigenous languages because “los indígenas no llegarán a una verdadera civilización, sino cultivándoles la inteligencia por medio del instrumento natural del idioma en que piensan y viven” (27). Thus, their language is yet one more tool to be used in order to civilize them. To complete the process, they must learn French and English, in addition to Spanish: “quién ignora que hoy el pobre, el artesano, el simple marinero, el humilde comerciante, necesita más que los ricos hablar el francés y el inglés para extender el círculo de su relaciones y mejorar los conocimientos prácticos de sus negocios?” (26-27). Once more, the use of dominant Western languages determines progress.

Article Two of Ramírez’s *Plan de Estudios*, developed under Benito Juárez, who named him Secretario de Justicia e Instrucción Pública in 1861, specifically addresses the education of the indigenous masses and also provides insight into Ramírez’s own beliefs and attitudes concerning Indians. He writes that there are about 5 or 6 million indigenous inhabitants that originally formed 20 or 30 diverse nations. The conquest destroyed their

institutions, resulting in Indians that know nothing and that “sólo sirven de labradores o de soldados” (31).

Ramírez also criticizes their traditions, which he describes as humble, and claims that their languages serve to isolate them (31-32). According to Ramírez, Indians live in huts and do not realize that they too can live in comfort, that they can ride in the coaches that today run them over, that the fashions and perfumes can also be for indigenous women. In an effort to support the importance of education, he paints a very negative image of the nineteenth-century ignorant Indian: “rompen el alambre telegráfico para ver salir la palabra”; “han llegado a tal postracion, que pasarian por animales desconocidos para sus emperadores y caciques, si estos se escapasen de la tumba: para contar con ellos como ciudadanos, tenemos necesidad de comenzar a hacerlos hombres” (32). These same attitudes can be identified in the works of Liberal leaders that followed, such as Altamirano, and Justo Sierra.

Ramírez allows that the indigenous populations can retain their traditional clothing, customs, and language, if they so desire, but warns that they must find a way to become active, educated citizens before the end of the nineteenth century or they will simply disappear in the nineteenth century: “antes que termine el siglo, so pena de desaparecer en el siguiente, ellos deben figurar con toda la actividad de su inteligencia, con todo el entusiasmo de los nuevos intereses, en la industria, en la agricultura, en el comercio, en la política y en el teatro de la civilización y del progreso” (32). In order to achieve the goal of citizenship, Indians must learn reading, writing, and, above all, the sciences, so that the men of the pueblos can learn about “los viajes por mar y...las

maniobras de los buques” (34). In this way, the government can bring about “una revolucion saludable en la raza indígena!” (34).

James Lee rightly points out that, despite this attempt to include and maintain some indigenous languages and customs, both Liberal and Conservative policies “reflected a racial concept of the nation” (255) in which the Indian had to be eliminated through intermarriage and complete assimilation. For these leaders, European influence and a Western education “offered the ultimate answer to the disunity created by cultural diversity” (257). Nearly 20 years after Altamirano published his *bosquejos* on education and nearly 30 years after Ramírez’s educational policies, Mexico’s Liberal party continued to struggle with an educational system that would not only educate the indigenous population but one that would ensure their assimilation, which editor Bermúdez de Brauns writes both Altamirano and Ramírez believed was “necesario para lograr el progreso de Mexico” (11).

In *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (1982), historian Mary K. Vaughan addresses the role of public education in increasing the productive capacity in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mexico, emphasizing the ways in which class conflict influenced school policy (4-5). During the Porfiriato, before the Mexican Revolution, Vaughan identifies Justo Sierra as “the most eloquent spokesman for state primary education” (22). Sierra’s new educational program of 1888 called for increasing Mexico’s productive forces by producing patriotic individuals “conscious of their rights and duties toward society and the state” (Vaughan 25). Sierra believed that Mexico’s lower classes and rural population, especially its indigenous groups, could be assimilated through proper education. Inferior groups dominated by superstitions and

alcohol could be taught proper habits and attitudes and thus “learn their place in society” (25).

The concern with vices expressed throughout Mexico’s history by mid- and late-colonial Creoles like Sigüenza y Góngora and Fray Servando, the parish priests in the 1803 Oaxacan questionnaires, and Altamirano, continued to be an issue for Mexican educators in the early twentieth-century. Vices like ignorance, laziness, improper hygiene, alcohol, tobacco, and superstitions were constantly identified as obstacles in producing a reliable labor force (35). By rectifying these issues, which were often blamed on 300 years of servitude under Spanish rule, Sierra and other officials hoped they would produce the type of citizen that would be an asset to Mexico’s struggling economy (28). Historian Ann Staples also comments on this concern over vices, pointing out that after Independence, there was an almost unlimited faith in what education could do for the new nation. Education would produce a new citizen that would triumph over “*todos los vicios heredados de la sociedad colonial*” (Staples 119). Unfortunately for the poor rural classes, the educational system that evolved throughout the nineteenth century and culminated during the Porfiriato continued to blame the victim and “legitimized a social structure based upon exploitation” (Staples 35). Nearly 100 years after Independence, by the dawn of the Mexican Revolution, little had changed for Mexico’s indigenous populations.

Walter Mignolo’s focus on postcolonial Latin America also has led him to closely examine how the role of the subaltern, in this case, the indigenous peoples of Latin America, has evolved over the last two hundred years, since the Independence movements of the early 1800s. For Mignolo, the key to moving beyond the colonial systems that continued to

dominate the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to take control of the production of knowledge.

During and after the colonial period, the production of knowledge was controlled by powerful institutions such as the Church, the government, and the educational systems. These institutions were run by what Mignolo calls the “knowing subject,” that is, one who “maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them” (“Epistemic Disobedience” 160). As long as the “knowing subject” retained control, the subaltern would remain as a passive bystander, one who is told what is good for them without being allowed to speak or act.

The Liberals and intellectuals of nineteenth-century Mexico believed they were taking that power from the hands of the colonial authorities in order to determine independently the course of their burgeoning nation. Scholars have demonstrated that Mexico’s indigenous peoples—as individuals and as autonomous communities—played an important role in Mexico’s wars for Independence. Throughout the nineteenth century, indigenous groups actively fought for their rights, both through legal means and through acts of resistance. They were quite aware that, ironically, the Conservative agenda, including the possibility of the return of a monarchy, might benefit them more than the Liberal Republican project of *mestizaje*. Indeed, even nineteenth-century policies that addressed the problem of the “Indian” attest to their continued “problematic” presence as they refused to quietly assimilate.

Liberal thinkers and leaders like Juárez, Ramírez, Altamirano, and Sierra can be classified as the “knowing subjects” described by Mignolo. They took it upon themselves to determine the future path of Mexico’s indigenous groups after

Independence. Altamirano and many of his fellow intellectuals clearly believed that colonialism was responsible for the desperate situation that the Indian presumably found himself in after Independence; that is, passive, superstitious, barbaric, unable to fully participate as a citizen. While it cannot be denied that many indigenous groups suffered great losses under colonialism, it is also true that under colonialism there were opportunities for the indigenous to work within the dominant systems while maintaining their own culture, with its traditions and languages. This fluidity of moving within the different systems, along with the fluidity of identity, ironically, was systematically eliminated during the nineteenth century by those who are today lauded as being heroes and defenders of indigenous peoples.

Yet, the question remains, why did intellectuals like Altamirano, who identified closely with being indigenous, advocate for a move towards *mestizaje* for everyone? As Mignolo explains, “it is not enough to change the content of the conversation, that it is of the essence to change the *terms* of the conversation. Changing the terms of the conversation implies going beyond disciplinary or interdisciplinary controversies and the conflict of interpretations” (“Epistemic Disobedience” 162). If we are to understand Mexico’s current policies and attitudes towards its indigenous populations, we must understand that despite Mexico’s victory over colonialism, Altamirano and his contemporaries were not able to change the terms of colonialism. They were not able to escape the colonial paradigm in which they themselves had been formed.

Mignolo refers to this paradigm as the colonial matrix of power, “a racial system of social classification that invented Occidentalism (e.g. *Indias Occidentales*), that created the conditions for Orientalism,” (161) which, in turn, led to the creation of the

Other, the unknown, the subaltern. As Mignolo explains, “in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known” (“Epistemic Disobedience” 162). This is why it is imperative to study the role that Altamirano and other Liberals played in the development of nineteenth-century policies and attitudes towards indigenous peoples still prevalent today. As one of the “knowers,” Altamirano helped determine the knowledge that should be transmitted to Indians as well as how and when. Like many of his contemporaries, Altamirano was not able to escape the paradigm of colonialism and indeed failed to recognize that he and many of his contemporaries were, in fact, reinforcing many of the most negative aspects of colonialism in regards to the Indian as the Other.

The “Other” is a concept that would shape the future of the Americas from the moment that Christopher Columbus first set eyes on the indigenous peoples of the “New World.” Mignolo examines *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), by Maori anthropologist Linda Tuhiwai. Smith, as an example of an aboriginal point of view of being the Other. Smith writes,

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, *we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the ‘arts’ of civilization.* By lacking such values we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not ‘fully human’; some of us were not even considered partially human. Ideas about what

counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses....

(quoted in “Epistemic Disobedience” 172, emphasis added)

This passage written by a twentieth-century Maori national is strikingly similar to the image Liberals held of Mexico’s indigenous populations in the nineteenth century. Her words recall Altamirano’s observations that the Mexican Indian had to be taught what crops to grow, what art forms to produce, and what songs to sing in order be considered civilized.

Because the subaltern is not “fully human,” members of the dominant Western culture determined that they had the right to decide the course of the aboriginals’ future. In discussing the question of the subaltern’s humanity, Mignolo references Frantz Fanon, an Afro-Caribbean who writes that the Negro of the Antilles, the Indian from India and from the Americas or the aboriginals of New Zealand and Australia, the Negro from sub-Saharan Africa, and the Muslim from the Middle East or Indonesia, “will come closer to being a real human being in direct ratio to his or her mastery of disciplinary norms” (quoted in “Epistemic Disobedience” 165). The disciplinary norms, of course, are determined by the dominant Western culture, and the producers of knowledge will, in turn, determine how this knowledge is disseminated.

Throughout Mexico’s modern history, Western culture determined that its indigenous population would be made more “human,” more “civilized,” through Christianization and formal and informal education, in which they would learn the dominant language of Spanish as well as how to behave and dress “appropriately” in society. By the end of the colonial period, it is evident that while many indigenous

groups had learned to manipulate Spanish institutions and mores, many had also retained their own languages as well as important elements of their traditional customs.

Indigenous peoples survived colonialism because of their ability and willingness to adapt. Indeed, if the Indian had become completely erased by colonialism, then nineteenth-century intellectuals like Altamirano would not have struggled to transform the Indian into a productive *mestizo*.

According to Mignolo, transformation for aboriginal groups is not possible until the control of knowledge changes; only then can institutions change (“The Many Faces of 1492,” lecture). He offers as an example the current situation in Bolivia and Ecuador, where indigenous peoples are finally claiming epistemic rights such as linguistic, educational, and political claims, thus succeeding in changing the content and not just the structure of power. In regards to the role of literature, Mignolo acknowledges that its origins are imperialistic but it can also serve as a tool for decolonization because it can break the rules.

Despite his rejection of colonialism, Altamirano did not succeed in choosing the decolonial option through literature. Rather, he used his literary production to further his own agenda—and that of the Liberal party’s—of *mestizaje* through education. His choice did not empower the Indian but rather relegated him to a mythical pre-Hispanic past while denying his contemporary identity. According to nineteenth-century Liberals, Indians had to master Western ideals of language and culture in order to come closer to their ideal of citizenship. Thus, even after the official end of colonialism in 1821, indigenous groups were not able to choose the “decolonial option” because they were not

presented with it as a viable option. They were not able to escape the Western system in which they are told what they are and what they should be.

According to Mignolo, the decolonial option only becomes feasible when “the rules of the game and the shots are no longer called by Western players and institutions” (“Epistemic Disobedience” 161). Although Altamirano and his fellow Liberals believed that ending colonial rule would empower all of Mexico’s citizens, in reality they continued to function within the same Western institutions and values that had shaped Mexico for over 300 hundred years and that would continue to dominate Latin America into the twenty-first century.

In looking back to the nineteenth century, one must be careful not to impose today’s values. Nevertheless, if we are to understand today’s current issues regarding indigenous peoples, it is imperative to trace the evolution of their representation by the dominant culture as well as their own role in determining their present and future. Mignolo warns that in order to make the decolonial option a viable one, non-indigenous peoples must submit to the guidance of indigenous peoples and engage them in the decolonial option (172). He writes that “a New Zealand anthropologist of Anglo descent *has no right* to guide the ‘locals’ in what is good or bad for the Maori population. That is precisely the *problem* that appears in the report of the *Harvard International Review*, where a group of US experts believes they can really decide what is good and what is bad for ‘developing countries’” (173).

This is what occurs during the nineteenth century, when Altamirano and his peers rejected Mexico’s colonial past and chose what would be best for Mexico’s indigenous populations: to learn Spanish, to become educated, to become productive citizens by

participating in Mexico's capitalist economy; indeed, to become more "white," as evidenced by the policy of eugenics advocated by nineteenth-century Liberals. Mignolo introduces Michel Foucault's concept of bio-politics into the discussion of eugenics. Bio-politics "refers to emerging state technologies (strategies, in a more traditional vocabulary) of population control that went hand in hand with the emergence of the modern nation-state" ("Epistemic Disobedience" 174). While Foucault focused on Europe, Mignolo points out that such technologies were applied to the colonies as well, whose aboriginal population was seen as "subhuman." Thus, eugenics reinforced Altamirano's efforts to civilize and educate Mexico's indigenous population and then to whiten them, to make them biological *mestizos*.

In order to lend credence to his position as someone who can speak on their behalf, Altamirano presents himself as their brother, as an "*indio puro*" who has traveled the same path and who has achieved a certain level of political and social success. By presenting himself as an example of a success story, he now has the "right" to guide the non-educated, non-modern Indian. This image of Altamirano is so carefully cultivated not only by him but by his contemporaries and successors that even today he is considered one of the great defenders of indigenous culture. What is significant is that Altamirano either did not see or refused to acknowledge that he himself was already a cultural *mestizo*, a member of the *ciudad letrada* who has no interest in preserving the traditions of the contemporary Indian beyond those that will help identify the indigenous origins of contemporary Mexico. Like his peers, he is interested in elevating the role of the pre-Hispanic Indian in Mexico's mestizo culture while imposing and controlling knowledge through his political and literary production.

Altamirano was trained by the same institutions that were in power during the colonial period and thus learned what was allowed, prohibited, etc. He did not engage in epistemic disobedience; he was taught to value the European literary classics and to value European languages. He learned that these had to be taught to the indigenous populations in order to civilize them and bring them into modernity, a philosophy that Vasconcelos would continue to support half a century later. As a member of the *ciudad letrada*, he learned the value of sprinkling Nahuatl words throughout his writings in order to point to Mexico's indigenous origins but the Nahuatl language was never meant to be as important as Spanish. Again, only by acknowledging Altamirano's role—and those of other powerful "Indians" like Benito Juárez—in the evolution of Mexico's policies towards its indigenous population can we come to understand why, two centuries after Independence, only now are indigenous peoples able to choose the decolonial option. Only now are they able to fight successfully against a racism that Mignolo sees as the result of two conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge: one, that certain bodies are inferior to others, and two, that inferior bodies carried inferior intelligence (178). While nineteenth-century Liberals claimed that the emerging nation of Mexico was fighting to help the Indian escape a state of apathy and ignorance brought about by 300 years of colonialism, it is impossible to deny that many of these notions of biological, intellectual, and social inferiority became entrenched during the nineteenth century.

Mignolo acknowledges the validity of the argument that certain "bodies" and "regions" are in need of help from others that "got there first and know how to do it" ("Epistemic Disobedience" 178). Yet, he cautions that one must recognize that you do not want to "impose" your knowledge and experience but rather work with the local

population under question. One must be careful to question whose agenda is being implemented and why and to whose benefit—questions that are not always easy to answer. Indeed, these are questions that perhaps Mexico's nineteenth-century leaders were not even able to articulate at this point in their history.

In acknowledging the many ways in which indigenous communities continue to resist the dominant sectors of society, one must never overlook the real and continuous discrimination and repression these groups face. Alan Knight notes that in the 1930s, for example, *indio* was used not to refer to a cultural group but as an epithet applied to any low-class person, “especially if dark in complexion or rude in behavior” (cited in Knight 101). This is still true today, in the twenty-first century. Indians continue to occupy a difficult social position in which they “are discriminated against for being Indian and at the same time admired for being the ‘real soul’ of Mexico’s...pre-Hispanic heritage” (cited in Knight 101). Knight concludes that “if radical change does not solve the ‘Indian problem,’ continued ‘development’ will eventually remove it altogether” (102). The question of what that “radical change” must entail is just as complicated to answer as is the question of identity. According to Mignolo, taking control of the production of knowledge must be part of this change in order for indigenous populations to avoid being “disappeared” by global pressures.

During the nineteenth century, those in control of the production of knowledge—the members of the *ciudad letrada*—advocated *mestizaje* as the only option for forming a nation of productive citizens. The biological and cultural process of *mestizaje* was often—and continues to be—a violent one. As Miller and other scholars note, the process often involves the erosion of autonomous indigenous communities and the

romanticization of the subaltern group, which dismisses their active participation (Miller 4). The process also implies the continued privileging of whiteness. During the late nineteenth century, Justo Sierra's vision of Mexico's future involved attracting immigrants from Europe to obtain a cross with the Indian, which he perceived as necessary to keep up the level of civilization and avoid regression (Sierra 368). Over 100 years later, the Indian in Mexico, whether culturally or biologically "pure," is still perceived as backwards, inferior, and a detriment to progress. As Alan Knight points out, the practice of whitening continues today, and is reinforced through film, television, and advertising stereotypes (100).

Altamirano's didactic works—literary and political—emphasized the positive role that Indians could play in Mexico's future if they would allow themselves to be transformed from Indian into cultural *mestizo*. The *mestizo* citizen had to be willing to distance himself from both his Indian and Spanish past in order to become Mexican. If the Indian wanted to participate in the new republic then he must learn, through formal and social education, how to become a *mestizo* culturally, at least until such time as he could give birth to a biological *mestizo* through a marriage similar to that of Nicolás and Pilar in *El Zarco*.

Altamirano's vision, however, was not easily fulfilled. Indigenous communities then and now have not left their history in the past. Many communities have never willingly abandoned their culture, their religion, their language. As happens whenever a dominant group attempts to impose its views on subaltern groups, aboriginal communities have fought, negotiated, and resisted, forming new spaces out of conflict where, many times, they can work and prosper within the dominant society. It is this

process of adaptation and acculturation that Altamirano ignores in his works and in his political views because his vision of modern Mexico did not allow for the multiplicity of peoples and their cultures.

Some 500 years after the arrival of the Spanish, indigenous groups continue to struggle against “externally imposed categories” (Knight 101). Their struggles against discrimination continue to be one of political and sometimes violent action, as indigenous communities fight to retain their role as active participants, to define for themselves what they consider citizenship in Latin America’s ever-evolving process towards modernization. Yet these on-going struggles point to an unavoidable fact: Altamirano’s Indian, who he hoped would passively allow himself to be disappeared, is in fact still present, struggling for recognition within an unequal power structure, but still fighting. As Knight and Mignolo point out, there is hope for Mexico’s indigenous communities, indeed for aboriginal groups around the world, as indigenous communities and leaders continue to work within and outside of the dominant system. Indigenous groups have refused to acquiesce to the dominant culture’s attempt to impose one “solution” because they know better than anyone that there is no single “ideal” indigenous community. It is this diversity that Altamirano and other Liberal leaders failed—or refused—to acknowledge as they attempted to define their future as productive citizens.

Conclusion

While numerous scholars have successfully proven that indigenous groups were active participants in society—both Western and indigenous—since the conquest, it is clear that the twentieth century brought its own share of problems for many of these groups. *Reflecting Visions: New Perspectives on Adult Education for Indigenous Peoples*, edited by Linda King, is a collection of essays that came out of an international seminar on indigenous education held in 1997 in Oaxaca, Mexico. These essays look at the current state of adult and public education in the late 1990s for indigenous groups around the globe. However, the authors, many of whom are indigenous, are not necessarily concerned with looking at specific regional areas. Rather, they see this as a global issue. As a result, the essays deal with education not only in Latin America but also among the Saami in Norway, the Maori in New Zealand, and the Inuit in Canada.

One of the important goals that the indigenous representatives who attended the conference established was to “start learning in and from one’s own culture and context, to deepen one’s roots and...as soon as possible, to learn the official languages, to acquire the skills needed to participate actively in national economic and political life” (King preface). The adoption of the official language has often been presented as a way for the indigenous peoples to become active members of society, as seen in Mexico’s nineteenth-century educational policies. Nevertheless, here the participants are insisting that this can be done without losing their indigenous culture.

Unlike the works produced by nineteenth-century intellectuals, *Reflecting Visions* allows the indigenous to speak directly about this important topic. The contributors raise

complex questions such as: Who should determine the content of education? What role should literacy play in communities where indigenous culture is based on oral tradition and knowledge? Many of the participants also offer specific alternatives and solutions, which were brought together in the Declaration of Huaxyaca adopted by the participants at the seminar. In part, it states that adult education must strengthen indigenous peoples and their communities; it must be made available in their own languages and reflect their own culture and world view; it must include indigenous-oriented curricula that strengthens indigenous knowledge, skills, and identities; and it must adopt an intercultural and transcultural focus that includes non-indigenous cultures “in order to promote the harmonious coexistence among cultures within the framework of a truly democratic society with justice for all” (King 7).

These ambitious goals were certainly never envisioned by Altamirano or his Liberal peers in their promotion of education for the indigenous and peasant masses. Instead of advocating for “harmonious coexistence” in which each group retained its identity, Mexico’s Liberals called for a type of *mestizaje* in which one could no longer distinguish between the indigenous and the European characteristics, in other words, complete assimilation. In the early twentieth century, this concept of transformation through *mestizaje* would be promoted by Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos.

In 1985, many different groups of indigenous people worked with the United Nations on drafting a declaration of rights of indigenous peoples. Julian Burger, one of the contributors to *Reflecting Visions*, writes that the participants included village leaders, elders, activists, youth, women, and hundreds of other indigenous peoples (14-15). He

further states that the draft declaration covers virtually every concern of indigenous peoples, which seems unlikely given the diversity of the participants. Although their goal is not to provide a history of the evolution of education and its impact on indigenous populations, several of the contributors briefly address their country's colonial past in order to understand their current situation. Burger writes that education has not always promoted understanding, tolerance, and friendship. He notes that in Latin America, children "were often removed from their traditional learning environment and placed in missionary schools where they are placed on a forced diet of Christianity and Western values" (20). Many of the other authors discuss the negative impact that colonization had on their communities. They focus on defining the active role of indigenous groups in the evolution of an education system that will allow them to be successful in the dominant society without losing their cultural traditions.

This collection of essays concludes with the printing of the Declaration of Huaxyacac. Aside from the demands they make regarding education, the contributors make some compelling stipulations that speak directly to researchers and historians. In addition to asking that they respect the individual traditions of indigenous cultures, they demand that, "when research is done about indigenous peoples or when knowledge of indigenous communities is recorded or made public, indigenous communities must have control over how that knowledge is used" (219). While perhaps an unrealistic request, this statement nevertheless reflects how indigenous communities throughout the world continue to take charge of their own lives, despite the political, social, and economic obstacles they face on a daily basis.

Because Oaxaca is the state with the most variety of indigenous pueblos, it has been the focus of new, innovative educational systems proposed by indigenous teachers and by government and non-government organizations. In 2002, educator Lois Meyer proposed a project that would bring together an analysis of ten of these educational programs. The overall goal of the coordinating board was to seek a multiplicity of voices that would include both academics and activists (Lois Meyer et al. xii). Many of the essays were contributed by people outside of Mexico, but, more importantly, indigenous leaders and teachers from Oaxaca were also given a voice in relating what has and has not worked in their communities in the continued attempts to “educate” the Indian.

Many of these educational programs have struggled with how communal education would work within the “normatividad,” the official federal system of education. Some of these programs included options such as teaching their children the indigenous way of life separately from that of the official system, or incorporating formal education within their own system by identifying key subjects such as math and social sciences to be taught alongside their own subjects, such as their community’s history, ecology, and local customs (394). Above all, these programs hoped to get their own communities to recognize the value of communal knowledge.

Many times, the bilingual teachers had to convince not just the federal educators but the *campesinos* themselves that their children should be taught their local customs and traditions, that an important goal should be retaining their maternal tongue, for example. It was often difficult to convince the indigenous community of this fact because many felt that the Mexican state and its urban culture—with Spanish as the official language—was their children’s only chance for future success (407). Additionally, many communities felt that

education should be left to the government or to each family, but not to the community (413). These obstacles did indeed prove to be quite challenging to overcome, and, in fact, in many communities the innovative communal education programs had to close due to lack of financial and communal support.

In many ways, the resistance from within the communities points to the very complexity of these communities. These are dynamic, multidimensional communities that have developed processes of resistance and evasion. For example, saying that education should be left to the government could be interpreted as their belief that the government was obligated to pay for their children's education (424). According to the participants, programs like the Asesoría Técnica a Comunidades Oaxaqueñas (Aseteco) had to continue reevaluating its conclusions about indigenous communities and schools in order to avoid "essentializing" the Indian. Echoing José Rabasa warning, programs like Aseteco must avoid reducing indigenous peoples to folklore and historically freezing the community (426). Thus, in the twenty-first century, indigenous communities continue to struggle against stereotypes and to assert their right to form their own subjectivity. Despite the many challenges and obstacles faced by these programs, there have been successes. The Escuela Normal Bilingüe e Intercultural de Oaxaca (ENBIO), for example, now offers an alternative for training indigenous professors who will in turn teach children to value their own language while also recognizing the need to learn about the dominant white culture (503-04).

In an interview conducted by Lois Meyer for *Entre la normatividad y la cominidad*, Noam Chomsky comments that the suppression of regional cultures, local languages, and local customs has been achieved in Europe through hundreds of years of violence and destruction and that it continues today (614). He also notes, however, that several tribal

languages and cultures are being revived and that people are learning to appreciate and recreate the structures that existed before the violent process of formation of the state (615). He sees hope for the indigenous communities of Mexico, but cautions that there can be no single system that will work for all of them. While he recognizes the negative impact of globalization—control by multinational corporations—on these communities, he also sees active resistance against globalization in Latin America as well as in the rest of the world. Also, for the first time, he sees a rise in popular solidarity that is born out of movements like the *neozapatistas*, which he claims has inspired a global movement in favor of justice (635). These communities will continue to resist dominant outside groups, just as they have always done. While the goal of this project was not to pretend to represent one collective, the participants have tried to come up with certain agreements and shared perspectives, to offer suggestions and reflections, and to start a dialogue (640-41). Significantly, they agreed that each community must take control of its culture's destiny through the formation of its children.

The issue of indigenous agency continues to evolve, on a global level, in the twenty-first century. On December 16, 2010, the president of the United States, Barack Obama, announced that the United States would sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, reversing the Bush administration's decision not to support this non-binding document introduced in 2007. With President Obama's announcement, the United States became the last country to drop its opposition to a document that "recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination, as well as their institutions, cultures and traditions, and prohibits discrimination against them." Addressing the second White House Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama stated,

“What matters far more than words – what matters far more than any resolution or declaration – are actions to match those words” (“Obama adopts U.N. manifesto on rights of indigenous peoples”).

While actions may speak louder than words, the words contained in the United Nations Declaration are worth examining, especially because they share many of the same demands espoused by the 1997 Declaration of Huaxyacac. The United Nations Declaration specifically addresses the fact that indigenous peoples have suffered historic injustices because of the colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories, and resources. More importantly, these experiences have prevented them from exercising their right to development according to their own needs and interests. Regarding education, the United Nations Declaration recognizes the rights of indigenous families and communities to share and retain responsibility for the upbringing, education, and well-being of their children. Like the Declaration of Huaxyacac, it recognizes the multiplicity of indigenous identities around the world and states that the various historical and cultural backgrounds of each region or country must be taken into consideration. Addressing the issue of agency, Article 3 states that indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination, while Article 5 states that indigenous peoples have the right to maintain their distinct institutions (political, legal, economic, social, and cultural) while retaining the right to participate in the State, *if they so choose* (3, emphasis added).

These two declarations on indigenous rights reflect the type of agency that Walter Mignolo and José Rabasa have pointed to in their research on indigenous peoples, an agency that is absent in Altamirano’s body of work. The composers of the declarations

were able to come together in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries and identify key themes and obstacles they believe have negatively impacted their ability and rights to choose their own path. In many ways, the declarations reflect the same issues that indigenous groups in Mexico have been battling since the moment of first contact: forced assimilation, imposition of an educational system that enforces the values of the dominant culture, and loss of language and other identity markers. The United Nations Declaration, for example, emphasizes throughout the document the importance of maintaining their languages and cultural traditions, stating that indigenous peoples have the right to “revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures” (5).

The ability of these indigenous groups to come together and draft resolutions that will have legal, political, and social ramifications for aboriginal groups around the world speaks to their capacity to, according to Mignolo, change the terms of the conversation. They are taking control of the production of knowledge and moving from being the known—passive—to being the knower—active (“Epistemic Disobedience” 162). This brief glimpse into current issues involving indigenous groups bring us full circle to Altamirano’s views on the role of the *mestizo* and the Indian in nineteenth-century Mexico.

The Indians depicted by Altamirano in novels like *El Zarco* and *Navidad en las montañas*, in his historical works on Mexico, and in his essays on education, reflect what he and other members of the Liberal party viewed as the ideal Indian: submissive, noble, brave, a man of action yet loyal, and one willing to be educated, to be assimilated, into the new nation. In order to promote their image of the ideal *mestizo* Indian, Altamirano

and other intellectuals like Ignacio Ramírez and Justo Sierra constructed a derogatory image of the nineteenth-century Indian unable to escape his colonized state. He needed rescuing from vices such as drunkenness, idolatry, apathy, and ignorance. As the present study has demonstrated, many of these negative images were resurrected from colonial texts produced by such Creole elite as Sigüenza y Góngora and Fray Servando, who argued that the uneducated indigenous masses represented a threat to their unique American identity. Ironically, after Independence, the same uneducated indigenous masses were identified as a threat to the formation of the new nation.

Altamirano is careful to depict the nineteenth-century Indians as victims of colonialism, especially of the Church, and later of propaganda tactics employed by the Conservatives. As victims, they are not able to speak or act for themselves. In a continuation of colonial patriarchal attitudes towards indigenous groups, the dominant group determined that the Indian could not be held responsible for his state of “backwardness,” and, by the same logic, could not choose his own path. By denying indigenous groups agency, the Liberal party hoped to implement their project of *mestizaje* without any opposition. Unfortunately for them, the images they created—both idealized and negative—did not reflect the complex realities of life for Mexico’s diverse, autonomous indigenous groups.

In order to gain a more complete picture of what life was like for the indigenous populations during the colonial period and after Independence, the present study undertook an interdisciplinary approach that included archival, primary, and secondary literary, theoretical, and historical sources. The information these sources provided about the activities of indigenous groups were compared and contrasted to the representation of

the Indian in Altamirano's body of work. His experiences as a soldier, educator, and politician were also examined in order to see how he himself came to represent the ideal cultural *mestizo* of the Liberal party. By engaging in this interdisciplinary dialogue, a distinct image of Mexico's indigenous groups begins to emerge that is not present in Altamirano's works. The research of historians such as Gruzinski, Lockhart, and Guardino demonstrates that during the colonial period and after Independence, indigenous groups quickly learned to work within and outside of the dominant structure of power as necessary. They carved out spaces for themselves within the institutions of the Church and State, adopting the dominant culture's religion and legal system, for example, while retaining and incorporating their own traditional systems.

For theorists like Angel Rama, this adaptability is the process of transculturation, where the minority group takes what it needs from the dominant group while conserving what it wants from its own culture. It is not the process of *mestizaje* advocated by Altamirano and other nineteenth-century Liberals such as Andrés Molina Enríquez. As this study has shown through a close reading of Altamirano's works, Liberals advocated for a *mestizaje* that called for an erasure or cleansing of identifiable indigenous traits, both biological and cultural, first through education and secondly through a biological transformation that would be achieved through the promotion of immigration policies designed to gradually "whiten" the indigenous populations.

Historian Ethelia Ruiz Medrano's research yields additional examples of acculturation. She traces how indigenous groups have successfully used pictorial documents, along with maps and oral testimony, in disputes and litigation over land and property throughout the colonial period and well beyond into the twenty-first century. In

an example of Lienhard's theory of cultural *diglosia* at work, Ruiz Medrano points out that these pictorial documents were accorded the same legal status as notarial deeds and records. Thus, the subaltern permanently impacted the dominant culture's legal system, forcing a space within it for their traditional sources of information.

Historians have also demonstrated that indigenous groups participated during the wars for Independence and in all of the major political and military upheavals of the nineteenth century. Reflecting the diversity of these groups and their distinct agendas, indigenous groups did not always choose to support the same side, and, contrary to how Altamirano and other Liberal intellectuals have depicted them, they were not easily swayed by propaganda. Indeed, as Guardino, Lecaillon, Mallon, and Ruiz Medrano have shown, some groups chose to fight against Independence and against the Liberal agenda because they recognized that colonialism and later, a possible return to a monarchy, provided them with important safeguards that were being stripped by a Liberal agenda that had declared that the Indian no longer existed as a legal category.

By comparing and contrasting what historians have uncovered with the literary works of the nineteenth century, we note that this multiplicity of identities and voices among Mexico's indigenous populations is markedly absent in Altamirano's works. At the same time that their agency and participation was being suppressed, Altamirano was offering in its place an alternative image of the noble Indian of the past and a glorification of Mexico's pre-Hispanic culture. Like their colonial Creole predecessors, Altamirano and other Liberal intellectuals participated in what Miller and other scholars have deemed the erosion of autonomous indigenous communities and the romanticization

of the subaltern group, thus making it easy for the dominant groups to dismiss their active participation (Miller 4).

This study has also examined the education of the Indian as a recurring theme throughout the colonial period. After Independence, education became of paramount importance in order to achieve the cultural transformation of the Indian. The archival and primary sources employed in this work have shown that many of Mexico's indigenous groups never gave up their languages or their traditional beliefs. While they learned Spanish, incorporated aspects of Christian doctrine, and adapted to the Spanish legal systems, most did not allow themselves to become erased. Indeed, the educational policies of the nineteenth century clearly speak to this, as they continued to call for teaching Spanish to the rural indigenous groups and eradicating what the dominant culture continued to view as idolatry. Thus, the Liberal party's attempt to impose one solution—cultural transformation through education—to the “problem” of what to do with the contemporary Indian failed because it did not account for the diversity and multiplicity of identity among Mexico's indigenous populations. More importantly, the Liberal party failed to recognize that after hundreds of years of resistance and adaptation, the indigenous groups were not simply going to fade away.

According to Marilyn Grace Miller, many early nation builders in Latin America viewed *mestizaje* as vital to progress and development, and Ignacio Altamirano was no exception. The characters he creates in *El Zarco*—Nicolás and Pilar—represent what he sees as a necessary move towards the new Mexican identity of *mestizaje* that must reject its pure Indian and Spanish history. The Indians in *Navidad* reflect Liberal thinking regarding the modernization of indigenous pueblos through social and formal education.

Altamirano used his literary works to create the idea that the Indian had completely disappeared, leaving in its wake only a romanticized Aztec past of fierce and brave warriors who are relegated to an extinct past. Ideally, Altamirano wanted to replace the nineteenth-century Indian with the more desirable *mestizo* population: “población buena, tranquila, laboriosa, amante de la paz” (*El Zarco* 100). Yet, the Indian, or rather, the many indigenous communities of Mexico, have not disappeared. They certainly did not disappear with the conquest, during colonialism, during the war for Independence, or during the tumultuous years that followed Independence. And now, in the twenty-first century, aboriginal communities around the world continue to make their presence known, to assert their demands for equal treatment as citizens of the State, and to demand respect and recognition of their right to determine their own path. While one should not diminish the real discrimination, social and political obstacles, and loss of land and resources that these groups continue to face, this study demonstrates that neither should they be dismissed as simply victims, as often portrayed by members of the dominant culture in the nineteenth century.

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