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**TEACHING MEXICO: THE PEDAGOGY AND PROSE OF *EL  
MAESTRO RURAL* (1932-1940)**

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by

**Daniela MacGregor Sevilla**

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## **Dedication**

El cariño que siento por todo los que me ayudaron a completar esta disertación solo se puede expresar en mi lengua materna. Primero, a mi supervisor, Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, con quien he pasado horas felices de plática y aprendizaje en las calles de Austin y del D.F. La entrega de esta disertación se hace gracias al ánimo e inspiración que me aportaste durante estos años. A todos los profesores de mi comité por su apoyo, interés y paciencia. Por supuesto a mi familia, en especial a mis padres que aseguraron que mi hermano y yo siempre tuviéramos apego a su tierra natal y nunca fallaron en mostrarnos el Popo y la Izta al aterrizar. A mi esposo y a nuestros hijos, Patrick y Tristán Agustín. Ellos no se acordarán de las horas largas de escritura, o de sus reclamos vociferos cuando salía para la biblioteca, pero yo nunca olvidaré quien los mantuvo felices para que yo pudiera completar este trabajo. Y por fin, a mi dulce perro Cartucho, el compañero leal de mis años de estudiante graduada.

## **Abstract**

# **TEACHING MEXICO: THE PEDAGOGY AND PROSE OF *EL MAESTRO RURAL* (1932-1940)**

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This dissertation analyzes themes of colonization, nationalism, language and culture in the pedagogical magazine *El Maestro Rural*, published by Mexico's Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) from 1932 to 1940. This bimonthly magazine was distributed by the federal government to the rural schools throughout Mexico for the use in the school and community. *El Maestro Rural* was a vehicle for disseminating the national pedagogical practices, theories and philosophies that evolved during the postrevolutionary reconstruction of Mexican society. To that end it served as a tool for the national government to attempt the internal colonization of the rural indigenous communities. To provide context for the education program after 1932 I look at José Vasconcelos's tenure leading the SEP and the precursor to *El Maestro Rural*, *El Maestro*. I explore the way dance and theater were used by *El Maestro Rural* to create sanctioned uses of indigenous culture by creating spaces for performative citizenship. By looking at legends and short stories from *El Maestro Rural*, I analyze the ways in which the voice of the local community infiltrated the national dialogue producing a cultural bilingualism which contested the national narrative of progress.

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## Introduction

A simple black and white woodcut print in a style reminiscent of Diego Rivera<sup>1</sup> shows the words “El Maestro Rural” in the lower left corner. Above these, to serve as an example of this description, is a man with a dark complexion seated on a bench reading from a magazine, surrounded by young children whose faces resemble his own. Some are looking over his shoulder, others seem to contemplate his words with closed eyes, while a few are looking deeply into his face. All of them are rapt with attention. This is the way, in March of 1932, *El Maestro Rural*<sup>2</sup> began its eight-year run as a pedagogical magazine distributed to teachers working, oftentimes in isolation, throughout the growing network of federal-run rural schools. When I first touched the pages of *El Maestro Rural* it was with a slight feeling of awe. I felt at once very close and very distant from the teachers who had held the same pages in their hands over eighty years ago. I had found a source of information that provided insight into the national plan for postrevolutionary rural education and what felt like an intimate recounting of the life and work of the teachers who taught in remote rural communities of Mexico. I began by looking at how these two narratives were interconnected and found that the reality of work in the rural communities led the teachers to transform the way they created material for their students and communities to read.

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the woodcut is unsigned

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of continuity, I use the style of capitalization (each first letter) which the magazine itself uses most often on its cover and title page.

From 1932 to 1940 the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) published *El Maestro Rural*, this bimonthly magazine was distributed by the federal government to the rural schools throughout the Mexican states. From its inception and through the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, *El Maestro Rural* was a vehicle for disseminating the national pedagogical practices, theories and philosophies that evolved during the postrevolutionary reconstruction of Mexican society. The magazine was first published by the SEP under the direction of Narciso Bassols, whose tenure marked a turn towards an increasingly secular and socialist style of pedagogy meant to integrate all citizens into the modern industrial and agricultural economy Mexico was in the process of fortifying.

*El Maestro Rural* had three main contributors: the intellectuals and pedagogues writing from the capital, the directors and supervisors of the rural schools and the teachers working in rural areas. Occasionally, the students themselves would be invited to contribute through writing contests. The magazine was developed as a tool to enforce the ideologies with which the teachers were meant to inculcate their pedagogies. Foremost, the SEP hoped to unify the nation by assimilating the indigenous population into national culture.

What I see at work in *El Maestro Rural* is a colonialist effort of the Mexican government to use education as a tool for consolidating a hegemony throughout rural Mexico, especially in indigenous communities. After the Revolution, the government needed to find a way to guarantee the allegiance of disparate communities to one central nation-state. Because of the monumental status the Revolution has achieved it is hard to envision a time when, the Revolution was in the not so distant past and still very difficult

to define ideologically. To name a few of the sometimes allied, sometimes rival camps: portions of the country had sworn their allegiance to Pancho Villa and his communist goals, others were loyal to the agrarian reform championed by Emiliano Zapata, and others were called to action by the anarchist ideologies of Ricardo Flores Magón. In an effort to consolidate these different groups the government had to continue the armed revolution to ensure federal control but also coopted the voices of these different movements. Therefore, the government cast itself as the guardian of Revolutionary values for the nation, defining them in such a way that political power remained centralized at the capital and economic and social planning aligned itself with modern capitalist expansion. Eventually, under Lázaro Cárdenas, the Revolutionary government would also ensure the establishment of certain popular socialist projects including the redistribution of land and the nationalization of the petroleum industry. To ensure the success of these projects and continued economic growth the Revolutionary government had to incorporate its rural population into this new functioning economic model. The problem of the indigenous population fell to the jurisdiction of the SEP because, as we will see in my first chapter, Vasconcelos had envisioned the indigenous population as a transient problem, erased with the act of educating them into accepting the nation-state's model of modern progress. In this way the government, through the SEP is repeating the moment of colonial intrusion into the indigenous populations of Mexico. Aníbal Quijano has explained the coloniality of power as the ways in which the hierarchies of race, culture and knowledge constructed after the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese to Latin America have continued to exist and are translated into the capitalist era in such a

way that alternative knowledges, cultures, economic and social organizations are suppressed by the Euro-centric capitalist model.<sup>3</sup> Scholars, like José Rabasa in *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History*, have proposed ways in which subaltern subjects can produce autonomous knowledge from outside these hierarchies thus creating tenable political and social models. In the same way that neocolonialism has been a way for developed countries to influence developing nations through capital investment and cultural influence, the internal colonialism of Mexico's postrevolutionary government attempted to influence the underdeveloped regions of Mexico to suit the needs of the government. According to Pablo González Casanova, when a government is exercising the powers of internal colonialism, the ethnic minorities are not able to participate in the central government unless they assimilate the cultural, political and social practices of the dominant ethnic group. We can see the ways in which *El Maestro Rural* attempts to assimilate its pupils through didactic plays, stories, agricultural and hygiene lessons that invite them to participate in the Euro-centric, capitalist models of progress. At the same time the magazine is asking its *maestros rurales* to collect and share the cultural practices of the communities in which they work to create solidarity between the different indigenous communities by sharing their traditions throughout the nation. By doing close readings of the texts that the *maestro rurales* share with the SEP and each other in *El Maestro Rural* I propose to show the

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<sup>3</sup> See Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15.2 (2000): 215-232. SAGE Journals. Web.

ways in which they challenge and even break their allegiance to the national models of economic and social progress.

The seminal work on *El Maestro Rural* is the historiographic study by Guillermo Palacios *La pluma y el arado. Los intelectuales pedagogos y la construcción sociocultural del “problema campesino”<sup>4</sup> en México, 1932-1934* which looks at *El Maestro Rural* as a privileged source of historical information and insight into the process of creating a cultural and ideological postrevolutionary project. Palacios highlights the way the magazine's content was a collaboration of intellectuals, district supervisors, and rural pedagogues and was geared for consumption not only by those responsible for the education of the rural population but by the *campesino* communities themselves. One of the shortcomings of Palacios's study is his truncated analysis. Palacios states that his study of *El Maestro Rural* focuses on the magazine from its inception to 1934 because of the transformation in the content and structure which the magazine underwent beginning in 1934 due to the changes in the SEP after Lázaro Cárdenas was elected president. Palacios argues that these changes, which included directing the magazine only to the rural teachers, meant that its contents were no longer meant for the community. By changing the intended audience, Palacio argues that the SEP is accepting that it failed to create viable literature for the newly literate *campesinos*. What Palacios does not acknowledge is the drastic increase in plays and literature for adults and children in the pages of *El Maestro Rural* after 1934. Apart from two or three

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<sup>4</sup> Even when translating his articles to English, Palacios continues to use the term “campesinos” or “Indo-campesinos” to refer to the rural population which was the focus of this education policy. Using this term allows Palacios to combine the peasant's cultural tie to their land and indigenous past.

special issues dedicated to solely pedagogical topics, each edition of *El Maestro Rural* contained at least one legend, short story, poem or play that was meant to be shared with the *campesino* community. Though the major strength of *La pluma y el arado* is that Palacios supports his argument by predominantly drawing directly from the pages of *El Maestro Rural*, the study relies more heavily on the cultural essays written by the major intellectuals of the SEP rather than its cultural and practical content written by the teachers themselves. Palacios does occasionally refer to the essays, plays, stories, and poems contributed by the rural teachers. However, he forsook this more interpretive reading of the literary content for a reading of the cultural situation provided by the national and, by Palacios's own definition, urbane intellectuals. This situates the majority of his study outside the rural landscape which it hoped to illustrate.

Mary Kay Vaughan's *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasant, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* draws from *El Maestro Rural* as one of its primary sources. In her study, Vaughan looks at *El Maestro Rural* in conjunction with other pedagogical texts, information provided in bi-monthly reports performed in rural SEP schools, and interviews with the local population to explain the forces shaping national popular culture and the postrevolutionary government's hegemony in rural Mexico. Vaughan notes that "This notion of national popular culture rested heavily on the achievements of the Indian past and contemporary Indian aesthetics, which were nationalized as symbols, object, and artifacts" (46). She goes on to explain that although indigenous culture was accepted as a foundation of Mexico's aesthetic it was important that those cultural practices never interfere with the ultimate goal of education: creating

modern Mexican citizens. Vaughan explains that the government saw indigenous society as “insular, religious, and subsistence-oriented” and modern Mexican society had to become the opposite by doing away with beliefs that would prevent communities from taking part in the national economy and contributing to the expansion of Mexico’s share in a global market (47). Vaughan’s analysis give insight to the processes by which education transformed rural Mexico’s participation with the rest of the nation. What I have done differently is to see how this transformation was enacted through the texts made available to these communities during a time when increased literacy was a major focus of education.

Unlike Guillermo Palacios who limits the scope of his work to 1932-1934, I have addressed the changing nature of the SEP’s goals by looking to their origins under Vasconcelos’s leadership and then at the developments that took place during Cárdenas’s presidency. My methodology is to look at *El Maestro Rural* as a colonial text like the codices compiled by Catholic missionaries of the sixteenth century which archive and coopt knowledge. However, I argue that *El Maestro Rural*’s invitation for the teachers to participate in the formation of its content allows space for the negotiation of SEP’s goals and the actual needs of the local communities.

Following these historiographic studies, my own work seeks to address the ways that *El Maestro Rural* simultaneously celebrates indigenous traditions and denigrates contemporary practices of indigenous communities. What I propose is that through a close reading of the content of *El Maestro Rural* that was specifically meant to be shared with the community we can see how the SEP’s attempt to transform the community was

countered by the locals. How do the plays and dances that are meant to be performed by and for the community invite them to take part in a national narrative that threatens to invalidate their everyday cultural practices? How do the stories that the teachers share with their students show their ability to understand the needs of the community in which they live and to what degree does this combat the national model of education that the SEP was proposing?

To better understand the SEP of the 1930s from which *El Maestro Rural* was published I begin with José Vasconcelos's time leading the SEP. Because he was hoping to create an education policy that would give rise to a nation devoid of what he saw as backward indigenous communities he modeled it on his ideal example of the cosmopolitan Mexican citizen, himself. Therefore, I look at his autobiography alongside his pedagogical treatises and how these reflect the content of *El Maestro*, a pedagogical magazine which is a precursor to *El Maestro Rural*. Although *El Maestro Rural* on the surface seems to want to challenge Vasconcelos's style of assimilative education for indigenous communities by including indigenous culture as a valued part of the national aesthetic, in actuality the SEP is continuing the colonialist project of pushing the progressive agenda of the nation-state on local and often isolated indigenous communities.

I then look directly at the content of *El Maestro Rural*, situating it historically to better understand the political and social ramifications of its message. For instance, the inclusion of dances and plays to be taught and performed in the rural schools is driven by the desire to foster a new patriotic ceremonial practice that would help delineate the

boundaries of the Mexican nation. Whereas the inclusion of stories served didactic purposes, they also eventually allowed the teachers to insert themselves alongside the struggles of the communities where they worked.

In the wake of the Revolution which saw the birth of the politically mobilized “revolutionary peasant” the state became more interested in weaving the *campesino* into the fabric of the nation to ensure his pacific participation in the national project. As Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla points out, the development of *indigenista* policies by the state aimed at helping “civilize” the indigenous population defined the indigenous people in such a way that it recreated the moment of colonization by blurring ethnic particularities and erasing their historical trajectories. The creations of the sociopolitical category “*indigena*” by the early twentieth century *indigenistas* paralleled the conquistadors’ invention of the term Indian which negated the ethno-historic particularities of the civilizations they encountered. As historian Rebecca Earle points out, the category of Indian was created in 1492 and has since been used in Latin America in various ways to strengthen the national imaginary. For instance, during the War of Mexican Independence representations of the betrayal of the Aztec emperor by Hernán Cortés were used to instill hatred against the treacherous Spanish colonizers. These celebrations of the Aztec empire fomented an allegiance to and interest in ancient indigenous civilizations. The archeological study of ancient indigenous civilizations and their nationwide glorification would culminate in what Earle refers to as the near godlike status of Aztec royalty after the 1910 Revolution. Yet Earle is careful to point out that for all the admiration of indigenous antiquity the iconographic framing of indigenousness

as part of the nation was limited to a narrow and abstracted notion, much in the same way as iconic feminine representations of the nation and liberty in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not translate to women's civic rights or freedom. The indigenous cultures that would ultimately be considered acceptable to the nation would have to pass through the filter of the state to ensure that they reflected a Mexican nation that was proud of its indigenous heritage but not condoning its contemporary cultural manifestations. By looking at *El Maestro Rural* this study analyzes what happens when the nationally celebrated version of indigenous cultures is brought back to the indigenous communities where they originated.

I found it helpful to understand the ways in which the SEP attempted to exert its influence in rural communities by looking at the arrival of the teachers as a colonial encounter. As Walter Mignolo explains in his study on colonization in the New World, colonial encounters are not simply "transmitting meaning or representation" but involve "a process of manipulation and control" (xvi *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*). The encounters between the SEP and the rural communities mirror the power structure of the colonial era but the colonizing is happening from within the nation itself, a form of internal colonialism that overrides the interests of the community for those of the nation. Mexican sociologist and political scientist, Pablo González Casanova, has looked at the way postrevolutionary states are able to maintain much of the colonial structure that kept the elites in power through the forces of internal colonialism. When the colonial structures of power remain in place the only way for members of a minority community, such as the rural communities of Mexico, to participate in the government is by

assimilation, which is what the SEP's efforts to “castellanizar” the indigenous communities are attempting to accomplish. For this reason, the SEP demands that the *maestros rurales* maintain their status as “gente de razon”<sup>5</sup>—working with the community, not alongside them but out ahead as beacons of modern Mexico.

The message of the SEP in *El Maestro Rural*, and in Vasconcelos's *El Maestro* is clear. The teacher's role in the school is meant to mimic the mother's role in the home with a special emphasis on storytelling as a means of teaching the Spanish language and instilling lessons on social responsibility, hygiene and the dangers of vices at the same time. Licia Fiol-Matta has noted the way Gabriela Mistral's time in Mexico was spent celebrating indigenous culture and calling upon Latin America to embrace its “indigenous mother”. However, real indigenous women were not allowed to teach, the SEP instead chose “urban women, likely to belong to the white criollo class” (Fiol-Matta 69). Although some indigenous legends are included in *El Maestro Rural* when it came time to encourage students to write and read they were not meant to write about their indigenous traditions. Instead *El Maestro Rural* encouraged its students to write stories about what they had learned in school and how the community was improved by the presence of the school. The legends become part of what José Rabasa has called Mexico's tendency “to privilege antiquarian historiography” when gathering indigenous knowledge and artifacts (*Without History* 18). Antiquarianism relegates these legends to Ancient Mexico and appropriates the act of storytelling from the community.

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<sup>5</sup> “Gente de razón” is a term developed in the colonial era and can be translated to “people of reason”. In *El Maestro Rural*, as in its historical usage it was used to distinguish outsiders who spoke Spanish and were culturally bound to Hispanic culture from indigenous communities.

Antiquarianism is a facet of the colonizing process by which the colonizer determines what is valuable from indigenous cultures and what is not. If the legends and dances that are compiled in *El Maestro Rural* are treated in the same way as the artifacts of indigenous culture that are housed and organized in the museum the observer is not invited to understand the cultural context from which they arose so much as appreciate that they have been salvaged for the sake of posterity. Néstor García Canclini explains that by removing artifacts from their context a museum, “asks for contemplation, not the effort that should be made by someone who arrives in a different society and needs to learn its language, its ways of cooking and eating, of working and rejoicing” (*Hybrid Cultures* 120). If the SEP may have been able to contemplate the content collected by *maestros* in the way Canclini describes, the *maestros* themselves were in the process of doing the opposite as their lives became more entangled with the communities in which they lived.

In my analysis, I read the legends alongside the work of Kelly McDonough in *The Learned Ones: Nahua Intellectuals in Post Conquest Mexico*. In this way, the different tales compiled by teachers from within their community and placed in *El Maestro Rural* are stories shared by a member of an indigenous community who actively was participating in the production and transmission of knowledge. These legends can be read as a response to the work of the teachers and the SEP. The storytelling we see in *El Maestro Rural* is a way of seeing the evolution of the teacher’s role in the community where they work. In analyzing these final stories, I found that they foreshadowed some of the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who explained the importance of

working and knowing a community from the inside and teaching accordingly in an attempt to strive for social justice. As the teachers become more comfortable with both the language of the SEP and the language of the communities a cultural bilingualism emerges, which is reflected in the stories they create. I will look at the way this relates to linguistic theories of language suppression in bilinguals as illustrated in the studies of David Green in which a speaker must inhibit the use of one language to speak in the other, I argue that the same mental control is needed to speak from one cultural perspective and not another.

Looking at bilingual lexico-semantic systems is suited to my dissertation since, taken as a whole, it illustrates the changing nature of the conversation between the SEP and the rural communities to whom *El Maestro Rural* was directed. By beginning my analysis with *El Maestro Rural*'s precursor published by the SEP under Vasconcelos, *El Maestro*, where indigenous cultures were silenced, I show how the SEP's dictamen evolved into a dialogue. I continue by looking at the dances and theater pieces included in *El Maestro Rural* where indigenous communities were told how to perform like indigenous peoples but behave like modern Mexican citizens. These spectacles allowed rural audiences and the teachers to respond to the shifting expectations of the SEP. Finally, I arrive at the evolving nature of storytelling provided in *El Maestro Rural* which reveals a new type of communication between the SEP, its teachers and the rural communities.

In a brief essay entitled, “Language as an Instrument of Domination” Rosario Castellanos, who actively participated in the indigenous education effort, traces the

power dynamics encompassed in the use of language in Latin America since the arrival of the Spanish missionaries and how it has created hierarchies of racial and class privilege. Castellanos explains that when introduced to indigenous peoples, "language-- like religion or race -- constitutes a privilege that, paradoxically (or at least apparently), tends to cease to be one when it is divulged, communicated, extended." (250). If the goal of a shared national language is to deconstruct hierarchies, in Latin America it did the opposite: erecting them and relegating political power to what Angel Rama refers to as *la ciudad letrada*. What Castellanos proposes is that the focus should not be on producing the language but instead on creating a new type of listener. This is how Castellanos explains that shift, "The meaning of a word is its addressee: the other being who hears it, understands it, and who, when he answers, converts his questioner into a listener and *understander*, establishing in this way the relationship of dialogue that is only possible between beings who consider themselves and deal with each other as equals." (251).

As the first director of the SEP, José Vasconcelos did not look at the indigenous communities of rural Mexico as equals. His time at the SEP is marked by his unilateral approach to providing education to the rural indigenous population. His goal was to create a temporary indigenous education program that would be disbanded when its mission of assimilating the indigenous population into the nation was complete. Once the indigenous population could speak Spanish and understand what he viewed as Universal, but were really Eurocentric epistemologies as he did, they would be able to take part in the national conversation and no longer be considered *indigenas*. To do this he attempted to uproot local indigenous traditions and replace them with a Eurocentric cultural canon.

In Chapter 1, “Vasconcelos’s Pedagogical Odyssey: The Fears of a *Ulises Criollo* and the Construction of National Cultural Identity,” I look at Vasconcelos’s attempts to expand, promote and unify public education throughout Mexico as a federal project. This chapter serves as a backdrop for the SEP’s postrevolutionary education project allowing me to show how much of the official policy of the SEP continued with Vasconcelos’s goals of assimilating the indigenous population. It also serves to introduce an early attempt at reaching the rural schools through literature and culture made available in the magazine *El Maestro*. I look at three of Vasconcelos’s publications: his pedagogical treatise *De Robinson a Odiseo* (1935), the first part of his autobiography which addresses his own time at school, *Ulises Criollo* (1935), and the third part, *El desastre* (1938), that deals directly with his time at the SEP under Álvaro Obregón’s presidency (1920-1924). By looking at how the themes in his bibliography converge with his pedagogical treatise I argue that Vasconcelos is replicating the anxieties of his youth by vilifying the two groups: The United States of America and Mexico’s indigenous communities. His educational model is an explicit continuation of the work of the Catholic missionaries whom he invariably references as a source of inspiration for his teachers. *El Maestro* (1921-1924), the pedagogical magazine published under Vasconcelos’s guidance shows how he expected to provide a breadth of cultural knowledge to the students of the schools that would allow them to share in what he saw as the universal culture that would unify Mexico. There could not have been a magazine like *El Maestro Rural* without the failure of *El Maestro*, and for this reason I include it in this chapter as a precursor.

I begin Chapter 2, “Theater and Dance in *El Maestro Rural*: The *Campesino* as Performed by Post-Revolutionary Mexico”, by transitioning historically from Vasconcelos’s departure from the SEP in 1924 into the presidential term of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) a time period which coincides with the publication of *El Maestro Rural* (1932-1934). Since *El Maestro Rural* was one of the main sources for pedagogical materials available to teachers in rural schools it is a privileged source for understanding the projects and goals that the SEP wanted to communicate to its teachers in the field. In this chapter I focus on the performances which *El Maestro Rural* provided for its teachers’ use in their schools. These dances and plays are what they wanted their students to perform and, importantly, what they wanted the communities to gather together to watch. I look at how the rural peasant population was taught what it meant to be Mexican in the postrevolutionary era by looking at these plays and dances as lessons in performative citizenship. With the help of Pablo González Casanova’s descriptions of internal colonization, I will show how the national education project was an effort to re-colonize indigenous communities. Traditional indigenous dances become a source of national patriotic pageantry, stripped of their religious and local cultural signifiers. *El Maestro Rural* is telling students and teachers that it is only permissible to act like indigenous people on a stage. Meanwhile, *mestizo* dances, such as “El huapango,” presented by Rafael M. Saavedra, are contextualized as they relate to contemporary rural life in the wake of the Revolution. Plays, like “El huapango” emphasize the need to continue to fight for the rights of the community which the Revolution had legitimized. These plays press the communities to action much like the anarchist plays of the

prerevolutionary era, inciting them to demand justice from within the community as opposed to asking the government to protect their rights. As *El Maestro Rural* begins to shift its target audience to children as opposed to the community as a whole, the message is transformed. The lessons offered by the plays is less about combatting the injustices imposed upon the community and more about fighting the vices that plague the community from within. The plays focus on the importance of discipline, sobriety and hygiene thus exemplifying the practices of internal colonialism in which the interests of the nation-state, in this case economic growth through the construction of a viable workforce, override the interests of the community.

Whereas Chapter 2 mostly addresses the dictates from the SEP and their attempt to create a model citizen, Chapter 3, “Storytelling in *El Maestro Rural*: Language, Knowledge and Dialogue” uses the stories contributed to *El Maestro Rural* by teachers to analyze their conflicted role within the community as spokespeople for the SEP’s proposed goals of modernization. *El Maestro Rural* is criticizing the work of the Church and at the same time replicating its colonialist efforts, this time with the gospel of progress in which salvation is attained by acquiescing to the prerequisites for modernization, in other words becoming part of the capitalist economic expansion of Mexico. I open with an analysis of “El maestro” by Adolfo Velasco. This story of the foundation of the ideal school by the ideal teacher is the first short story published in *El Maestro Rural*. My close reading of this story shows the ways in which the teacher negotiates his place within a primarily indigenous community. Then, I compare his role to that of Ernesto in Rosario Castellanos’s *Balún Canán* to better explore the

problematization of how dialogue between the teacher and his community can challenge the patriarchy. Building on this idea, I analyze the ways in which Rafael Ramírez, the Director of Rural Schools at the time, warned teachers against speaking to their students in their native languages because he said they could lose their position as “gente de razon” by backslicing into indigenous styles of thought. However, at the same time the magazine includes legends collected by teachers from indigenous sources as part of its educational content for teachers and their students. By reading these legends as the work of knowledge producers from within the community, I show how they can be used to challenge the colonial narrative of progress which the SEP enforces. In practice the need to connect to the communities in which they worked was challenged, sometimes violently, by the loyalists to the Cristero Rebellion.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, teachers who entered the writing competitions run by the SEP played with the rules against including superstition and other traditional storytelling devices. Finally, I look at the way stories from the final years of *El Maestro Rural* begin to challenge the prescriptions of the SEP by mixing regional dialects into their storytelling. By practicing a style of cultural bilingualism these teachers are able to code switch between the community in which they work and the SEP. This style of story prefigures the pedagogical theories of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire in which the teacher or leader begins to understand their role as part of the community in which they work. The result is a new style of language, and a new social

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<sup>6</sup> The Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929) was a struggle between the federal government's secularist policies which sought to eliminate the influence of the Catholic Church by suppressing religious practices. The most violent conflicts which ensued between supporters of the church and the federal government came to an end with a truce signed in 1929. However, violence continued during Cárdenas's presidency due to what was perceived as anti-Catholic policies, especially in education. For this reason, teachers bore much of the violence in this second era of the Cristero Rebellion.

message which challenges the colonialist push for progress rooted in what the SEP perceives as the social and economic models for modern Mexico.

*El Maestro Rural* aided the efforts of internal coloniality by allowing the SEP to mediate directly into the curriculum of the rural classrooms. However, the “maestros rurales” were not mirrors of the SEP’s hegemonic project but filters through which it had to pass. The state’s goal was to create a homogenous mestizo citizen to populate the rural communities of Mexico thus creating a unified national citizenry. Though *El Maestro Rural* and its contributors may have initially believed in this utopic construct of uniting rural communities throughout the country, the evolving nature of the teacher’s contributions was shaped by their experiences in the communities where they worked. In the same way that the coopted indigenous imagery failed to create an allegiance to the nation from the communities that initially gave rise to these traditions, the stories written and transcribed by the rural schoolteachers at times rejected its erasure of ethnic and cultural particularities that the SEP had labeled as primitive. In 1934, *El Maestro Rural* tried, not for the first time to redefine its mission. In an article entitled, “Lo que es y lo que quiere ser ‘El Maestro Rural’” the unnamed author describes the mission of the magazine to be a “especie de cordón umbilical que mantiene ligado al Maestro Rural con la capital en que se encuentran todos los prestigios económicos y civiles, impidiéndoles que se hunda en el nirvana de la indolencia y el fatalismo de las gentes de nuestra jungla” (6).<sup>7</sup> What the author fails to realize is that his metaphor is apt, but not for the reason he or she intended. An umbilical cord is meant to provide nutrients only temporarily in utero until a baby is born. Therefore, eventually the teacher will be ready to forgo his or her connection to the SEP for an independent life. He or she will be a fully formed

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<sup>7</sup> "Lo que es y lo que quiere ser "El Maestro Rural". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 10. 15 Nov 1934, 4-6

individual, who instead of falling into an indolent nirvana, is able to decide for his or herself what the so-called jungle in which he or she has been teaching has to offer. What my study shows is the way these teachers were able to live a culturally bilingual life. Informed by the teaching of the SEP and also autonomous from it because of their allegiance to the towns in which they worked. I argue that through this cultural bilingualism, *El Maestro Rural*'s content shows the way that autonomous political, social, and cultural practices within indigenous communities survived the efforts of internal colonization. What one can find in the pages of *El Maestro Rural* is a conversation taking place between intellectuals, teachers and the communities they served which resembles what Rosario Castellanos proposed in the essay I cited above. A conversation in which both those who question, and those who answer are taking part in the act of understanding. It is a conversation between a colonial power and the communities that it was attempting to transform which continues to this day. The dialogue that one sees on the pages of *El Maestro Rural* brought about a bilingual conversation between rural communities and the colonialist powers of the Revolutionary government in which the communities came to demand to be heard as equals.

## **Chapter 1: Vasconcelos's Pedagogical Odyssey: The Fears of a *Ulises Criollo* and the Construction of National Cultural Identity**

In the years following the Mexican Revolution a new style of federal government sought to reestablish national order and incorporate the once disenfranchised impoverished majority that had mobilized during the armed struggle. The majority of urban and agricultural workers still suffered from lack of economic and social resources that had brought about their political awakening in the form of armed insurrection. As in the years prior to the Revolution, the government saw public education as a necessary step toward a representative democracy in which each member of civil society understood his or her place within the greater national framework. In this first chapter I will look at the key figure in post-revolutionary education reform, José Vasconcelos (1882-1959). Vasconcelos was an active participant in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and, after accepting his post as the president of the *Universidad Nacional de Mexico* (National University of Mexico), he developed a plan to federalize the public school system that would lead to his appointment as the first Minister of Public Education for the newly created *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Secretariat of Public Education or SEP). His tours throughout Mexico's remote municipalities and rural towns showed Vasconcelos a disjointed and disparate Mexico in dire need of vast educational and social reform to raise the standard of living of the population and unite the nation. Aware that the Revolution had opened up to the poorer classes the possibility of political action through violence, the intellectual and political class wanted to unite them under a common notion of nationhood so as to prevent further social unrest and rebuild the

national economy. Vasconcelos proposed that the best way to do this was by fostering a cultural patrimony that would be shared with all through the national education system.

In this chapter I will address several of the projects that Vasconcelos put into place during his time as head of the SEP from 1921 to 1924. Vasconcelos left an indelible mark on the Mexican education system through development of a literacy campaign, wide dissemination of texts by the national government's publishing branch for educational and cultural purposes, and the construction of the SEP headquarters as well as hundreds of new schools. His legacy was not without its challengers, as evidenced by the drastic changes that took place in the education system during its transition from Vasconcelos's hands to those who would lead it during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). His political influence exponentially increased the funding available to the public education system which, though then President Plutarco Elias Calles reduced the budget drastically in 1924 the year Vasconcelos left the SEP. Vasconcelos's fervent work to create public funds for education set a precedent of national responsibility for the state of schools. The reach of his public persona guaranteed that, even after his departure and fall from popularity, his conception of the future incarnation of Mexican citizenry and the kind of men and women that would shape them remained vital to the formation of the SEP. For Vasconcelos growth of the education system was equivalent to the continuation of the missions of the first Catholic missionaries. In an address to the teachers of the SEP on the celebration of the *Día del Maestro* Vasconcelos extols their virtues encouraging them to look upon teaching as "una vocación religiosa" that with the help of the government will make of education a

“cruzada de misticismo” that serves to redeem the nation’s morality (*Textos* 147). In lieu of a specific religion Vasconcelos hoped to inspire a feeling of moral obligation amongst his young fleet of teachers to bring all those who had been left behind into the folds of modern Mexico. In many ways the popular socialism of Lázaro Cárdenas’s government and cultural movement, especially the in the public arts, of the ensuing years were a reaction to Vasconcelos and his generation’s attempts to funnel the nation into a particular mold of modern culture that followed that of Europe. This chapter analyzes how Vasconcelos envisioned the cultural future of Mexico and how these views contrast with how his successors in the SEP would transform his vision to fall in line with those who opposed him.

Of the vast quantity of publications by José Vasconcelos the following directly address his efforts to create an educational model for Mexico: his pedagogical treatise *De Robinson a Odiseo (From Robinson (Crusoe) to Odysseus)* (1935), the first part of his autobiography, *Ulises Criollo* (1935), and the third part, *El desastre* (1938), that deals directly with his time at the SEP under Álvaro Obregón’s presidency (1920-1924). First I will give a brief overview of Vasconcelos’s time at the SEP including his contributions to the use of public art, specifically murals, in public education. Following this I turn to Vasconcelos’s recounting of his childhood in *Ulises Criollo* and compare his self-assessment of his experiences as a student to the ideal education he outlines in *De Robinson a Odiseo*. This analysis will reveal how his personal anxieties about the future of the Mexican national identity translated into his pedagogical practice. His political attempts to institute these pedagogies are outlined in *El desastre* where Vasconcelos

discusses his successes and failures as the head of the SEP. *El desastre* gives particular insight into his failure to counter the influence of anthropologist Manuel Gamio. Vasconcelos's humanist views which he developed as a member of the Ateneo de la Juventud came into conflict with men like Gamio who sought a deeper understanding of the different contemporary indigenous cultures of Mexico. By looking at Vasconcelos's self-censure in *El desastre*'s manuscripts it is possible to assess how his lack of understanding of Mexico's indigenous population was a purposeful omission in his education policy and also contributed to his most notable work, *La raza cósmica*. The publication *El Maestro*, for which Vasconcelos was chiefly responsible, is evidence of the cultural legacy, one without reference to contemporary indigenous culture, that Vasconcelos hoped to share and disseminate throughout Mexico. In *De Robinson a Odiseo* Vasconcelos responds to the attacks of his successors who suspended the publication of the magazine in favor of more practical pedagogical texts such as *El Maestro Rural*. Finally, this chapter closes with the speech Vasconcelos gave at the inauguration of the SEP headquarters. Because of its proximity to the end of his time at the head of the SEP, the speech evidences Vasconcelos's imminent loss of power over the project that he had begun.

My analysis of Vasconcelos's autobiography and his public speeches will shed light on the growing conflicts between Vasconcelos's view for the future of Mexico and the members of his political, artistic and intellectual entourage that in many cases turned into adversaries. Vasconcelos's education plan combined political, social, and cultural reform; it was meant to edify the future Mexican citizen. In his desire to create a holistic

education reform, Vasconcelos called to his side some of the most noted minds of his time. He commissioned artists to complete public works and murals for the SEP's various buildings including Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Roberto Montenegro to name a few. He also drew support from intellectuals and authors like Gabriela Mistral, Julio Torri and more. In some of these figures, such as Gabriela Mistral, he would find ardent supporters of his educational and social plans, but others would become some of his most ardent detractors. The contrasting visions of Mexico proposed by Vasconcelos and his contemporaries played against one another on the political and educational field; each one rooted in divergent plans for the future of the Mexican nation.

To understand the distinction between Vasconcelos and his successors, one can compare *El maestro* (1921-1923) with *El Maestro Rural* (1932-1934). Vasconcelos guided the publication of *El maestro* under the SEP. While *El Maestro Rural* (1932-1934) appeared nearly a decade later, to a certain extent the magazines served similar purposes. They were meant to share and endorse new pedagogical practices and provide “proper” reading material for both pupils and educators in the many regional schools that for the first time fell under federal jurisdiction. The main focus of this study, *El Maestro Rural* (1932-1940), was published by the SEP under Narciso Bassols during the transitional period at the end of Pascual Ortiz Rubio’s presidency and throughout the Cárdenas administration. However, while *El maestro* fails to acknowledge the impact of the Revolution on its readership, *El Maestro Rural* requests and addresses feedback from the communities that are experiencing drastic changes in their economic, political, and

social realities. The Revolution had raised the volume of the political voice of a once virtually silent/silenced majority. Both magazines are openly attempting to unite these new voices into one nation, but only the latter welcomes them as individuals into the creation of the nation. *El maestro* is a top down publication that provided teachers and students with the opinions and culture celebrated by the intellectuals of the nation's capital. In *El Maestro Rural* these same intellectuals began to increasingly acknowledge peripheral/marginal voices that not only respond but demand information and answers from the nation's capital. *El maestro* reveals a cultural and educational project that had not yet come to terms with the participation of a multitude of national voices and instead focused on attempting to create harmony through coerced unification.

Vasconcelos was able to convince the post-Revolutionary government that education was a necessary endeavor that called for immediate funding because it serves as a means of improving the life of far flung communities and thereby strengthening their attachment to the nation. As Vasconcelos often looked at his work as an extension of the process of colonization begun by the colonial missionaries it is interesting to turn to the work of social anthropologists David Brokensha and Peter Hodge who studied the colonialist model of community development in the 1920s and its eventual manifestation as the nationalist model. In *Community Development: An Interpretation* Brokensha and Hodge draw mainly on educational models from former British colonies in Africa and schools in the United States. However different the landscapes which Brokensha and Hodge analyze may be from rural Mexico in the 1920s their study sheds light on the two major reasons why education, especially in once isolated rural communities, is a crucial

aspect of any development within a national framework. The first is that education instills a sense of value for rural communities within the greater nation-state. The second is that it teaches those living in rural communities the national model of progress. With this taken into account it is therefore crucial to think of community development not as a function on its own but as a process taking place within a national framework.

Vasconcelos's first step in creating the SEP after the revolution was to reach out to the rural communities that had little to no contact with the federal government. Forging these new connections with rural communities allowed Vasconcelos the opportunity to tell them about his proposal to federalize the public school system and emphasize the importance of a curriculum centered on Mexico as a nation. By bringing education to these far off places Vasconcelos hoped to begin the process of uniting these communities under one flag. Vasconcelos and his contemporaries in the post-Revolutionary government saw unification as a critical step for the nation to be governed peaceably after the fighting between bands of revolutionaries had led to years of violence throughout the nation. These goals did not necessarily translate into the advancement of the social and political interests of the people who inhabited these often impoverished areas of the Mexican countryside. In "Education and Class in the Mexican Revolution" Mary Kay Vaughn argues that from 1890 to 1930 the education system was designed "to mold a labor force equipped with skills and attitudes appropriate to the modernization process and values and beliefs legitimizing bourgeois rule" (17). Vasconcelos's work was part of this project of legitimization, but throughout his time at the SEP he came

increasingly into contact with the communist and populist socialist current that ran contrary to his own projected outcome.

## I. VASCONCELOS'S LEGACY: A DREAM CONSTRUCTED WITH MURALS AND STATUES

José Vasconcelos was the first Minister of Public Education to head the newly federalized public school system from 1921 to 1924. During that time, he oversaw the federalization, (re)secularization, and massive expansion of the public education system in Mexico and left an indelible mark on the construction of Mexican identity through the practice of publicly funded cultural growth in the post-revolutionary era and beyond. From the vast opus that is his auto-biography there are two sections, *Ulises Criollo* (1935) and *El desastre* (1938), that are of most interest when discussing Vasconcelos's time as the Minister of Public Education since the first deals with his own childhood education and the latter recounts his time at the SEP under Álvaro Obregón's presidency (1920-1924). He also intersperses autobiographical accounts throughout his pedagogical treatise *De Robinson a Odiseo (From Robinson (Crusoe) to Odysseus)* (1935) while attempting to justify and sanction the choices he made while head of the SEP. These works reveal Vasconcelos's dislike for the changes that were taking place in the national education project after his self-exile in the wake of his failed run for the presidency in 1929. The fears, anxieties, and insecurities of Vasconcelos's childhood memories permeate his pedagogical plan as evidenced by his desire to transform the perceived dangers of the unknown indigenous and campesino majority into his own familiar likeness. Vasconcelos recounts raids on his home in Piedras Negras from both the United

States and the Apache tribes that lived in close proximity to his family home. I will show how by including these attacks as well as his experiences as an elementary school student in Eagle Pass, Vasconcelos represents cultural anxieties that reflect his conception of national education as a defense against the barbarity of American and indigenous cultures. Popular memory embraces Vasconcelos as an emblem of cultural and racial harmony because of his widely read and discussed *La raza cósmica* (1925) in which he trumpets the dawning of a new fifth race to be born of the combination of the four existing races. Yet much of his imaginative discourse on the virtues of the indigenous race do not embrace the contemporary realities of Mexico but an idealized visualization of an nonexistent indigenous subject from the past. Unlike the harmony he presents in *La raza cosmica* Vasconcelos meets the American and indigenous communities as outside threats against which he proffers a Hispanic-European vision of national identity that would overshadow the indigenous cultures of Mexico and defend against American materialism by strengthening the nation's spirituality.

During the inaugural years of the SEP, Vasconcelos set forth to disseminate an education program that was meant to integrate the threatening indigenous communities from his childhood into the folds of a unified and normalized national cultures. After 1935, when he described this education project in his autobiography and pedagogical treatise, he was attempting to reinforce the crumbling ground upon which he stood as a public figure at the time. Vasconcelos was no longer at the center of the national education project; instead, he was watching his creation fall out of his hands and into those which would forge a secular socialist education that negated and even mocked his

efforts to instill the Mexican people with European knowledge and aesthetics. In Vasconcelos's eyes his project would have both controlled the barbarity of the indigenous people by forcing them to adhere to Western epistemology and aesthetics and distinguished Mexico from its Anglo-Saxon neighbor by allying itself culturally more closely to Europe. The cultural missions, rural schools, urban literacy, and art education projects aimed at constructing a levee of universalist culture derived from European, especially Greek and Latin classical sources, to combat the raging waters of "yanqui" imperialism.<sup>8</sup> Much in the same way that the cultural and literary movement known as modernism broke with positivist and utilitarian traditions of the nineteenth century by looking to European epistemology and classical sources, the aim of Vasconcelos was to create a cosmopolitan nation consisting of a growing literate populace. Vasconcelos's insistence on a unilateral conception of culture negates the incursion of alternative knowledge production into the national imaginary, thus drawing sharp epistemological boundaries for his idealized mestizo citizen.

Seen as a whole, the vast body of Vasconcelos's work can seem self-contradictory due to his defense of the secular liberal revolution followed by an approximation to

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<sup>8</sup> Under Vasconcelos's leadership the Mexican government increased the education budget exponentially resulting in a variety of education campaigns including the "Misiones Culturales" which beginning in 1923 sent educators and volunteers throughout the country's rural areas to teach literacy, hygiene, and crafts. Vasconcelos commissioned the building of hundreds of schoolhouses and created a national literacy campaign that was widely popular in the capital which involved recruiting civilians to teach the illiterate adults and children. As part of the literacy campaign Vasconcelos placed the government's publishing house under the control of the SEP and commissioned the publication of thousands of inexpensive editions of classic works of international and national literature for use in libraries throughout Mexico. For more on these projects see Claude Fell, *Los años del águila (1920 - 1925)*(1989) and José Joaquín Blanco's biography (1977).

fascism and a reactionary return to the Catholic faith in his later life.<sup>9</sup> However, he continues to be an important and much idolized figure, with his primary works *Ulises ciroollo* (1935) and *La raza cósmica* (1925) featured as required reading for high school students in much of Latin America and as part of the canon of Latin American works studied internationally in academia. The evidence of Vasconcelos's impact on the Mexican national imaginary is unquestionable. Contemporary art historian, Alicia Azuela, has indicated that muralist movement and the Escuelas al Aire Libre, which I will discuss elsewhere, were responsible for the resurgence of cultural production in Mexico. Vasconcelos invested heavily in public art projects because he believed that art had the power to bring out the best in humanity and impel them toward the future. According to Azuela, Vasconcelos “definió su labor como ‘civilizadora’, dirigida a reconstruir el alma nacional y a ‘crearle la doctrina’ a la revolución” (Azuela 133). Like many artists and intellectuals of the time, Vasconcelos felt that the popular revolution lacked an ideological underpinning and set about creating a revolutionary mythology that would support the newly established authority of the liberal political elite. His support of the arts parallels the support of literary movements that would enshrine revolutionary heroes in the public’s imagination and reaffirm political hierarchies of power.

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the historical and critical analysis of Vasconcelos’s career is laudatory, following officially sanctioned discourse that describes Vasconcelos as a foundational figure in Latin American and International education see: Navas-Ruiz (1984), Fernández Mac Gregor (1942), and Molina (1981). José Joaquín Blanco’s biography (1977) gives insight into Vasconcelos’s personal and political life which is complimented in this study by Claude Fell’s extensive historical research (1989). Fell proves an invaluable and somewhat more objective insight into the political and social influences on Vasconcelos. Luis A. Marentes’s more recent critical analysis of Vasconcelos’s intellectual career (2000) addresses his affiliations to fascism and reactionary Catholicism in the 1930s. Recent criticism has focused on the impact of Vasconcelos’s thought on Latino political movements see: Sánchez (2009) and Medina (2009).

On a short stroll through the historic center of Mexico you will encounter the SEP's main office which was constructed under Vasconcelos's supervision. The SEP headquarters are covered in murals painted upon Vasconcelos's request by Diego Rivera (to which we will return to later). Its central patio is decorated with the famous bas-reliefs depicting the four races that comprised part of his vision for "raza cósmica." A few blocks away stands the ex-Iglesia of San Pedro y San Pablo, converted by Vasconcelos into a center for free public education that is now known as the Museum of Life and part of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. San Pedro y San Pablo is arguably the site of the beginning of the muralist tradition and appropriately a place where the artistic vision met with Vasconcelos's censorship. The interior decoration of the old church was commissioned by Vasconcelos who would first enforce his censorship by clothing decorative nude figures and altering the central mural as I will describe below. Decorating the upper windows of the church's aisles are the famous stained glass works of Roberto Montenegro, "Jarabe tapatío" and "La vendedora de pericos." The themes for the stained glass were inspired by Montenegro and Vasconcelos's trips in the early 1920s throughout the states of Mexico to promote what was then an unpopular incursion of the federal government into the once state-run education programs.

Vasconcelos invited several other artists whom he had recently called back to Mexico from their studies in Europe on these propaganda trips throughout rural areas including Diego Rivera whom he would later commission to decorate other SEP buildings. In addition to building support for his education program, Vasconcelos saw the trips as an opportunity for the "real" artists who had been trained in Europe to teach

and guide the folk art of the rural population, refining their talents so as to meet the ideal of the elite cosmopolitan sensibilities. In his study, *Crafting Mexico*, Rick López explains that instead of trying to teach the local artisans, the artists were inspired by and admired the arts and crafts of the communities they visited. It was during these travels that the artists Jorge Enciso and Roberto Montenegro found their inspiration for the *Exhibición de Arte Popular* in 1921 which they organized as a late addition to the centennial celebration of Mexico's independence. Enciso and Montenegro did not transform and refine the popular art they encountered before putting it on display at the exhibition; quite to the contrary, they elevated it as an art in its own right. The goal of the exhibition was tri-fold according to its organizers. They would exhibit high quality popular art, encourage the middle and upper class to admire and desire it, and finally, they would try to uncover a common aesthetic foundation from amidst the regional diversity that would serve as a basis for national cohesion (79 López). This appraisal of contemporary indigenous art as a valuable asset to building a stronger conception of the nation is a sharp contrast to the preeminent view of the Porfirian regime which saw the contemporary indigenous population as an impediment to the social and cultural advancement of the modern nation. To an extent, Vasconcelos's own views on indigenous cultures and art echoed those of his Porfirian predecessors in that he wanted to incorporate these art forms into the nation but only with the intercession and guidance of artists trained in Mexico's universities and Europe whom he had enlisted to work in his education project.

If his plan had succeeded, Vasconcelos would have been able to maintain national aesthetic hierarchies based on classical European standards as they had been prior to and throughout the Porfiriato. Instead, Enciso and Montenegro's exhibition of popular art and the ensuing boom in Mexican artistic production and international popularity were defined by the use of traditional indigenous communities' cultural production that became part of the Mexican national identity. This new identity that drew from indigenous communities turned away from a purely European and neo-classical aesthetic and embraced the symbols and styles of the various pre-Hispanic and early colonial civilizations.<sup>10</sup> Nineteenth-century Mexican art had represented the indigenous subject as a neoclassical hero whom the *criollo* population, accustomed to European art, could understand. It is Porfirio Díaz who commissions the neoclassical statue of Cuauhtémoc for the Paseo de la Reforma of Mexico City where the Mexica emperor is dressed in robes that resemble a Grecian toga. This new "untranslated" style of art that Montenegro and Enciso displayed at the *Exhibición de Arte Popular* in 1921 would become the foundation for cultural and political hegemony in Mexico. As Mexican anthropologist and sociologist Roger Bartra suggests in his review of the travelling art exhibition, "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries" upon its 1990 New York Metropolitan Museum of Art debut, national identity is created through a process of naturalization in which

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<sup>10</sup> In Mexico, much like in other Latin American countries, throughout the nineteenth century and the Porfiriato (1876-1911) indigenous people had been represented in romantic art as either part of the natural scenery or as neo-classical portrayals of heroic subjects such as the famous statue of Cuauhtémoc commissioned by Porfirio Díaz on display on Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City. As a forerunner of the national art that would come to represent post-revolutionary Mexico the modernist, Saturnino Herrán, allegorically portrayed the nation in the form of a sensual indigenous masculine body thus breaking with the traditions of the nineteenth century (see Dominguez-Ruvalcaba 11-32).

historical moments attribute significance to certain styles of representation. Though not explicitly, Bartra is using the work of the French theorist Roland Barthes who describes the process of mythification as one in which myths are created to serve a political and social purpose. In the case of Mexico Bartra explains that the ethnicized national identity fostered by the country's diverse artistic production is inserted into institutional life through public exhibitions and the education system. Once a particular form of national art has entered into public life it becomes part of a political culture that is homogenous and coherent. This enables the creation of official cultural policy which disseminates an ideology that legitimates the political system. Bartra's criticism is symptomatic of the early nineties when Mexico's failed economic policy was breaking down the political legitimacy of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). As Montenegro and Enciso are preparing the *Exhibición de Arte Popular* in 1921, the PRI had not yet formed as a consolidated political platform. However, public art projects like this exhibition would already begin to help define and bolster the post-revolutionary government's political ideologies that were presented as anti-capitalist and aimed at the economic and social advancement of the popular class. The celebration of the popular class through the public exhibition of this style of art would serve as a blind that hid the conflict between alleged populist political ideologies and the Mexican government's continued desire to strengthen and modernize the Mexican economy on a global scale. As mentioned earlier, Vasconcelos was acutely aware of the impact of art and cultural production on public perception of national identity and was a strong opponent to the celebration of the style of art presented in the *Exhibición de Arte Popular* by Enciso and Montenegro.

Vasconcelos refused to attend the *Exhibición de Arte Popular* in 1921, ridiculing it as an exposition of what he perceived as lesser art (López 74). Like Adolfo Best Maugard, the Mexican painter best known for his popular art education method that drew from pre-Hispanic sources, Vasconcelos felt that the indigenous essence found in popular art could and should be recovered and repackaged by the Mexican intelligentsia. By reconstituting this Mexican essence under the vigilance of a European aesthetic, Vasconcelos and Best Maugard envisioned a place for it within an ethnicized national identity. This desire to translate or mediate the art via a European aesthetic is a transposed continuation of the neo-classical interpretations of indigenous subjects that were commonplace in Mexico's nineteenth-century romantic movement as noted above. However, while as Best Maugard thought of the indigenous aesthetic as a potential base for genuine Mexican nationalism, Vasconcelos's classical liberal humanism refuted this possibility. Best Maugard, and other artists like Dr. Atl, saw in the indigenous population a source of anti-rationalist romantic culture that spoke to the rupture of the modern arts with rational science and culture. Vasconcelos was attached to the "modernista" tradition of the turn of the century which, like Rodo's *Ariel* looked to Europe, especially European antiquity, as a source for cultural guidance and alternatives to positivism. Thus for Vasconcelos the indigenous masses were uncultured, more closely related to the materialistic Caliban, than Ariel the prince of humanism. This difference of opinion would lead Vasconcelos to clash with the artists who stimulated the new movement in Mexican art in the post-revolutionary era.

However, while the head of the SEP in 1921 he still held considerable influence over those artists as evidenced by the control he exercised over Roberto Montenegro during the process of decorating the ex-Church of San Pedro y San Pablo. In 1922, the same year as Montenegro would complete his work on “El árbol de la vida,” Vasconcelos would also commission David Alfaro Siqueiros, Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera to decorate the walls of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, a project which brought about a rich collaboration between these artists. In the first mural commissioned by Vasconcelos for the ex-Church of San Pedro y San Pablo on behalf of the SEP the relationship between the government’s funding of the arts and the new national aesthetic is clearly illustrated. In the mural, “El árbol de la vida”<sup>11</sup> Montenegro is required to transform his original vision to ensure the inclusion of themes from popular art and acquiesce to the Vasconcelian vision of ateneísta thought (Ortiz 94). Vasconcelos describes his commissioning of the mural in his manuscript for *El desastre* as follows:

En el ábside de est [sic] ex Iglesia inició Montenegro el movimiento de pintura mural que después ha trascendido más allá de la nación y es hoy práctica estadounidense.

*La obra, sin embargo, adolece de pobreza del asunto. NO hallábamos qué representar: le dí al pintor como tema una tontería goethiana: "¡Acción supera al destino: vence!" (El desastre ms 17)*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Traditionally there are considered to be both biological and cultural “trees of life”. As this tree is surrounded by cultural muses but also contains flora and fauna in its foliage Montenegro seems to combine both categories in his mural. Western tradition, especially Christianity, associates the tree of life with the search for wisdom, and Mayan tradition views the tree of life as a conduit for the gods between the natural and supernatural world (Fogelson 635). It is unclear if Montenegro meant to combine these traditions. Considering his extensive travels with Vasconcelos in many indigenous communities, it is possible that he drew inspiration not only for the depictions of the local flora and fauna from these travels but for the theme itself.

<sup>12</sup> I have reproduced the manuscript for *El desastre* by placing in italics the handwritten portions that were added to the typescript. I have left Vasconcelos’s original spelling, including those accents and corrections written in blue ink by what seems to have been a copy editor’s hand.

In the first version of the typescript Vasconcelos had not taken credit for the mural's inspiration. It is only later, in his own editing of his autobiography, that Vasconcelos includes his pivotal role in what he and other critics would say had been the birth of an artistic movement. "El árbol" comprises one man surrounded by twelve women at the base of a tree whose stylistic foliage is decorated with the flora and fauna of Mexico. Alicia Azuela follows Julieta Ortiz's argument that the mural's central figures represent the virtues of energy and fortitude that are essential to a leader and thus places the man, like the minister of education, at the apex of a hierarchy of spiritual guidance (137-138). The great absence of this analysis, however, is that it discusses a painting that is not the one Montenegro originally painted in 1921 which one can see as a work in progress in a photograph in the *Boletín de la SEP* from 1922 (fig. 1). In the original a thin nearly nude male is bound to the tree with his arms behind his back looking downwards as twelve ladies, some of whom are nude from the waste up hold the sheet that binds him to the tree. Julieta Ortiz notes that the changes to the central figure were most likely made by Montenegro at the behest of Vasconcelos himself.<sup>13</sup> In lieu of the figure of human suffering as a means of reaching the transcendental knowledge inspired by the twelve muses around him, Vasconcelos demanded a stronger focal point. Perhaps in a fit of frustrated exaggeration Montenegro painted the blond nietzschean *superman* we now see (fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> The man is not only fully dressed, but in armor no less, staunchly protected

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<sup>13</sup>Julieta Ortiz describes Vasconcelos as a grueling task master who expected the mural to be completed in under a month for the cost of five hundred pesos (Ortiz 94).

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the changes made to the central figure, the mural currently has shading that provides a Renaissance roundness to the figures that was not in the art-nouveau style of the original (as evidenced by

and defending the life that springs from the tree but no longer restrained by his beautiful cortège. This swap is symptomatic of Vasconcelos's preoccupation when developing the national education project: that it maintain and strengthen the virility of the Mexican national identity. The original male figure did not speak so much of a hierarchy in which the man holds the ultimate position of power, instead it revealed the way humanity is bound to the artistic and scientific muses and the natural world, the soldier that replaced him is free of these bonds. The original man's down cast eyes suggested humble respect akin to that of the twelve female figures that surround him and not the brazen confidence of the soldier the sole figure staring outwards in the updated version. The new man, a soldier reminiscent of the sixteenth-century *conquistadors* stands unchallenged holding the observer with a steady and confident gaze. Vasconcelos was known to have murals retouched for the sake of modesty but his influence on Montenegro's piece goes beyond this to assure that traditional patriarchal hierarchies rooted in Hispanic and Ecclesiastic traditions remained at the center of the education process.

Montenegro's original semi-nude figure also had a somewhat asexual, or according to Ortiz, androgynous, build (Ortiz 93). Vasconcelos's preoccupation with heteronormative conceptions of virility was echoed in a wider national debate on culture, particularly in literary trends, which by the end of the 1920s would divide intellectuals into two distinct camps: those supporting "virile" literature with explicit nationalist interest and the "effeminate" literature represented by the cosmopolitan group of authors

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the contrast of the extremely two dimensional tree). These changes, most likely made in 1944 during a "restoration" resulted in Montenegro refusing to resign the mural (Mac Merry).

known as the Contemporáneos.<sup>15</sup> As Mary Kay Vaughan points out in her analysis of gender, politics, and power in the long Mexican Revolution,<sup>16</sup> artist portrayed indigenous culture and women as the primordial or natural history of Mexico — foundational to the nation but not conducive to the progress of modern times. Like the twelve female muses that surround the central figure of Montenegro's redacted mural, the women (of whom one is indigenous) solely provide inspiration for the rational, technological, modern pursuits of the masculine conquering subject. For Vasconcelos, it was men, specifically of Spanish or European ilk, that were meant to protect and ensure the growth of this new tree of life.

Exiting the ex-Iglesia de San Pablo y San Pedro, now Museum of Light, we leave *El árbol de la vida* at our backs and head towards the Zócalo via San Ildefonso Street. There we encounter a tall, larger than life bronze statue of Vasconcelos in academic garb upon which a plaque with the following quote from Vasconcelos is inscribed, "La gran patria hispanoamericana representará una nueva expresión de los destinos humanos." The imposing statue echoes the soldier that we just saw in Montenegro's mural. As the quote from the plaque suggests, Vasconcelos was not only interested in adhering to the goetheian theme of triumph over destiny through action, but he also wanted to fashion the great Hispanoamerican fatherland that would take the action to guide a new type human destiny. Central to Vasconcelos's education policy, from his famed efforts to publish and

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the polemic surrounding this division in literary styles see Guillermo Sheridan *Méjico en 1932: La polémica nacionalista*

<sup>16</sup> Vaughan uses the term the long Revolution to describe the initial armed revolt that began in 1910 and its social and political repercussions in the decades that followed.

spread classical literature throughout Mexico to his publication of the educational magazine *El maestro*, was an attempt to ensure that the fatherland, the *patria*, would represent a human destiny in which he could see his own image reflected. Vasconcelos envisioned a nation of virile subjects like he saw in the bold uprightness of the conquistador/soldier who deposed Montenegro's humble protagonist so as not to protect but to guide and control the growth of the tree of life with missionary fervor.

## **II. A HERO FOR HIS MEXICO: ANXIETIES AND ASPIRATIONS OF A ULISES CRIOLLO**

The first installment of Vasconcelos's autobiography, *Ulises criollo* (1935), proposes a hero's journey as a forerunner to his decades of public service that would follow. Not surprisingly he dubs himself with the name of the figure he will later use in his treatise on education, *De Robinson a Odiseo* (1935), to embody the ideal model for a pupil in Latin America. In *Ulises* his childhood is an allegory for the creation of the national identity which he struggles to foster in his education policy. Vasconcelos grew up in close proximity to two kinds of communities that he perceived as threats to Mexico's civilized society, those of the United States and of indigenous people, and prided himself in his ability to maintain his Christian and cosmopolitan cultural traditions despite these outside influences and his self-proclaimed bouts with moral weakness. Vasconcelos's first memories are closely linked to his mother and his time spent in Piedras Negras, a small border town where his father worked as a customs agent. The position of Vasconcelos's family, and Vasconcelos in particular as a young boy going to school in Eagles' Pass across the border were precarious. Understanding Vasconcelos's

recounting of his early experiences as a schoolboy in Eagles' Pass through developmental psychology shows us that the "national character" of an individual is formulated through his experiences during his early education. As mapped out in the chronological framework of psychosocial identity development theory created by the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson,<sup>17</sup> within the different states of ego development a child must decide not only who they will be, but who they will not be. During the stages of ego development most associated with the school years Vasconcelos spent in the United States are those concerned with competence and fidelity. In the first stage the child is assessing his own abilities in comparison to those of his classmates and in the second he is deciding where he will fit in to the greater social structure. Vasconcelos drew a sense of cultural superiority when comparing himself to his fellow students as well as being acutely aware that he did not fit into their society and therefore drew closer to his childhood home and his mother.

During his time at school in Eagle Pass, Joe, as he was called by his classmates, found it necessary to challenge his classmates' conception of what Mexico was in order to defend his country and by extension his own identity. His American classmates derided him for being Mexican and referred to Mexico as a semi-civilized land. Vasconcelos found comfort against the attacks of his American classmates in his mother's national pride. As author and critic Sylvia Molloy points out "throughout the first half of *Ulises criollo*, the mother will be pictured as a cultural guide, and even more

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<sup>17</sup> Erik Erikson outlined a chronological framework for psychosocial identity development theory that has served as a basis for developmental theory since the late 1980s. See Erikson (1959)

than that: as a figure representing the 'civilization' left behind, a key to a fundamental (and highly idealized) Mexican past" (197). However the Mexican past as Vasconcelos understands it is rooted in Catholic and Spanish traditions, it is a truncated version of the historical origins of Mexico. Though the Mexican nation-state began with the independence movement spearheaded by *criollo* leaders whose ancestors came from Spain, the reality of the Mexico in which Vasconcelos lived was such that a plurality of Mexicos had survived throughout history including those communities that were directly tied to pre-Colonial indigenous civilizations. By this young age Vasconcelos had strongly identified with his Mexican identity but only so long as this was separate from Mexico's indigenous population. His sense of national pride and belonging was most put into jeopardy during his time in Piedras Negras when his American classmates would equate Mexico with its indigenous people. When Vasconcelos felt his identity most threatened his mother was available to wrap him up in the folds of *criollo* culture rooted in Catholic and Spanish traditions.

Vasconcelos presents himself as a mythic hero or savior repeatedly in his autobiography but no more so than in the alternative destiny foretold by his mother in the opening pages of *Ulises Criollo*. His mother's imagined encounter with the Apaches mirrors Vasconcelos's education project and brings into light Vasconcelos's allegiance to and admiration for the colonial missionary tradition. As mentioned before, Vasconcelos lived in a border town where Apache raids were still a reality. He places this memory around 1885 when the government would send officials, such as his father, to outposts near the border to secure Mexico's territories. In these vast expanses of sand and

mountains the apaches were the “enemigo común de las dos castas blancas dominadoras: la hispánica y la anglosajona” (9). By describing the Apaches as a common enemy Vasconcelos makes a clear distinction between the two antagonistic forces of his youth, while the Americans may have threatened to oust his family from their town they were of a similar (white) caste and to that extent less dangerous and unknown. Vasconcelos recalls how his mother often reminded him that if the Apaches should come they would kill his family but take him alive. She then advised him on how to behave:

Si vienen los apaches y te llevan consigo, tú nada temas, vive con ellos y sírvelos, aprende su lengua y háblales de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, que murió por nosotros y por ellos, por todos los hombres. Lo importante es que no olvides: hay un Dios Todopoderoso y Jesucristo su único Hijo.  
(*Ulises Criollo* 11)

Despite the real danger that the potential Apache attacks impose, the emphasis that Vasconcelos's mother places is on his maintaining and spreading his Catholic faith. For his mother there are two viable options, her son can either live as a Catholic among the Apache or when he is grown he can return to Mexico City to live with his grandfather. Therefore the essential identity of Vasconcelos is inextricably linked to his Catholicism from the outset of his narrative. There is a strict line drawn between the unconverted Apaches and the Christian “blancos” that attack Vasconcelos. While the Americans attack with purpose, they raid the Mexican outpost to claim the territory as United States soil, according to Vasconcelos, the alleged threat of the Apache raid is not accompanied by a desired goal on their part beyond killing the members of Vasconcelos's family. The dichotomy is drawn between the barbarous and the civilized and the link to civilization that is emphasized is religion. Although he is not taken during an Apache raid,

Vasconcelos did eventually travel to Mexico City, and it was from Mexico City that the adult Vasconcelos would send out his “Cultural Missionaries” as he dubbed his schoolteachers to spread civilization and tame what he perceived as the barbarous countryside.

The unique brand of civilization that Vasconcelos espouses as the solution to Mexican backwardness appears as his defense not only against Apaches but also against his “yankee” classmates at the school he attended as a boy across the border in Texas. In his recollections of his time as a schoolboy, Vasconcelos repeatedly defends himself from attacks from his classmates in Eagle Pass who claimed he was not civilized. Although his Catholicism would have served to protect Vasconcelos from the Apaches, to defend against the claims that Mexico is less civilized than the United States, Vasconcelos draws upon his alliance with literature and good manners. Unable to compete with the industrial and capitalist progress that Vasconcelos saw on the other side of the border he instead laid claim to cultural capital that ran deeper than that of his “yankee” classmates,

me irritaba si al hablar de las costumbres de los mexicanos junto con las de los esquimales, algún alumno decía: — Mexicans are a semicivilized people—. En mi hogar se afirmaba, al contrario, que los yankees eran recién venidos a la cultura. Me levantaba, pues, a repetir: —Tuvimos imprenta antes que vosotros<sup>18</sup>—. Intervenía la maestra aplacándonos y diciendo: —“But look at Joe, he is a mexican, isn’t he civilized?, isn’t he a gentleman.—Por el momento, la observación justiciera restablecía la cordialidad. (*Ulises criollo* 28)

The two points that Vasconcelos uses to defend himself against the attack of his fellow students are the printing press and his gentlemanliness, or good manners. But there is

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<sup>18</sup> The use of the “vosotros” pronoun by a young Vasconcelos shows his continued interest in showing his family’s adherence to Spanish traditions as this pronoun is often exchanged for “ustedes” in Latin America, although many authors continued to use it in formal writing well into the twentieth century.

another part of his defense that arises from his initial irritation. Vasconcelos quickly rebuffs his classmates' comparison of Mexicans with the "esquimales," the indigenous tribe also known as the Inuits, and does not acknowledge that within Mexico there are indigenous tribes that conserve some or all of their traditional (pre-colonial) ways of life. There are two explanations for this, either Vasconcelos does not perceive these people as Mexicans or he wants to distance himself from this (arguably majority) population and ally himself with the European or *criollo* ancestors who brought the printing press and rules of etiquette in the form of manuals on good manners from Europe. Mexico's book industry and refined etiquette are two tools that he had seen as critical in developing his education project. These both would be made manifest in his famous and often ridiculed publication of the classics, and the other is his lesser-known desire to spread of good manners through good example and aesthetic education in the national public schools.

Let us address the second, which he takes up in his description of the ideal schoolhouse cafeteria in *De Robinson a Odiseo* which was published in the same year as *Ulises*: "El sentar a la misma mesa alumnos de distinta clase social fomenta la camaradería y educa con la emulación. La mesa en común será escuela de buenas maneras, si no para los ya refinados, sí para los que carecen de ejemplos en el hogar" (60). This is a utopic but also normalizing vision of the possibility of a communal table in which the roughness of the uncouth students would be erased through contact with the more refined middle class. Vasconcelos, through his proximity with the United States, is acutely aware of the attacks on Mexico and thus wants to create a preemptive strike against anyone who would claim that Mexico was less civilized by ensuring in all its

citizens the same refinement of manners that served to protect him from ridicule at school. In *Ulises Criollo* his teacher defended against this sort of attack by noting Vasconcelos's gentlemanliness; Vasconcelos would have a nation of stalwart gentlemen shield itself from the judgment of a growing international audience with the buckler of good etiquette.

In a somewhat vengeful turn Vasconcelos celebrates the capacity of men from the United States, like his old schoolmates in Eagle Pass to become gentlemen such as himself, "Como viajero periódico varias veces he podido apreciar la transformación operada por la escuela en el medio rústico de los Estados Unidos del Suroccidente. Rápidamente el 'cow-boy' se ha transformado en el 'gentleman.' Se ha cumplido así una obra de pedagogía estética" (*De Robinson a Odiseo* 76). Writing *De Robinson a Odiseo* from a point of self-proclaimed maturity, one can only imagine Vasconcelos malignantly chuckling as he generously bestows upon his rustic former torturers the name of "gentlemen." In this way Vasconcelos asserts his constant superiority and proves that had it continued under his supervision the education project he had outlined would have continued to transform Mexican pupils into gentlemen and women who much like him had manners that were superior to those of their American counterparts. For Vasconcelos a successful implementation of his education reform would have resulted in the disappearance of the "semi-civilized" portion as the indigenous communities would have been assimilated into the styles and customs of his own *criollo* upbringing through contact with other young ladies and gentlemen and the efforts and example of their teachers.

### **III. *EL DESASTRE*: THE FAILURES OF THE ULISES CRIOLLO**

In his autobiography Vasconcelos's heroic efforts to transform and unite the nation are curtailed by his political enemies. As Sylvia Molloy points out, Vasconcelos, like Sarmiento before him, followed the nineteenth century heroic tradition of portraying a statesman as the developer of a nation. Molloy compares both men's efforts as educators and "self-appointed "civilizers" of their barbarian compatriots" (Molloy 186). In fact Vasconcelos often uses Sarmiento's simplistic dichotomy which divided the country into *civilización y barbarie*, and gives it a distinctly Mexican division of Quetzalcóatl vs. Huchilobos (Blanco 140). The main difference between them is that Sarmiento wrote in the defense and celebration of his continued and future political career while Vasconcelos wrote after losing his bid for the presidency in 1929. More importantly, in 1935 when *De Robinson* was published Vasconcelos had recently met with the exiled Mexican Catholic bishops to discuss his potential return to Mexico. The Catholic Church considered him an ideal candidate to oust then President Cárdenas with the support of the renewed Cristero movement. Though it had seemed a promising way for Vasconcelos to return to political power, Cárdenas brokered a deal with the Catholic clergy, and they abandoned Vasconcelos. Thus Vasconcelos's period of self-exile from Mexico continued, during which he strengthened his position as a public intellectual while criticizing the political figures who had replaced him.

Vasconcelos's four part autobiography, *Ulises Criollo*,<sup>19</sup> and *De Robinson a Odiseo* (1935) can be seen as part of a single intellectual project, that was meant to cement Vasconcelos's legacy as a leader of the people and defender against the incursions of secularism, socialism, and the United States' imperialist hand. As Mexican author and diplomat, Sergio Pitol, notes in his introduction to *Ulises Criollo*, "Al recrear su pasado cinco años después, teniendo a sus espaldas la reciente derrota, encontramos que Ulises, el niño, es consciente que la nación tiene dos enemigos, uno externo: los yanquis, y otro interno: los indios" (xxxix). Written in the same year, *De Robinson a Odiseo* is a treatise on education meant to set down in writing the program that Vasconcelos admits to have created largely through improvisation during his time at the SEP and attacks the socialist and pragmatic pedagogies his successors put into place when he left. In it he justifies the decisions that he made throughout his time at the SEP by showing their success or blaming their failures on incompetence of execution. In *De Robinson*, he strongly chastises the incursion of American pedagogical methods especially American education reformer and founding member of the pragmatist movement, John Dewey. Initially, Vasconcelos had welcomed Dewey's ideas as alternative pedagogies during his time at the SEP but, by the time he was writing *De Robinson*, Dewey had come to represent Vasconcelos's primary rival. In the pedagogical magazine *El Maestro*, which I will address later, there were articles that included references to this Dewey's style of education. However, once differences with President

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<sup>19</sup> *La flama* the fifth and final part of Vasconcelos's autobiography was published significantly later in 1959, the year of his death. *Ulises Criollo* (1935), *La tormenta* (1936), *El desastre* (1938) and *El proconsulado* (1939) were published and marketed as parts of the same work, *Ulises Criollo*.

Calles forced Vasconcelos to resign from the SEP, he voiced increasing concern over the influence John Dewey's practices had on the socialist education system that was put into place by his successors at the SEP most notably Moisés Sáenz and Narciso Bassols.<sup>20</sup> Vasconcelos argues that Dewey's methods are not effective when teaching the Mexican population which has inherently "Latin" minds. He also argues sharply against the permanent segregation of the indigenous population into bilingual schools, a solution which he saw as a temporary necessity before integrating them into the national Spanish language school system. He saw the influence of American anthropologists in the newfound admiration of contemporary indigenous languages and cultures in Mexico and perceived this as detrimental to his humanist view of social advancement through the expansion of intellectually guided cultural growth.

Other conflicts arise in Vasconcelos's memories regarding the influence of the United States. Vasconcelos felt that the influence of Washington on Mexican politics was detrimental to its national autonomy. This was especially true in his own political career as the U.S. allied itself with both the Calles and Cárdenas who were his adversaries. Conscious of the effect of the United States' influence on the current political climate Vasconcelos portrays the United States harshly as a menace in his childhood home that threatened and bullied the much weaker Mexican state. In the early pages of *Ulises Criollo* Vasconcelos narrates a memory from his youth when the U.S.

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<sup>20</sup> After Vasconcelos left the SEP he was succeeded by Bernardo J. Gastélum who held the post until the end of Obregón's presidency. Plutarco Elías Calles then appointed José Manuel Puig Casauranc who was succeeded by Moisés Sáenz in 1928. During the two year presidency of Emilio Portes Gil, Ezequiel Padilla held the post and was followed by several ministers in quick succession until Narciso Bassols held the post from 1931 until 1934.

forces arrived at a Mexican outpost where his father had been stationed near the northern border:

Vagamente supe que los recién llegados pertenecían a la comisión norteamericana de límites... Los hombres de uniforme azul no se acercaron a hablarnos; reservados y distantes, esperaban nuestra partida para apoderarse de los que les conviniese. El telégrafo funcionó; pero de México ordenaron nuestra retirada; éramos los débiles y resultaba inútil resistir. (12)

The fragile nature of Mexico's sovereignty is underlined by this incident. The threat of another eviction looms over the remainder of Vasconcelos's youth in Piedras Negras. Once completely devoted to championing the cause of the revolution and the SEP's mission, upon his departure Vasconcelos would emphasize its flaws by pointing out, among other problems, the allegiance to America influences.

Despite the blame he laid on the United States, Vasconcelos was aware that his political and educational plans also failed to take root due to the lack of support from within the increasingly socialist government. He does not address the lack of internal support for his cause directly until later sections of his autobiography, but in a 1937 essay entitled "El amargado" after the epithet he was given during post-presidential run his self-exile, he addresses his detractors directly: "¿Alguno de ustedes ha consumado obra más importante que la que yo realicé en el Ministerio de Educación, y que no porque la hayan destruido los enemigos de México deja de ser la más ilustre del continente desde que se concluyó el esfuerzo de los misioneros católicos?" (Vasconcelos *Textos* 260). Although he argues in the majority of the article that he is happy with his new pursuits of the mind in lieu of his aborted political career it is clear that for Vasconcelos his mission

was interrupted and thwarted by those who succeeded him. In an early portion of the essay he mentions that he was once called “el despechado,” the jilted one, an epithet that can be ascribed to the way the once political darling was cast aside in his presidential defeat. Despite the outcome of the election, Vasconcelos did manage to garner wide popular support during his run for the presidency and though he was once attacked by the press, posterity now represents him as a foundational figure in education reform.

In the years directly following his run for president it is easy to see how Vasconcelos would have been known as a bitter loser, since his own view of his recent public life is fairly negative as is reflected in the title he chose for the portion of his autobiography that deals most closely with this epoch. First published in 1938, *El desastre* is the third of the four lengthy volumes that initially composed Vasconcelos' biography. In just over eight hundred pages, Vasconcelos recounts and analyzes his life from just before taking his position at the head of the SEP in 1921 up until the outset of his campaign for the presidency in 1928. In his introduction to *El desastre*, he describes his time in public service:

La presente narración abarca un periodo de madurez en que apagada, amortiguada la flama erótica, el anhelo se concentra en la obra social. Breves años en que fue mi pasión la multitud, sus dolores y sus potencialidades. Igual que otros amores, también me fue infiel, me traicionó...hasta que la patria misma impotente, deshonrada, me vió [sic] salir de su territorio entre maldiciones de los ignorantes y las risas de los malvados. (*El desastre* 11)

Through this introductory statement Vasconcelos sets the scene for the remainder of the book, explaining that his public service was done out of a deep love that took the place of the erotic love of his youth. Saying that his new love, the multitudes, was unfaithful

suggests that the citizens of Mexico abandoned him at the polls. However, he may also be referring to the fact that most of the plans he set in motion were either halted or altered. Through his autobiography and his pedagogical treatise, Vasconcelos defended himself against laughter and the insults that were cast upon him after he left Mexico. He also took the opportunity to cast his own dispersions back at the ungrateful masses by signaling the instances where he saw a lack of progress due to the failure to adhere to his plans.

Vasconcelos's education reform was arguably the most effective Mexico had seen thus far with its vast expansion of the school system and widely popular literacy campaigns. Politicians and intellectuals since the Porfiriato saw literacy as a way to solve the problem of the heterogeneity of the Mexican citizenry. Vasconcelos embraced the idea of unifying the nation through shared cultural practices rooted in European traditions but with an admiration and understanding of pre-Hispanic Mexico as well. The work of contemporary anthropologist, Manuel Gamio (1883-1960) a leader of the revolutionary *indigenismo* movement, was creating a growing interest in the ancient civilizations of pre-conquest Mexico. The new found amazement with the organization and magnitude of the ancient Mexica and Maya empires did not translate into respect for the present day indigenous communities. The relationship between anthropology and the national project became closely entwined during this time with state funded and sanctioned anthropological research. As Mexican anthropologist, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla suggests in his article “*¿Problemas conyugales?: Una hipótesis sobre las relaciones del estado y la antropología social en México,*” social anthropology was legitimized as a profession by

the state and it in turn aided the state in supporting its ideologies and constructing the hegemony held by the post-revolutionary Mexican government. Anthropology was charged with discovering the origin of the great diversity of people in Mexico but more importantly with the way to integrate them into the nation by removing these differences. Bonfil Batalla explains that a portion of Manuel Gamio's introduction for his seminal work *Forjando patria: pro nacionalismo* (1916) is often memorized by new anthropologists as a goal for their future work, "la antropología. . . debe ser el conocimiento básico para el desempeño del buen gobierno, ya que por medio de ella se conoce a la población que es la materia prima con que se gobierna" (52). In *Forjando Patria* (1916) Gamio presents the languages, cultures, and traditions of Mexican indigenous communities. Gamio meant the book to serve as a guide that would enable the government to integrate indigenous communities into the Mexican nation. Unlike Vasconcelos, Gamio did not exalt the past at the expense of the present. Gamio considered *Forjando patria* a defense of the contemporary indigenous people of Mexico but his interest in indigenous culture was clearly stated as a means to an end — the end being assimilation which would ultimately transform that culture into something new. Unlike the Porfirian positivists and Vasconcelos, Gamio did not see the models of European civilization as an ultimate goal, instead he foresaw "the development of a mixed or intermediate culture that was better suited to its times and its environment than either the European or indigenous" (Armstrong-Fumero 12). In his recent autobiographical study of Vasconcelos, Luis Marentes discusses the growing gulf between Gamio at the Dirección de Antropología and Vasconcelos at the SEP.

Vasconcelos saw Gamio's empirical anthropology as an import from the United States. In his analysis of the postrevolutionary cultural project, Rick López notes that in *Forjando Patria* Gamio argued that seventy five percent of Latin America was indigenous and was represented politically by members of the twenty five percent that was culturally and linguistically European. Vasconcelos was one of these political representatives that Gamio criticized for not knowing or caring to learn about the contemporary indigenous' languages, needs and traditions. Rick López explains how Vasconcelos and Gamio agreed that only intellectual elites such as themselves were qualified to not only evaluate popular culture created in indigenous communities but also set it on the right track toward progress. The great difference between Gamio and Vasconcelos was that Vasconcelos perceived all regional and indigenous traditions as lacking aesthetic merit because they were all backward or primitive. Vasconcelos believed that popular culture should only serve as a means of bringing the lower classes into closer proximity to Hispanic or European culture by first teaching them basic appreciation with what was familiar to them. Gamio on the other hand did not believe that indigenous art could be judged with the same standards as European art and had a value of its own. As noted above, Gamio still looked at indigenous culture as a part of the future Mexican civilization that would ideally combine the best of European and indigenous cultures. The fact that Gamio kept his position as the head of the Departamento de Antropología in 1924 and was instated as the undersecretary at the SEP after Vasconcelos's departure proves that the socio-political mood was shifting away from a Europeanized vision of national culture. In the tense post-revolutionary climate Gamio would eventually begin to receive threats against

his life for his work and moved into exile, but he had successfully unseated Vasconcelos whom he described as a “devoted Helenist who live[s] and breathe[s] Homer” (López 134). Gamio may have unseated Vasconcelos, leading to an increased interest in indigenous culture in the education system, but the primary interest of both men at the time was the ultimate assimilation of the indigenous communities.

Like Vasconcelos, Gamio still saw the diverse indigenous population as an impediment to national stability. The solution was assimilation, as it had been under Justo Sierra who served as Porfirio Díaz’s Secretary of Education (1905-1911), the expansion of public education into rural areas and the creation of an effective popular education system. Ultimately, the political aspirations of Vasconcelos failed because the nation of citizens that he envisioned leading was no longer the nation being built. Despite Vasconcelos’s allegations of electoral corruption, the political body had turned away from his style of classical humanism and was rallying support by identifying with the indigenous and popular culture that Vasconcelos had hoped to relegate to a glorified but distant past. Vasconcelos fashioned himself as the savior of the nation in that he had successfully brought education to the once ignored masses of Mexico. If he had been elected, Vasconcelos would have attempted to forge a nation free of the “problema del indio” by eradicating unmodern indigenous practices and transforming all of Mexico’s people into citizens. The campaign buttons Vasconcelos’s campaign passed out bore the red, white, and green tri-color with an inscription surrounding his portrait, which read “Cultura – Honradez – Libertad” (Guzmán Urbiola). Culture was a central means of rallying political support and Vasconcelos hoped to spread his brand of culture

throughout the country by his expansion of public education both inside the classroom and outside through his support of public art.

Vasconcelos saw the practice of national culture as a means of uniting the Mexican people. Along with education that provided skills such as literacy and training for the modern work force, cultural education was meant to shape Mexican civil society. As prescribed in his autobiography and *De Robinson a Odiseo* this culture would be increasingly Hispanic so as to overshadow the practices of minority and indigenous groups that threatened national unity. The vasconcelian utopia, according to Horacio Legrás' study of Vasconcelos's memories, would be a provincial community, such as Piedras Negras, which was multi-cultural and contained a mixture of classes but was united through the Hispanic rituals centered in the spiritual guidance of the Catholic Church ("La voluntad revolucionaria"). Vasconcelos had seen how the heterogeneous national body could be unified in the celebration of religious festivals in the small towns of his youth. He emphasized Christianity above all else as a means of bringing together the nation. For example, to dismiss criticism over his unwillingness to create separate schools or reservations in the style of the United States for the indigenous population, Vasconcelos retorts that they are unnecessary since, "Por fortuna, aquí dejamos de ser indios desde que nos bautizan. El bautismo dio a nuestros ancestros categoría de gentes de razón, y basta" (*El desastre* 27). Vasconcelos includes this retort as part of his disparagement of the "Smithsonian" style anthropologists who triumphed upon his departure and inaugurated the Instituto de Educación Indígena (27). Despite the alleged secularism of the education program Vasconcelos's self-declared model for his outreach

to the rural areas was the work of the ecclesiastic missions during the colonial era: “organizamos nosotros nuestra campaña de educación indígena a la Española, con incorporación del indio todavía aislado, a su familia mayor que es la de los mexicanos” (27). Vasconcelos even gave a special title to those teachers who were deemed qualified to work in isolated rural communities: “maestros misioneros.” These men and women were sent far and wide across Mexico to spread the message of hygiene, literacy, civic duty, and of course national culture. For Vasconcelos, the goal or his educational missions correlated directly with those of the missionaries who converted through baptism. To convert the population through education would mean that Vasconcelos would succeed in continuing to remove the category of “indios” by leaving in its place a civilized group of “gentes de razón”. By simply reversing the desired final result, it is possible to determine that for Vasconcelos the “indio” was a category that described an irrational and uncivilized group of people.

During Vasconcelos’s time at the SEP from 1920 to 1924 the role of the government in funding and organizing public education grew exponentially. José Joaquín Blanco, one of his many chroniclers, shows how Vasconcelos significantly increased the amount of the federal budget allotted to public school. He almost doubled the number of schools, teachers and students in the country from 1920 to 1923 (Blanco 91). Historian Claude Fell entitles his book on this era of Vasconcelos’s life, *Los años del águila* alluding to a quote from Vasconcelos which he places as an epigraph for his work, “Y sólo tendremos patria y raza y noble imperio sobre una hermosa zona del

mundo, ¡así que en nuestras almas el águila destroce a la serpiente!”<sup>21</sup> (Fell).

Vasconcelos hoped to lift the nation above the mundane through a style of education that would enable him to civilize and thus destroy the barbarous “serpents.”

Before the SEP was officially formed in 1921, Vasconcelos earned himself the nickname “el ministro a caballo” due to his exhaustive travel throughout the small rural towns which had in many cases never seen a representative of the government, let alone received news of culture or current information on education practices, due to nearly impassible or nonexistent roads (Fell 50). In speaking with the teachers of these communities and their pupils, Vasconcelos learned about the mismanagement and sometimes lack of educational resources which influenced his decisions upon taking control of the SEP. For instance, when designing his “salas de lectura popular” and “bibliotecas ambulantes” Vasconcelos took into account the fact that even when available, many of the men and women had not been able to access the books in their local libraries because the hours of operation matched those of their work days. Thus Vasconcelos ensured that the libraries were open during evening and weekend hours when the community would best be able to take advantage of them and organized “salas de lectura popular.” He also made books available to communities that had no library through the “bibliotecas ambulantes” which circulated along routes selected by Vasconcelos to share books on hygiene, spellers, technical manuals, and eventually the series of classics published at his request through the University (50).

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<sup>21</sup> Part of the front matter of *Los años del águila* this quote is attributed to J. Vasconcelos, *Cuando el águila destroce a la serpiente*, 1921.

Vasconcelos's efforts to spread the word about the federalization of the school system effectively combatted those who were opposed to the measure by strengthening political and public support. The transformation of the Secretaría de Instrucción (Secretariat of Instruction) into the Secretaría de Educación Pública Federal (Federal Secretariat of Public Education) took place at the end of September in 1920 and was publicized widely by Vasconcelos amongst elected officials and the major newspapers of Mexico. Vasconcelos's propagandistic fervor for education was contagious. Vasconcelos presented education as a national calling in which men and women showed their patriotism through efforts to teach the poor and illiterate and to better the citizens of the renewed democracy. He was able to rally thousands of men, women, and children to participate in his campaign against illiteracy. However, much like the outcome of his campaign against illiteracy, lack of funding and poor implementation lead to an underwhelming fizzle after a brilliant initial spark.

Vasconcelos's education project was an exercise in creating a national imagined community for the post-revolutionary era that would include the entire populous and guide their spirit upwards towards universal culture. In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson points out that the state creates a “family history” that involves a “systematic historiographical campaign, deployed by the state mainly through the state’s school system” which is meant to remind the citizen that whatever wounds have been sustained in the past, they are part of a shared family history and must be remembered together with their “brothers” (201). This is especially relevant to Mexico in the wake of the 1910 Revolution in which factions were often unclearly divided and the lines between

hero and villain not always clearly drawn. The fratricidal Revolution behind him, Vasconcelos hoped to create a new family history to be read by his newly literate populous. In lieu of these confused and often broken alliances, Vasconcelos's SEP proposed a national education project that aimed to construct a plebiscite like the one described by Ernest Renan. Renan, an early philosopher on nationalism, wrote that a plebiscite must share two primary interests: 1) the will to continue to do "great things" together, and 2) the will to live together and keep a common heritage alive. As Josefina Zoraida Vázquez notes in *Nacionalismo y Educación en México* "La Revolución dio al Estado la fuerza y los medios legales para un monopolio educativo capaz de eliminar de la escuela toda interpretación que no fuera la propia" (Vázquez 2). The common heritage that Vasconcelos hoped to keep alive through the education project was that of a *criollo* Mexico, of mixed racial backgrounds but united in their respect for their European traditions. In the educational magazine *El Maestro* (1921-1923), which the University's Talleres Gráfico's published at the behest of Vasconcelos, the complicated realities and allegiances of the revolution are erased in favor of a simpler trajectory that would come to be the official state-sanctioned version of the events. *El Maestro* covers contemporary Mexican history, beginning with Benito Juarez and including the revolution in the following way in less than two pages of the fourth issue of *El Maestro* from July of 1921. The country grows weary of foreign interests taking precedent and the multiple reelections of Porfirio Díaz and supports Madero's ousting of his government. Later, in an act of betrayal, Huerta assassinates Madero and the Constitutionalists in the North fight to remove him and put in place the Constitution of 1917. When Carranza's term is up the

country again rebels due to his lack of adherence with revolutionary ideals and his attempt to choose a successor. After another uprising, interim president Adolfo de la Huerta initiates the first movement toward tranquility: “Se distinguió este movimiento por la clemencia con los vencidos; y el interinato Presidencial, por la honradez administrativa” (348). Finally Álvaro Obregón takes his place as president, elected with an overwhelming majority and thus leaving the country in a unified peaceful state. The prior issue and the articles that preceded this recounting began with the Creation of the universe, covered universal history and included information on Mexico beginning with pre-Colombian civilizations. The history section would go on to include histories of countries such as Egypt and France. As noted here, the historical trajectory featured in *El Maestro* reveals the way in which history was meant to serve as a tool to create a sense of belonging within the nation, and more importantly situate the Mexican citizen in the humanist tradition as one community at peace among many in the civilized world.

Humanism played a central role in Vasconcelos's conception of where Mexico was situated among the other countries of the world. Since his first foray into the public sphere with the Ateneo de la Juventud in 1909 which later became the Ateneo de México, Vasconcelos had challenged the positivist model in which he and his contemporaries had been educated. Other founding members included the philosopher and lawyer Antonio Caso, Dominican intellectual and critic Pedro Henríquez Ureña and the poet, essayist, and diplomat Alfonso Reyes. Although the Ateneo declared its break with the positivists critics argued that it failed to bring to the fore a new viable project for the renovation of society. Octavio Paz wrote, “[Antonio] Caso y sus compañeros destruyen la filosofía

oficiosa del régimen sin que, por otra parte, sus ideas ofreciesen un nuevo proyecto de reforma nacional. Su posición intelectual apenas si tenía relación con las aspiraciones populares y con los quehaceres de la hora” (153). As Paz aptly indicates there is a disconnect between the ideas presented by the Ateneo and the needs and desires of the Mexican populous. As the influence of the Ateneo generation began to infiltrate the upper echelons of post-revolutionary Mexico’s cultural and political institutions the tide of change which they attempted to institute in carried with it much of the wreckage of the Porfiriato. These vestiges included a narrow view of how Mexico should develop as a nation — state models followed the idea that progress was a linear path toward industrialized society. Almost all the members of the Ateneo eventually ascended to places of political power, perhaps most notably Vasconcelos. Vasconcelos maintained an active political role during the revolution when many of the other members went into exile. In his positions as the director of both the National University and the SEP, Vasconcelos only provided the broad brushstrokes for the new federal education laws. Much of the old regime’s supporters remained in place after the Revolution resulting in a combination of distinct plans for the continued advancement of national education. It was two old *porfirista* positivists, Ezequiel Chávez and Enrique O. Aragón, who helped to fill in the details of Vasconcelos’s reform (Fell 55). Vasconcelos, who had established himself by openly breaking down the positivists’ ideological system, would end up collaborating with the same men who worked under Justo Sierra whose education system he had criticized.

It is undeniable that positivism and its belief in the unquestionable advantages of a particular style of order and progress left their mark on Vasconcelos's education reform but the major distinction between Vasconcelos's reform and Justo Sierra's can be seen in the influence of the most famous treatise on Latin American education, José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel*. Written at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Uruguayan essayist, Rodó, *Ariel* attacks the growing hegemonic intent of the United States imperialism that threatened to replace European or Greco-Latin influence in the Americas with utilitarianism and materialism. It is along these anti-materialistic political and philosophical lines that the intent of *Ariel* and Vasconcelos's movements run parallel. Following Rodó, Vasconcelos believed that the spirit of Latin America was rooted in aesthetics and that it was through their innate creativity and curiosity that the Latin American people would grow into a community of great nations. Latin America's growth would only occur if it eschewed the United States' model of materialist development and embraced a Greco-Latin alternative that looked towards Europe and classical antiquity for cultural and political models. *Ariel* is written in the form of a farewell address by a teacher whose students affectionately refer to him as Prospero, an allusion to the wise magician from the Shakespearean play *The Tempest*. Gathering his pupils near the statue of *Ariel* taking flight after Prospero has awarded him his freedom, the address serves as a warning for the pupils to follow the path of Ariel, into the heavens, and not be lost in the sensual and materialistic world of the Shakespearean anti-hero Calibán. Similar to Vasconcelos and the Ateneo's break with the positivist *científicos*, whose idea of

progress was based on continued material success in a modern technological era, Prospero's advice shifts importance toward spiritual accomplishments.

The Ateneo and Rodó both saw Greece as an ideal model for the modern state. In his study of the Ateneo, Horacio Legrás notes that Latin American intellectuals rediscovered Greece through the works of European thinkers such as Nietzsche, Bergson, and Schopenhauer, who sought in Greek antiquity an answer to the incorporation of the volatile and politically inexperienced masses into the modern representative state after the fall of the great European monarchies ("El Ateneo" 49). In much the same way as Europe was breaking free of monarchic rule, Latin America was attempting to free itself from the semi-feudal oligarchic vestiges of colonial rule and enfranchise the masses who, in the case of Mexico, had very recently made their political voice emphatically heard. Yet, as contemporary critics of Rodó point out, his vision for Latin America, though well-meaning, did not take into account the reality of the deep rifts in racial and class groups that remanded the majority of the population to a life of poverty and sometimes isolation from the political and cultural metropolis (Lago Carballo 19-20). Unlike Rodó, Vasconcelos did not have the privilege of writing in the abstract at a safe distance from the reality of Latin America's social landscape. For Vasconcelos it was clear that unlike himself and the other members of the Ateneo, the majority of the population did not have access to the education that he deemed necessary for the creation of the ideal citizen. Rodó and Vasconcelos both envisioned the same ideal youth that Rodó describes at the close of his monologue as Prospero gazes once more upon the statue of Ariel and cries, "Ariel triunfante, significa idealidad y orden en la vida, noble inspiración en el

pensamiento, desinterés en moral, buen gusto en arte, heroísmo en la acción, delicadeza en las costumbres” (Rodó 152-153). Vasconcelos hopes that Mexico’s citizens will attain this nobility, morality and delicacy through his schools and makes it a focal point of his education reform. When faced with the social reality of Mexico’s diverse population Vasconcelos does not look to transform his vision to meet with its needs instead he hopes to transform society to meet with his vision for what it should become.

One of the major impediments to Vasconcelos’s vision was the indigenous population. Like the colonial missionaries before him, Vasconcelos hoped to convert indigenous peoples and mold their beliefs until they fell in step with his own. Throughout his work, despite the call for laic education which he espoused, Vasconcelos remained convinced that Christian morality was a central element of Mexico’s national identity. When discussing his campaign for the presidency Vasconcelos warns, “Lo que el norteamericano dominante quería, era ver desaparecer de México el catolicismo que representa la latinidad, el tipo de civilización que nos integra a nosotros y les estorba a ellos para la conquista moral que consolida las intervenciones en la economía y en la política” (*El desastre* 818). Christianity was also one of Rodó’s platforms for strengthening the character of Latin American citizens. Rodó explains that true democracy would only come about when Latin America accepted its double inheritance, the “sentido del orden, de la jerarquía, y el respeto religioso del genio” from the classic civilizations and the “sentimiento de igualdad” born of the Christian spirit (Rodó 107). For both intellectuals, civic equality came at the price of relinquishing connections to the

indigenous traditions, languages, and practices and embracing of “Latin” traditions as passed down through the Catholic Church.

#### **IV. CASTELLANIZACIÓN: SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF A TOO INDIGENOUS POPULATION**

When organizing the newly formed SEP into five different departments Vasconcelos included two which he eventually hoped to see phased out: Departamento de Alfabetización and the Departamento de Educación Indígena. According to Mexican historian of pedagogy Mario Aguirre Beltrán, their existence was only transitory since Vasconcelos judged that illiteracy would decline as the population learned how to read and understood its importance and the indigenous people would slowly be integrated into the general population through racial and cultural *mestizaje* (Aguirre 42). In October of 1920 Vasconcelos first mentions the need to create “escuelas especiales de indios en todas las regiones pobladas por indígenas y en las cuales se enseñará el castellano con rudimentos de higiene y economía, lecciones de cultivo y de aplicación de máquinas a la agricultura” (“Proyecto de Ley para la creación de una SEP Federal” (12) quoted in Fell 204). These types of schools were a continuation of a project started in 1911 under the name of "escuelas rudimentarias" which had sparked a debate that was far from over in 1920. Vasconcelos desired to diminish and/or eradicate indigenous languages and by extension traditions. He found support for assimilation among others who saw the indigenous “dialects,” as they called them, falling out of use due to programs such as military service that required recruits to learn Spanish. On the other side of the debate were the contemporary pedagogues who did not think the multiplicity of indigenous

languages was an impediment to national unification because indigenous people could pick Spanish up quickly, thus becoming bilingual citizens. Yet, many pedagogues felt that teaching classes in an indigenous language as opposed to Spanish would perpetuate economic isolation and poverty (Fell 204).

Like Vasconcelos, his contemporary at the SEP Abraham Castellanos argued that indigenous education should teach Spanish as vehicle for linguistic unification. In contrast to Vasconcelos, he espoused the idea that since the indigenous people already produced their own songs and educational rhymes these should not be violently uprooted, instead " la cultura nacional mexicana deberá en un futuro articularse alrededor de las leyendas y de la literatura (antigua y moderna) que la civilización española se esforzó por borrar, pero que continúan vivas" (Fell 205). What Castellanos understood to be modern indigenous literature is not clear since he includes the findings of archeologists, contemporary folklore, and among other authors, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano who, although of pure Nahuatl heritage, studied, lived, and wrote of *criollo* society. Though he was interested in creating a truly national culture from these indigenous sources, Castellanos's efforts have many of the same shortcomings of his less enthusiastic contemporaries. He refers to all indigenous people indiscriminately as "indios", and he does not give examples of the cultural achievements of his flagship school in Suchitlán, nor does he find a place for the mestizo or differentiate between peasants and "indios".

Castellanos's failure to distinguish between different indigenous groups or even between peasants and indigenous peoples is symptomatic of the way the vast majority of politicians and intellectuals understood the country and its inhabitants since the dawn of

the Mexico's administration as a colony. Mexican anthropologist, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla has analyzed the creation and use of the term “indio” in Mexico’s public policy such as the creation of the Departatamento de Educación Indígena. He argues that both the categories *indigena* and *indio* are products of the colonial process. The development of *indigenista* policies by the state which were meant to “civilize” the indigenous population defined the indigenous people in such a way that it recreated the moment of colonization by blurring ethnic particularities and erasing their historical trajectories. The creations of the sociopolitical category “*indígena*” by the early twentieth century *indigenista* intellectuals paralleled the conquistadors’ invention of the term *indio* or Indian which negated the ethno-historic particularities of the civilizations they encountered. Vasconcelos embraced the erasure that this moment of colonization implied because the ultimate goal of these schools would be to integrate the indigenous population into Mexico’s modern society. The educational model that Vasconcelos proposed also recreates the moment of colonization by treating the different ethnic groups of Mexico as one, uniform indigenous group that could be integrated into a new homogenous Mexican so that the purely indigenous schools would eventually become obsolete.

As Vasconcelos famously outlines in *La raza cósmica*, the fifth and final race would emerge in Latin America through a process of *mestizaje*. For Vasconcelos *mestizaje* when combined with his education project would lead the current races to value the “correct” aesthetics allowing aesthetic eugenics to take the place of Darwin’s natural selection. In this was the less valuable physical and cultural attributes would fall to the

wayside of humanity and Latin America would be normalized through one aesthetic ideal. Gabriela Mistral, who would find an allegiance to the indigenous people of Latin America during her stay in Mexico at the bequest of Vasconcelos became a strong supporter of this argument. Although Mistral fought against the stereotype of indigenous people as ugly, she supported the value Vasconcelos placed on Western, especially European culture. As Licia Fiol-Matta points out, Mistral left Chile where the racial project aimed to whiten the population through immigration from Europe and *mestizaje* and arrived in Mexico where alongside Vasconcelos she emphasized the birth of a new national citizen while using the veil of aesthetic eugenics to hide the fact that this transformation entailed the death of certain peoples and cultures. The women's schools, like the one which Vasconcelos dedicated to Mistral, were established to combat what Vasconcelos perceived as the "Indian problem" by separating children from indigenous adults and therefore teaching young girls to raise families that would suit the modern nation.

It is not only the customs of the indigenous people that Vasconcelos hoped to see disappear through a process of acculturation. Vasconcelos also wanted to ensure national cohesion through the process of "castellanización". In the chapter from *El desastre* that covers Vasconcelos's travels in the Yucatán, "Uxmal y Chichen Itza" he discusses the use of Maya and Castilian Spanish. The corrections Vasconcelos makes to his typescript of *El desastre* emphasize his recommended use of Spanish to connect the Maya population to the rest of Mexico. He describes the people living near the Mayan ruins as

speaking, “su dialecto mezcaldo de una infinidad de palabras castellanas” (112) and goes on to say:

Una de las cosas que más agradecía a Felipe Carrillo era la promptitud [sic] con que se había hecho cargo de mi recomendación de propagar el uso y el amor del castellano entre aquellas poblaciones ~~aborígenes~~ olvidadas.  
(113)<sup>22</sup>

Firstly, by using the adjective “olvidadas” to describe the population of which he speaks instead of the original “aborígenes,” Vasconcelos makes clear that these people are not defined permanently by their racial description. By describing them instead as “forgotten,” Vasconcelos suggests that now the indigenous Mayas have been “found” by the education system and their identity can and will change. By the late 1930s, when Vasconcelos was writing and revising this section of his autobiography, the indigenous policies of Mexico had solidified and grown in great part because of the involvement of anthropologists in government sectors such as health and education. Bonfil Batalla explains that as indigenous policies became more prevalent their aim was to do away with the ethnic particularities that divided indigenous people from the dominant structures of society. In “El concepto de indio en America: Una categoría de la situación colonial”, Bonfil Batalla concludes that by using the supra-ethnic term “indígenas” to describe the indigenous population the policies are meant to help they are recreating the moment of colonial domination during which the category was initially created. Bonfil Batalla argues that to dismantle the legacy of colonial domination the indigenista policies

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<sup>22</sup> I have reproduced the manuscript by striking those areas that Vasconcelos had drawn a line through in the typed manuscript and placing after this Vasconcelos’s handwritten corrections in italics. These corrections are above the typescript in the original. I have left Vasconcelos’s original spelling, including those accents and corrections written in blue ink by what seems to be a copy editor’s hand.

of the 1930s and 40s would have needed to stop trying to remove ethnic particularities and instead build from the particular historical trajectories of each ethnicity. Vasconcelos's proposals follow the current set forth by the supra-ethnic term. For his democratic vision to take root the colonial structures would need to dismantle the ethnic particularities so as to facilitate unification. Vasconcelos is unconcerned or unaware that this would replicate the centuries of domination to which this particular group of indigenous communities has been victim.

Vasconcelos's visit to the Yucatán peninsula casts into light the stark contrast between his vision of Mexico and that of the populist political leader Felipe Carrillo Puerto to whom he is referring in the previous citation. Although Carrillo owed his position as governor to an appointment by President Calles, Carrillo Puerto made vast inroads in agrarian reform during his short time in office (1922-1923). His government transitioned Yucatán towards a socialist style of government that threatened the already beleaguered henequen oligarchy and led to his assassination by federal troops in 1924. Yucatan's history of indigenous rebellion in 1847 and the agrarian uprisings that continued to occur made it a special case among the Mexican states. In Yucatán the Maya rose up against the white oligarchy to fight for equal treatment under the law (Gilbert 190). Although it was the previous governor, General Salvador Alvarado who ended the powerful reign of the henequen plantation oligarchy, it was Carrillo Puerto who encouraged and enabled the enfranchisement of the rural masses. When he took control of the Partido Socialista del Sureste Carrillo Puerto promoted a regional brand of socialism which grew in popularity by sponsoring ethnic pride in the rural Mayan

population. This last point is where Carrillo Puerto and Vasconcelos's roadmaps for progress diverged. Vasconcelos describes the political transformation taking place in Yucatán as a pseudo-revolution in which political leaders have simply taken the place of the corrupt landowners and continue the cycle of domination over the impoverished indigenous campesinos. According to Vasconcelos, leaders like Carrillo were great at manipulating the masses. He describes the political meetings he attended as follows, "En esos mítimes la predica socialista era llevada adelante por gente impreparada [sic] del todo, ignorante de lo que es el socialismo. En esencia, todo se reducía a lanzar "mueras" a la reacción y "vivas" a los prohombres del momento" (*El desastre* 122). Vasconcelos openly criticizes the socialist leaders and reveals what he perceives as a lack of political understanding in their followers. Throughout the chapter Vasconcelos repeatedly refers to Carrillo Puerto as uneducated, concluding that, "Lo lamentable era que un hombre de su impreparación y su ignorancia tuviese dominio absoluto sobre todo un pueblo" (130). This is not the place to assess the legacy of Felipe Carrillo Puerto so as to refute or concede to Vasconcelos's argument. What is clear is that Vasconcelos draws a line to separate himself from Carrillo Puerto and the brand of socialism he represents. For Carrillo Puerto socialism was a tool that the indigenous and impoverished people should be able to wield in defense against the powerful interests of the large landholders and the government itself. What Vasconcelos might have perceived as a lack of preparation on the part of socialist leaders was an explanation of socialism that was adapted to the particular needs of the audience. Socialism of any kind goes against Vasconcelos's allegiance to his criollo "cultured" upbringing as he notes in Yucatán, "Las clases cultas

odiaban cordialmente al gobierno" (126). This particular brand of socialism which attempts to empower the indigenous people is doubly threatening. For Vasconcelos the solution to the caste wars would have been to assuage the fears of the middle class by assimilating the indigenous population alongside them. He explains, "Al indio que ha sido la amenaza de los blancos en la lejana y aislada mal poblada Península, se le vencía, instalándolo de propietario; incorporándolo a la cultura de la nación" (127). By ensuring that they become property owners the indigenous people would not only join in the Hispanic tradition but the capitalist tradition as well.

Given their different political perspectives it comes as no surprise that Vasconcelos and Carrillo Puerto had contrasting views on Yucatán education reform which as of 1921 was meant to fall under the SEP's federal jurisdiction. Although Vasconcelos states that during his trip Carrillo Puerto listened to his suggestions with interest and was persuaded to adopt measures like teaching only in Spanish Yucatán ultimately followed a different model. Luis Marentes points out that contradictory to Vasconcelos's desires, in Yucatán the Partido Socialista del Sureste based its education reform on the rationalist pedagogy of José de la Luz Mena, a Spanish anarchist which was "[t]heistic, scientific and free" and "very different from the mystic, spiritual and disciplined method proposed by Vasconcelos" (Marentes 143). In *El desastre*, Vasconcelos describes his reaction to the plans that a primary school educator of the Socialist party outlined for teaching children that God was a bourgeois invention by turning to the group of men near him, including Carrillo Puerto, and asserting, "Llevan la cara de los brutos estos profesionales del ateísmo" (125). He thus discredits the teaching

plan as the work of brutes whose sole interest is the spreading of atheism. Vasconcelos self-assuredly asserts that from that point on rationalist schools were no longer addressed since Carrillo Puerto was able to recognize Vasconcelos's cultural superiority. However, this is an extremely biased, if not arrogant assessment of why these conversations came to an end.

Vasconcelos's entire visit is marked by his uneasiness with the unseating of the henequen plantation oligarchy which he describes as an aristocratic upper class. It seems that Vasconcelos would be on the side of the victors in the decades long caste war that pitted the indigenous Mayas against the landowners that employed them when asserts that, "En muchos casos los antiguos dueños no merecían la piedad. Habían sido en su mayoría egoístas y a veces más que egoístas, crueles explotadores de la peonada" (*El desastre* 122). However, time and again Vasconcelos laments the loss of the upper middle class in Yucatán as they escape to the United States. In doing so he aligns himself with those who have been displaced by what he calls the "seudorevolución". As French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (*Distinction* 6). By making observations that classify Carrillo Puerto like, "sabía respetar a quienes reconocía superioridad en la cultura", Vasconcelos is asserting that he is of a distinct and higher class which is threatened by Carrillo Puerto and his government (125). In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu divides taste into three zones that correspond to social class and education level. Ranging from the highest level of academic knowledge and social status to the lowest the three zones are the

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<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu originally published this work in French in 1979 it was translated to English in 1984.

following: legitimate taste, middle-brow taste, and “popular” taste. Vasconcelos auto-defines himself as pertaining to the zone of legitimate taste while Carrillo Puerto and his political entourage would belong to middle-brow or popular tastes. Despite this ousting of those who held not only the economic but cultural capital (to borrow from Bourdieu), in Vasconcelos’s eyes, Carrillo Puerto failed to bring about the social change that he promised would enfranchise the indigenous population who belong to the realm of popular taste. For Vasconcelos Carrillo Puerto was not a bad man but he was not intelligent or cultured enough to have been charged with running a state because in his eyes the role of the state is to elevate the cultural and social life of the populous. Vasconcelos writes that it was in Yucatán that the particular brand of "comunismo indocto" that took over the entire republic began (130). His allegiance to the education and political leanings of what he perceives as his own class are clearly represented in the following quote:

Si entonces me hubieran dicho que todo aquel desorden, toda aquella rapiña disfrazada de transformación social llegaría a ser la regla en todo el país durante el callismo y después probablemente renuncio desde entonces al Ministerio y me dedico a la vida privada para salvar a mi familia de la miseria, ya que el país se estaba haciendo, se ha hecho, insalvable. (130)

The populist styles of socialism that took over the government after Vasconcelos left Mexico was embracing a different style of interacting with the general populous. Instead of helping the population ascend to cultural appreciation that approximated middle-brow or even legitimate taste the new political elite were speaking to the popular tastes.

When Vasconcelos discusses the flight of the upper class of Yucatán to the United States, the path he has also taken, he emphasizes a loss of not only a key social but also

racial component to Yucatán's society. He writes that due to the flight of the upper class, "se ha ido quedando sin esa cría del abolengo, que aun entre los animales se aprecia bajo la forma del pedigree" (128). Meanwhile the pseudo-communist leaders had not brought great change to the peninsula despite the fact that the caste war was allegedly a victory the Yucatec Maya. Vasconcelos writes that Carrillo aligns himself with the indigenous people of Yucatán by saying that his green eyes come from the jade of the old Mayas but Vasconcelos affirms they are more likely from the Iberian Peninsula. In fact Vasconcelos notes that all those men who are currently in power are criollos, "En torno de Carrillo no había probablemente un solo indio puro; sus auxiliares pertenecían como él y como todos nosotros, a la clase que aun teniendo prosapia hispánica más o menos directa, descendió a la capa humilde al quedarse sin patrimonio" (122). Vasconcelos's attack of the Carrillo Puerto government is somewhat shortsighted as he fails to look beyond race. Carrillo Puerto made great advances in the integration of the Maya campesino into active civic participation by encouraging them to break with the old regime and promoting ethnic pride (Kindsbruner 147). One of the main ways these changes were effected was through the use of the Maya language in both politics and education. Vasconcelos writes of this practice in the following way:

Tanto [Carrillo Puerto] como sus oradores pronunciaban sus arengas en ~~castellano, luego la traducían al maya~~ Maya porque era la moda seudorevolucionaria, pero en segunda las repetían en castellano. (113)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I have reproduced the manuscript by striking those areas that Vasconcelos had drawn a line through in the typed manuscript and placing after the line in italics Vasconcelos's handwritten corrections that are above the typescript in the original. I have left Vasconcelos's original spelling, including those accents and corrections written in blue ink by what seems to have been a copy editor's hand.

As Vasconcelos clarifies in his amendment to the typescript, the use of indigenous languages, Maya in this instance, was part of a “pseudorevolutionary” technique to win the support of the indigenous citizens. He fails to see that in the case of Carrillo Puerto the Mayan language was used to bolster a political and social movement that was deeply rooted in the ethnic identity of the local Maya population. Vasconcelos crossed out a later section of the paragraph in which he clarifies where and when he deemed it appropriate to use which language, “Estaba bien afirmaba yo en las horillas que los políticos les hablen a estas gentes en su lengua para quitarles el voto, pero el maestro ha de exigirles el castellano y es mejor que no hable sino castellano” (*El desastre* ms. 113). The use of the verb “quitar” to describe the process of obtaining the votes of the indigenous population is indicative of Vasconcelos’s lack of respect for the indigenous communities’ participation in civil society. One would usually win or earn the votes of an electorate. By saying politicians were “taking” their votes Vasconcelos is implying a lack of political and social interaction and competency.

Vasconcelos argued that indigenous languages should not be used in the classroom. He saw bilingual education as a temporary step for indigenous citizens that would eventually lead to instruction solely in Spanish. While discussing Carrillo Puerto’s use of Maya in his political speeches Vasconcelos goes on to state that, “El desmesurado dialecto maya no se puede escribir” (113). In addition to this, in another section which is stricken from the typescript, he writes, “ahora ya no quedan propiamente ni siquiera idiomas nativos sino dialectos que son corrupción y estorbo para la hegemonía nacional” (*El desastre* ms. 113). In denigrating the pre-colonial languages of Mexico

Vasconcelos is locating the commencement of national identity alongside the arrival of Spanish. As Benedict Anderson explains, in his chapter “Memory and Forgetting” the Americas had a complicated relationship between nationalism and language. Whereas in Europe language was a means of tracing back and delimitating different nationalities in America to trace back languages of the initial inhabitants would have meant breaking with the nationalities created during the nineteenth century wars of independence. In Mexico especially, “Virtually all the creoles were institutionally committed (via schools, print media, administrative habits, and so on) to European rather than indigenous American tongues” (Anderson 197). If, as Anderson suggests, the solution to this problem is locating nationality in history, then Vasconcelos’s decision to silence indigenous languages also effectively silences the contributions of these voices to the formation of national identity which would only have commenced with the arrival of the official national language.

His ultimate decision to not include this sentence on the impact of dialects on national hegemony reveals Vasconcelos’s insecurity when discussing indigenous culture. Vasconcelos removed many of his harshest opinions regarding the indigenous languages of Mexico and he also redacted a section of the typescript that revealed his lack of knowledge on the subject of indigenous literature. The following paragraph is completely crossed out, with some of the final lines discussing the pornographic novels typed over with letters to prevent legibility. I have reproduced the original lines despite these efforts of the author to emphasize the trepidation with which he approaches the unknown territory of indigenous literary production:

En cuatro siglos no han producido estos un solo libro estimable, . . A no ser les decía . . Aquellas novelas pronograficas que en mis tiempos llegaban ha s ta Campeche . . Es cierto? Si, si, reian y los mismo que tenian unic a mente sangre maya se reconocian venas, asentian y apluadian porque obraba en Deseaban todo ver mejorada su estripe, No teian[sic] el alma envenenad a por el odio antiespanol que a tanots[sic] ha llevado despues a la traicion, monda y limonda. (113)

These lines negate Vasconcelos's earlier argument, that indigenous languages were too excessive to be written down, as it seems many enjoyed the pornographic novels of which he is speaking. They also somewhat cryptically, allude to the idea that indigenous people inherently want to “better” their lineage through sexual relations with other races, an idea which Vasconcelos returns to in *El desastre*, as we will see below, and most famously elaborates in *La raza cósmica*.

In a similar light, a recurring complaint of Vasconcelos's is the influence of United States on the work of Mexican archeologists who exalt the indigenous people and languages of Mexico. The exact nature of the allegiance that Vasconcelos sees between archeologists and United States imperialism is not clear since both countries were involved in a process of assimilating the indigenous population into national society. In another section that was not included in the published version of *El desastre* Vasconcelos rants against the United States' influence:-

No habia llegado la epoca nefasta en que los arqueolgos mexicanos agentes del imperialismo nordico, postularan las excelencias de lo indigena a efecto de introducir en la educacion el miso inter  s de las lenguas ind  genas, como un pretexto para delitar aun m  s y perseguir el castellano. *Todo ese propaganda en los rurales idiomas indigenas es acci  n imperialista yankee que tiende a desmentir aun m  s... Y tambien mucho cuidado con los arque  logos! Denigrando espa  ol pero no escribian libros sin los datos que saquean de los cronistas de la Conquista.* Bien hicieron los misioneros de enterarse de las lenguas

nativas, gracias a su inetres por la sabiduria conocemos algo de la historia indígena . . . (113)<sup>25</sup>

For Vasconcelos the teaching or use of indigenous languages in the education system was not only a pedagogical mistake but an attack on Spanish to which Vasconcelos seems to take personal offense lashing out against the “acción imperialista yankee” and telling the reader to be wary of archeologists. However, he does not seem to find fault with the chroniclers of the Conquista who took note of the practices and languages of the indigenous people. These men of the Conquista and especially the missionaries are the true heroes and the archeologists are threatening to undo their work. In a later section of *El desastre*, Vasconcelos affirms that creating special schools for indigenous people would be an imitation of the United States’ policy of segregation and therefore would serve to “deshacer la obra social más profunda y eficaz de la Colonia, el maridaje estrecho de indios y blancos” (*El desastre* 168). The impact of education should be that it continue the work of the missionaries, not in any way threaten to undo the assimilation that it commenced in the sixteenth century. Vasconcelos places his efforts on a continuum with that of the early missionaries in that they both attempted to “civilize” the indigenous people through incorporating them into Christian or “white” society. The efforts of those who oppose him by supporting the creation of permanent separate schools for indigenous students serve to break this continuum in his eyes.

Vasconcelos’s acts of self-censure in *El desastre*’s typescripts are the result of his intellectual insecurity on the topics of the incursion of anthropological research

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<sup>25</sup> The portion in italics was written over the typescript and then in turn crossed out by Vasconcelos. The typescript and manuscript are reproduced with orthographic errors as in the original.

influenced by the United States in Mexico. Just as Manuel Gamio had suggested, Vasconcelos, like most of his contemporaries in the political elite, lacks any credible understanding of a large portion of the Mexican people and their indigenous ancestry. In the decade between Vasconcelos's visit to Yucatán and the publication of *El desastre*, Vasconcelos had stayed abreast of the changes in the Mexican political system and the increased influence of the Departamento de Antropología in education and social programs. In the middle and upper class public to which his work was targeted, both supporters and detractors would have been better capable of detecting Vasconcelos's lack of knowledge on the subject after years of having the indigenous traditions and cultures of Mexico brought into the mainstream through public education and art. Vasconcelos admitted to a willful disregard for the historical realities of Mexico's indigenous past which he revealed in the speech he gave in 1925 at the dedication of a Cuauhtémoc statue that Mexico had bequeathed to Brazil on the two hundredth anniversary of its independence. He asserts that the misattribution of a quote to Cuauhtémoc did not matter as he was not concerned with recounting history so much as building a myth. His greatest concern, one that he also expressed in his *Historia de México*, is that the type of *indigenismo* that was increasingly popular does not focus on consolidating the nation that the indigenous people have conquered but instead aims to “destruir, denostar la obra de España a fin de que el indio, sin tradición propia que valga la pena, se quede otra vez a merced de ideologías nuevas y extrañas que son el antecedente de una nueva y más peligrosa conquista” (*El desastre* 180). In his explanation of his take on Mexican history, Vasconcelos is giving reality two interesting shifts. The first is to say that the indigenous

people had conquered a nation for themselves, thus avoiding mention of the initial conquest with all of its negative connotations. Then he notes that if they successfully insult and destroy the Spanish influence they will have no traditions of value to replace it with and be susceptible to dangerous foreign influence (an allusion to the United States' Monroeism). The myth that Vasconcelos admits to creating when rewriting Mexican history is one that would use Spain's legacy as a shield against the United States' influence because no other cultural heritage would be strong enough to hold up against it. Yet his own ignorance on the topic of indigenous culture and history proves that he is the least capable of making this kind of assertion.

Even prior to becoming the head of the SEP Vasconcelos had already begun one of the first parts of his civilizing crusade with the Campaña contra el Analfabetismo. For Vasconcelos there was no better way to unite the country than through a shared cultural experience and so as to enable this he began a massive campaign which recruited the public to teach their fellow citizens how to read. In 1920 he developed the widely popular, if imperfect, literacy campaign that sent adults and children alike out into the streets to teach men, women, and children to read. The campaign was publicized through a series of widely distributed circulars with information on how to become a teacher and incentives for joining the campaign. If one of these voluntary teachers could claim to have taught five people to read they would receive a certificate proclaiming they were an exemplary Mexican. In the first four months of the campaign 1,500 honorary teachers had enrolled in the program. This was a call to public action, education was seen as a right and also a civic responsibility. Vasconcelos wanted the participation of all members

of society, he particularly calls on women to participate in the fourth, and last circular from 11 November 1920, “Se invita muy particularmente a las mujeres a participar, ‘dentro de sus hogares o fuera de ellos’” (Fell 32-33). For Vasconcelos, women were a catalyst for change domestically which would have ramification on greater public society.

The last circular also reinforces the connection between the degree of civilization of a society and that society’s capacity for economic and social progress:

Los pueblos sólo son ricos y fuertes cuando la masa de la población goza de bienestar y es ilustra: y no hay civilización, no hay cultura verdadera allí donde unos cuantos se encierran en sus conocimientos indiferentes a lo de afuera, mientras la multitud ignorante se desquita de tal indiferencia no tomando en cuenta para nada a los sabios y egoístas. La ignorancia de un ciudadano debilita a la nación entera y nos debilita a nosotros mismos.  
(Fell 36)

Instead of isolating themselves, it is the responsibility of the intellectual to ensure the growth of the rest of society’s understanding of culture. What Vasconcelos is describing here is the gramscian notion of the ethical state. In the ethical state, the dominant class strives to provide the majority of the population with a particular level of culture and morality that approximates their own. The ethical state also fosters a growth in participation of civil society much as the post-revolutionary state in Mexico attempted to do. After the Revolution the government endeavored to integrate the newly mobilized sectors through various channels including corridos, theatre, novels, the press, and movies so as to better align their understandings of the state with the workings of a centralized representative government. The literacy campaign was just one effort among many of Vasconcelos and his colleagues from the Ateneo to create the ethical state, Legrás has noted that the Universidad Popular was another example. However, one of

the major flaws in these efforts was the belief in the paternalist fantasy of education as a way of creating a hegemony that was inherited by the members of the Ateneo from their positivist education, "En los ateneístas la confianza ciega en la educación era sólo el reverso de una creencia naïve en la esencial falta de todo contenido en la conciencia popular" (Legrás "El Ateneo" 58). Vasconcelos was trying to fill what he considered empty minds with the literature that he deemed universal with the false assumption that those minds were empty and ready to accept his universalist aesthetic. The reading he recommended, besides Homer's works, were the novels of Romain Rolland, León Tolstoi, and Pérez Galdós among others selected for, according to Vasconcelos, their didactic capacity and eternal morality thus serving to fill the minds of new readers with appropriate, European, ideals.

#### V. *EL MAESTRO*: A TEACHER FOR ALL

Once literate the populous would need to have access to reading material. Aside from the creation of travelling libraries and the reconstruction of Biblioteca Nacional, Vasconcelos also oversaw the transference of the repurposing of the Talleres Gráficos in 1921. According to the *Boletín de la Universidad* the Talleres would continue to publish government works and the text-books for official schools but it would also print a series of thirty-one classic works of literature including ten works to be selected by the public.<sup>26</sup> Historian Mario Aguirre Beltrán, who has studied Vasconcelos's works and contributions extensively, attributes the bulletin to Vasconcelos. One can hear echoes of his ateneísta

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<sup>26</sup> The bulletin is cited in (Aguirre 288) as follows *Boletín del a Universidad*, órgano del Departamento Universitario y de Bellas Artes, 4<sup>a</sup> época, México, II, 4. p. 24.

enthusiam in the following lines: "Se comienza con la *Ilíada* de Homero que es **la fuerte raíz de toda nuestra literatura** y se da lo principal de los clásicos griegos, los eternos maestros" (Aguirre 288 **emphasis mine**). Note that Vasconcelos places the roots of Mexico's literature in foreign and distant soil. This would explain why the vast majority of the works he selects are European with the exception of a treatise on Buddhism, *Arabian Nights*, and several collections of Latin American and Mexican poetry and prose.

Vasconcelos claims that his first conception for his plan to disseminate state sponsored editions of the classics was during a conversation with President Álvaro Obregón to whom he one day jokingly said, "Lo que este país necesita es ponerse a leer la 'Ilíada'. Voy a repartir cien mil Homeros, en las escuela nacionales y en las Bibliotecas que vamos a instalar..." (El desastre 63). And yet in *De Robinson Crusoe* he stands by his decisión by affirming that "Nada me parece más urgente que acercar a la juventud desde la infancia a los grandes modelos de todos los tiempos. No hay mejor cura para la mediocridad de la época" (82). In this sense, as in many others, Vasconcelos clashed with Dewey's style of education that believed the primary subject-matter for a classroom should come from the social conditions of the pupil.

As we recall from the scene in the classroom, Vasconcelos's first defense against claims of semi-civilization in Mexico had been the printing press. Vasconcelos underlines one major contrast between him and Dewey: Dewey espouses instrumentalism while Vasconcelos supports "perennialism". Perennialism is an educational philosophy based on the idea that Western man inherits a tradition of values that can be passed down by the "great books" and focuses on the philosophical presuppositions of modern

civilization. The great books include classic Greek authors as well as works written by the greats of vernacular such as Shakespeare, and Cervantes. Vasconcelos, who was strengthening the concept of the Latin race through his theories outlined in *La raza cósmica*, wanted to reassert Mexico's ties to its Spanish roots and more importantly to the traditions of classical antiquity linked to Greco-Latin traditions through the Church. He was concerned with feeding the spirit, the "latin" spirit, whereas Dewey's education was geared towards occupations that are derived from the social life of the student. According to Vasconcelos this style of teaching created inert ideas that sapped the vitality of human curiosity and imagination. Describing the US, Vasconcelos writes,

En un pueblo pragmático vasto hormiguero de experiencias, encaminadas todas a la utilización del ambiente, la escuela Dewey es término de un desarrollo lógico y no por eso menos nefasta. De sus consecuencias, sin embargo, sabrá librarse a su tiempo aquella nación llena de vitalidad. Pero la importación del sistema Dewey entre nosotros es un caso aberrante, de consecuencias más graves que el reparto de opio y de alcohol practicado con otros coloniales. (*De Robinson a Odiseo* 15)

Like ants, Vasconcelos ascribes to the anglosaxon culture the ability to produce efficiently that which they can construct from their surrounding whereas the Latin should, as previously stated by Rodó in *Ariel*, maintain their vital capacity to dream.

Vasconcelos warns that schools that follow the Anglo-Saxon model stunt the Latin mind, just as opiiods and alcohol have done in other colonies, in an attempt to spread industrialized materialism. Mexican schools should be directing the students toward the great minds that enliven the imagination, countering the mediocrity that is encountered in society. He staunchly defends himself against critics by pointing out that his dissemination of the classic great books were meant to form a library to be used once the

students had learned to read so that instead of encountering subaltern literature they would read the classics which “darán al alumno lo que a menudo la escuela le niega: la sensación de la vida en su conjunto, el drama o la gloria de un destino en proceso” (*De Robinson a Odiseo* 81). Through literature Vasconcelos hoped to push the minds of students beyond the confines of the classroom, but only in the direction that he chose.

Another, less discussed, product of Vasconcelos’s control of the output of the Talleres Gráficos is the pedagogical magazine *El Maestro: Revista de Cultura Nacional* which was first published in April of 1921 and lasted only two years. Vasconcelos was immensely proud of the publication and shared it with Spanish-speaking intellectuals in Latin America and Europe. In the issue from October 1921, the magazine published a letter from Gabriela Mistral in which she congratulates Vasconcelos on *El Maestro* praising the magazine for being "útil, sencilla i[sic] sana de la primera a la última página" (*El Maestro* 57). She goes on to say that she had often wished that a magazine would include the exact content that is featured in *El Maestro* which would feed the evangelical soul (she asks the readers pardon for her choice of words) of the teachers so that they would be better equipped to serve the community of educators. Mistral’s support of Vasconcelos did not waver after they had both left the SEP and Mexico behind. In 1926 when her friend, the Peruvian poet José Santos Chocano (1875-1934), accused Vasconcelos of being a phony, Mistral defended Vasconcelos ardently stating, “Vasconcelos recogió la obra de los misioneros españoles, abandonada ciento cincuenta años, en favor de la redención del indio. Ha sembrado como de un millón de encinas la

sierra, y el desierto, de escuelas y bibliotecas" (Mistral "Vasconcelos y Chocano" 152).<sup>27</sup>

Mistral and Vasconcelos shared a mutual desire to see the civilizing work that the Catholic missionaries had commenced completed and for Mistral *El Maestro* is a means toward this end.

Tal semanario [como *El Maestro*] haría más por la formación moral de un pueblo que la escuela muerta, fábrica de bachilleres; limpiaría las costumbres, crearía, con el amor a la lectura, una fuente delicada de placeres al hombre i la mujer pobre; haría más patria que los discursos del parlamento i, por último, obligaría a los escritores a ver claramente que tienen el deber de dar el sustento espiritual de su raza, que esa es su rezón de que lleven el nombre i los honores de 'intelectuales. (57)

Mistral's interest in *El Maestro* goes beyond its usefulness as a pedagogical tool, she sees in its contents a means for sweeping clean the nation of old customs. Through reading, the poor would find a fountain of knowledge that would wash away their dirty and immoral ways. This faith in reading as a means of transforming the future nation was ardently shared by Vasconcelos and played no small part in his hiring of Mistral to come and work with him on the national library project. As Licia Fiol-Matta notes, "One imagines that she was regarded as a bastion of Castilianized identity by her Mexican employers" (Fiol-Matta 70). In contrast to her previous allegiance to white racial and Western cultural superiority, upon her arrival to Mexico Mistral would adopt a "mestiza" identity calling upon Latin America to embrace its "indigenous mother". However the real indigenous women were "segregated from feminine schooling and also from the

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<sup>27</sup> Mistral was not the only one to go against Chocano's point of view. He was attacked in the press for his position against Vasconcelos. After a heated argument over the telephone with Edwin Elmore, a student who supported Vasconcelos, Chocano met him on the street outside a newspaper office and shot him in the stomach. Elmore died later that day.

profession of school teaching” meanwhile “urban women, likely to belong to the white criollo class, were targeted as the future teachers of the nation” (Fiol-Matta 69). The two endeavors that Mistral ultimately spent most of her time working toward in Mexico were travelling to different schools for women and girls who were trained to work as teachers or laborers in the modern factories and creating the anthology *Lecturas para mujeres* (1923). In both these efforts the goal was to break with indigenous traditions and implant a source of European tradition through “castellanización”. Fiola-Matta argues that *Lecturas para mujeres* was written for white schoolteachers and in it Mistral presents herself as a 'group leader", "an exceptional woman worthy of a following of an exceptional group, specifically a racially privileged class of white schoolteachers and white schoolgirls" (74). Similarly, *El Maestro* presents Vasconcelos as the privileged leader of a privileged group of “maestros misioneros” who if not racially white are meant to adhere to the culture espoused by Vasconcelos and the magazine as truly representative of their Hispanic and Latin identities.

In its appearance and content the *El Maestro* resembled more of a cultural magazine than a pedagogical one. Each installment of *El Maestro* was about one hundred pages and was published quarterly. The magazine initially had two directors, Enrique Monteverde and Agustín Loera y Chavez, who reported directly to Vasconcelos. The magazine was free and Vasconcelos claims that between 60,000 and 75,000 of each issue were published and distributed to teachers, functionaries, the Ejercito Nacional, and of course public schools. *El Maestro* was sanctioned by Obregón, it was meant to contain information for every citizen including peasants and workers, professionals and

scholars, children and house wives (Aguirre 93). The contents were divided into six main sections. “Artículos editoriales” was comprised of short essays from the staff of the magazine including the introductory essay by Vasconcelos in the first issue. “Pláticas Instructivas” covered a wide variety of topics from history to pedagogical treatise that ranged in breadth from "Emilio" by Juan Jacobo Rousseau<sup>28</sup> to works by Vasconcelos's great rival John Dewey. In “Sugestiones Sociales” the authors touched on various topics related to civic life. The section on “Literatura y Arte” featured foreign and national writers, all published in Spanish. In the “Literatura y Arte” section of the first issue Mexican poet Ramón Lopez Velarde would famously publish his most celebrated poem, "La suave patria" (1921). Hygiene and agricultural lessons were covered in “Conocimientos Prácticos”. In the final pages of each installment Rosaura Zapata curated the section entitled “Aladino” which featured pieces specifically for children including dances with accompanying music and Aesop's fables. As Aguirre Beltrán aptly points out, *El Maestro* is not designed for the real teachers but instead for the "sembrador abstracto de espíritu rodoniano con el que Vasconcelos estableció su punto de identificación plena" (Aguirre 58). It is no surprise that the style of the magazine did not win it a vast audience with the maestros who chose to read more practical alternatives such as the *Educación* and *El Sembrador*.

The cover of the first magazine reads in bold capital letters, “EL MAESTRO REVISTA DE CULTURA NACIONAL” with the date in the lower right hand corner in

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<sup>28</sup> The magazine, as is common in Mexico, Hispanicizes Jean Jacques Rousseau's name and the title of *Émile*.

roman numerals. To the left of the title stands a statuesque representation of a robed female figure in sandals in the style of turn of the century French art-nouveau (fig. 3). Holding an olive branch in her right hand and a large open tome in her left she is most likely a representation of Pallas Athena (or Minerva in the Roman pantheon). Although there is no explicit documentation of Vasconcelos's involvement in the selection of the cover art it comes as no surprise that his first effort to reach a wide audience harkens to Greek antiquity for its imagery. Not only this but Athena first appeared in the *Illiad*, the very epic that Vasconcelos hoped to distribute throughout the country. In the *Illiad* Athena is depicted as a battle-goddess but in subsequent appearances only fights to defend the State and her home from outside enemies (Hamilton 29). On the cover of *El Maestro* Athena was meant to represent wisdom, reason and purity. Her book is the repository of knowledge but she also protects civilization. Athena was said to have created the olive and been a patron of agriculture, a necessary advancement for European civilization. The Athenaeum (as in the civil association, Ateneo de la Juventud, in which Vasconcelos participated in the creation) was the sanctuary to Athena in Athens where professors taught their students and poets and musicians rehearsed (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Initially Vasconcelos and the other members of the Ateneo, such as Martín Luis Guzmán, Alfonso Reyes and Pedro Henríquez Ureña, had hoped to hold conferences on Greek antiquity as they saw that civilization as a model for the democracy they hoped to achieve in their own country to combat the positivist principles at the root of Mexican politics and education during the Porfiriato. Athena's presence on the cover reveals Vasconcelos vision for the national culture and educational material that he would

attempt to spread through this magazine: that it not only enlighten but protect and strengthen the nation.

The cover art and illustrations continue in the same art-nouveau style for the first year publication although the themes are varied including an illustration of a very European looking Aztec prince (perhaps Cuauhtémoc), a medieval girl reading, and an indigenous woman wearing a poncho and surround by richly decorated pots. In 1922 the style begins to take on some pre-Colombian motifs (fig. 4) but the content of the magazine preserves its focus on primarily European sources.

Vasconcelos's introduction to his project is entitled "Un llamado cordial" and in it he explains how culture benefits humanity. As with his publication of the classics, Vasconcelos attempts to replace the roots that he sees as unfit to grow the modern Mexican civilization he has imagined:

He aquí porqué el camino de la verdadera civilización sólo se encuentra, volteando de raíz los criterios que hasta la fecha han servido para organizar pueblos . . . y sustituyendo todas las construcciones carcomidas, con el concepto verdaderamente cristiano, de que no es posible que un solo hombre sea feliz, ni que todo el mundo sea feliz, mientras exista en el planeta una sola [sic] criatura que sea víctima de la injusticia. (5-6)

Although his project was meant to bring the intellectual into the service of the masses it seems that the goal was more to raise the masses to their level, "Escribiremos para los muchos, más con el propósito constante de elevarlos, y no nos preguntaremos qué es lo que quieren las multitudes, sino qué es lo que más les conviene, para que éllas mismas encuentren el camino de su redención" (6, sic). The path of redemption for the masses

was strictly based on the one set forth by the intellecutals and had the goal of homogenizing the national identity. For instance the goal for intellectuals should be

dedicarse a hacer iguales a nosotros a las antiguas raza conquistadas, a los que siendo nuestros hermanos, serán eternamente una carga ruinosa, si nos desentendemos de ellos, si los mantenemos ignorados y pobres; pero que en cambio, si los educamos y los hacemos fuertes, su fortaleza sumada a la nuestra nos hará invencibles. (7)

The “antiguas razas” should become enfranchised but only with the ultimate end being that they fight alongside and not against the status quo and therefore they must be “iguales a nosotros”, “nosotros” representing the white *criollo* elite.

Ultimately the magazine was forced to suspend publication due to lack of funding. Vasconcelos saw this as a personal affront from the Calles administration: "En un régimen en el que ni una hoja se movía sin la voluntad de la Presidencia, la suspensión de *El Maestro* sería una clara señal del fin de los tiempos de Vasconcelos como Secretario de Educación" (*El desastre* 224). In addition to *El Maestro*, from 1920 to 1924 several other pedagogical texts were published with both a wide national audience in mind or for a particular state. Although most of these magazines printed translations of the works of foreign pedagogues some, beginning in 1923, included plans for a truly national pedagogy specifically addressing the problems of rural schools and illiteracy in the marginalized indigenous groups (Fell 117)<sup>29</sup>. Unlike *El Maestro* these other magazines addressed directly the indigenous population which Vasconcelos was so convinced would simply disappear through assimilation over a long enough timeline.

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<sup>29</sup> *La Escuela Nueva* (Mexico City) and *La Escuela Nacional* (Veracruz) are two examples of pedagogical magazines that directly addressed the problems and challenges of the Mexican education system (Fell 117).

## VI. THE BATTLE BETWEEN MARIACHIS AND MOZART

Vasconcelos's supporters and detractors saw *El Maestro Rural* as the SEP's response to *El Maestro*. Whereas *El Maestro* told the teachers and students what their experience of culture and life ought to be *El Maestro Rural* invited them to participate in its creation. In this way *El Maestro* is the child of perrenialism while *El Maestro Rural* owes more to Dewey's instrumentalism. This marks the essential difference between the two schools of pedagogical thought: Vasconcelos's based on the universal aspects of modern civilization and Dewey's pragmatic approach. As he described in *De Robinson a Odiseo*, for Vasconcelos the goal of the education system should be to create new odysseuses, not robinsons. Vasconcelos avails himself of the following argument to demonstrate the absurdity of replacing Odysseus with Robinson Crusoe:

Imagíñese el lector la suerte que habría corrido el mito griego si en vez de darnos la figura total del hijo de Ulises nos presentara por obra de algún Defoe-Dewey y, como ejemplo del saber – el hombre que aprende haciendo--, algún explorador del África. Robinsón de la antigüedad que se había cosido por sí solo la piel de tigre al torso. A galeras lo hubiesen enviado los griegos, puesto que su ciencia era activa. O al Museo, por causa del traje pintoresco. Pero nunca a la Academia, ni como modelo. En la escuela reinaba Ulises que, según la ocasión, construía también su propio barco, pero en la mesa del banquete fascinaba por la claridad y la emoción de sus discursos. (*De Robinson a Odiseo* 39)

As he constructs the Defoe-Dewey hero who appears on the shores of ancient Greece one cannot help but draw similarities to the indigenous population in Mexico. The “traje pintoresco” of the indigenous people had become a central part of the Mexican imaginary, and anthropological efforts had placed the indigenous subjects into the “Museos”. Thus by placing himself on the side of the Greeks who categorize as unworthy or of lesser value the knowledge of the Robinson he does the same to the

indigenous culture of Mexico. Only the European epistemological tradition fits in the scope of Vasconcelos's national imaginary, all others are delegitimized and not welcome in the academy.

Vasconcelos did celebrate Mexican multi-culturalism but he did so in an attempt to erase it from the unifying cultural imaginary of the nation. As noted above, for Vasconcelos, it was up to the elite artists and intelligentistas to transform that which they deemed was the indigenous essence into an acceptable national identity. As Rick Lopéz notes in *Crafting Mexico*, Vasconcelos did not promote the notion of handicrafts and popular art as national artistic expression in the way his colleague Dr. Atl did. Dr. Atl, Roberto Montenegro and other artists participated in the celebration of artisanal crafts during the Exhibition of Popular Art in 1921, but Vasconcelos's did not appreciate it in the same way. The rivalry between Dr. Atl and Vasconcelos was public and stemmed from their differences of opinion on popular art but it was not the only cause for Vasconcelos's lack of appreciation. According to Vasconcelos “[a]ll popular practices... were corruptions of high culture, and hence a mere “parody of culture”” (López74). For Vasconcelos, folklore was a means to an end and not meant to be the culmination of Mexican national culture. Dr. Atl celebrated contemporary indigenousness as central to authentic *mexicanidad*, he “directly challenged the previously dominant Porfirian view of living indigenous practices as backward holdovers that stood outside of the modern nation” (López 89). For all the Ateneo’s alleged breaks with Porfirian thought it seems that Vasconcelos remained in agreement on this point. For him, indigenous folklore and those who produced it did not suffice to create the culture of the nation. In his schools

“ningún niño pasará por las aulas sin haber escuchado una melodía de Mozart o un preludio de Bach. El folklore servirá de incitante con tal de que no llegue a parecer suficiente, pues el mensaje está contenido en lo otro y constituye ejercicio de comunión” (*De Robinson a Odiseo* 77). The communion of which he speaks derives from his Kantian belief that through the experience of appreciating aesthetic beauty the individual assumes that the object he contemplates is generally accepted as beautiful and thus the individual communes with humanity. And yet, as Vasconcelos is expediting his departure from the SEP he witnesses the beginning of the failure of his dream to spread what he sees as the only means for man to arrive at the divine: through aesthetic appreciation. It seems that the mariachis have triumphed over Mozart.

Although one might think of the Inauguration of the SEP’s new headquarters in the historic center of Mexico City as the apex of Vasconcelos’s career at the SEP, it is really a grand celebration at the beginning of the end. With thousands of people in attendance, including three thousand school children and a worker’s chorus that was 3,500 strong, the inauguration of the SEP’s building was an enormous event covered by every major newspaper in the capitol (Valle “Crónica de la inauguración” 10). Later published in the *Boletín de la SEP* of September 1922, Vasconcelos’s inauguration speech recounts how he built up the SEP’s headquarters from the ruins, “la montaña de escombros que llenaba el lote formado por la antigua calle del Relox” (Vasconcelos “Discurso pronunciado” 5). His vision was to create a truly national edifice, critiquing the architecture of the Porfiriato for its non-Latin influences. Of that era’s architecture Vasconcelos says the following: “Y se reflexionaba en seguida en la ruindad de las

construcciones llamadas modernas, en la arquitectura porfirista que angostó las puertas señoriales, que redujo el vasto corredor español a un pasillo con tubos de hierro, en vez de columnas, y lámina acanalada, en lugar de arquería; todo ruin como la época " (6). Yet Vasconcelos's relationship with the Porfiriato was much more paradoxical than his negative account of its architectural contribution suggests since he also drew much of his intellectual and artistic preferences from the European sources that were so admired during that time with the noted shift in preference from France to Spain. Though the building was meant to reflect a growing national identity, the renovation of the seventeenth century building derives much from the late nineteenth century eclectic style of the Porfirian era. The neo-colonial French-style balustrades and high archways surrounding the large central patios suggest a well thought combination of architectural styles. As architectural historian Luis Carranza notes, the SEP building "represented the 'internationalism' of the Díaz regime, through its foreign philosophical underpinnings, and it directly referenced the Spanish tradition in Mexico, expressed most prominently in the colonial courtyard building typology" (*Architecture as Revolution* 18). With its use of heavy Mexican stone work and its massive scale, the SEP is exemplary of what would become the institutional Mexican architecture of the PRI. In this way the architecture reflects Vasconcelos's hopes that the foundation of Mexican culture would rest on the traditions carried over from Europe.

Vasconcelos's influence over the group of architects and engineers who worked with him on the project met with disfavor in the press. Carranza cites one architecture critic writing for the Mexico City newspaper *Excélsior* in July of 1924 who noted that

Vasconcelos, "did not let the architects who worked for him 'think' and make, as architects, what their free will as professionals with ideals and aspirations suggested; rather, he always arbitrarily imposed his artistic feelings" (30). Carranza agrees with his assessment noting that Vasconcelos deserves at least some credit for the SEP building's final design since he carefully chose the elements that the architects, engineers, artists, and artisans were to complete. This renovation project was clearly important to Vasconcelos as it was to not only house the SEP but provide for the public a visual representation of his education vision.

With an emphasis on his own national pride Vasconcelos declared in his inaugural speech that the building was constructed solely by Mexican labor and ingenuity. It stands as an example of a new style of nationalism: “¡Nacional, no porque pretende encerrarse obcecadamente dentro de nuestras fronteras geográficas, sino porque se propone crear los caracteres de una cultura autóctona hispanoamericana!” (7). It is upon the walls of this native building that Vasconcelos hopes to continue the muralist movement that had begun with Montenegro’s work *El árbol de la vida*. Montenegro was commissioned to paint murals in several offices throughout the building but the most famous decorations would be the homages to the four races and the murals by Diego Rivera that cover one of the large central patios. The final results for both of these would end up very differently from the projects that Vasconcelos had initially commissioned. The four bas-reliefs that now represent the races that contributed to the formation of the Latin American race according to Vasconcelos were meant to be four large imposing statues. The statues each a larger-than-life male figure would have been representative of the Greek, Spanish,

Indigenous (specifically Aztec) and Asian races. After the Mexican sculptor Ignacio Asúnsolo had completed the statue of Minerva that rests over the entranceway to the SEP he placed the plaster mold of the first of the four colossal statues meant to represent the races that contributed to the formation of the New World. In his autobiography Vasconcelos recalls how several women were shocked that such an immoral (nude) sculpture would be placed in a building where children could see it. Although he regrets their lack of taste Vasconcelos concedes to the change explaining to Asúnsolo, “Figúrese, Nacho: van a ser cuatro las estatuas, todas desnudas; hasta ahora sólo hemos exhibido al blanco, vendrán después el indio y amarillo, pero ¿qué vamos a hacer cuando instale al negro...? Le van a llamar a todo eso, el patio de los Falos...” (61). Though intended as comical, this anecdote reveals Vasconcelos’s frustration with his public and the way their input intervened with his artistic ideals.

The other change made to his original plan is no less a source of frustration to Vasconcelos. In this case it is not the public that intercedes with his plan, but the artist. During his last years at the SEP, Vasconcelos had brought Diego Rivera back from Europe and commissioned him to decorate the walls of the SEP headquarters in downtown Mexico City with an allegorical portrayal of the development of the cosmic race. He describes the commencement of this project in his inaugural speech as follows, “Para la decoración de los lienzos del corredor, nuestro gran artista Diego Rivera, tiene ya dibujadas figuras de mujeres con trajes típicos de cada Estado de la República” (8). He goes on to describe what Rivera has planned for the rest of his project “y para la escalera ha ideado un friso ascendente que parte del nivel del mar con su vegetación

tropical, se transforma después en el paisaje de la altiplanicie y termina en los volcanes" (8). If not Vasconcelos's exact vision, Rivera has agreed to portray a national imaginary that suits Vasconcelos's vision of the SEP. What happens instead is a manifestation of the distinction that Homi Bhabha places between the performative and pedagogic narratives of the nation. The pedagogic narrative was outlined by Vasconcelos: the murals portraying his official version of history were to culminate in the mestizaje of a culture that was unified despite the celebration of its multi-culturalism through an admiration and respect for European culture. Although he had carefully outlined the murals, in the hands of Diego Rivera they began to slip out of his control. The performative aspect of culture and community began to appear on the walls around him, drifting closer to popular cultural practice and the realities of indigenous communities in the present day. It is no wonder that in his autobiography Vasconcelos omits the commissioning of these murals and only mentions asking Montenegro to paint San Pedro with the goethean theme "*¡Acción supera al destino: vence!*" (*El desastre* 35). When Montenegro painted his *Árbol de la vida* Vasconcelos was still in control, he was capable of demanding art that suited his goals. He could enforce his will on the mural and control the action that was taken to create the destiny he saw fit for Mexico. By the time Diego Rivera, and his fellow muralists were working on the SEP headquarters and the National Preparatory School there was an increasing rift between them and their patron. The Sindicato Revolucionario de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores had formed in 1922 and among the primary members were many of the men involved in the creation of the SEP's murals including Diego Rivera, Fermín Revueltas and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

As Siqueiros notes in his memoirs, “the more our work developed, the more it found roots in our tradition, the more it found the element of our national idiosyncrasy, the more detestable it seemed to Vasconcelos”<sup>30</sup> (Marentes 143). As Diego Rivera’s murals continued to appear before Vasconcelos’s eyes, they forced him to face the imminent failure of his project. The figures in the murals demanded that he acknowledge the undeniable presence of the poor workers and campesinos which Vasconcelos’s education reform was attempting to erase. As he enters the buildings patio to observe Rivera’s progress Vasconcelos is said to have lamented, “Ay, Dieguito, ¡indios, más indios!” (Blanco 100). It is as if the Apaches of his childhood have returned and Vasconcelos must resign himself to the fact that he was not able to fulfill his mother’s request to spread his culture to them, thus saving their souls and his own.

When Vasconcelos called Diego Rivera back from his tenure spent amongst the cubist and modernist of Europe, Rivera was eager to find walls upon which to paint a style of public art akin to the work of the Italian Renaissance he so admired. Rivera saw this style of public art as a means of preparing the Mexican people to enter into political life. Thus, with the imagery he collected while touring Mexico alongside Vasconcelos, he went about developing a style that would educate more than decorate. The opportunity given by public funding allowed Rivera an artistic freedom that had not been present in his years producing for bourgeois consumption. In his first project for Vasconcelos, “Creation” (1922) on the wall of the National Preparatory School, Rivera

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<sup>30</sup> Translated by Marentes this quote is initially from the following source: Siqueiros, David Alfaro, *Me llamaban el Coronelazo. Memorias*. México: Gandesa, 1977 (183-184).

incorporates the Mexican visual elements such as landscapes and to a certain extent phenotypes but he uses symbols from Classical and Christian iconography. By 1924 when the first parts of his mural for the SEP headquarters are completed Rivera has joined the Communist party and has formed the Sindicato Revolucionario de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores. He is actively involved in the political life of the city; especially the cause of the proletariat and agrarian workers and this is reflected in his portrayal of the Mexico's history on the walls of the SEP. Rivera painted on the SEP a celebration of what the Mexican Revolution should have been, a triumph for the lower classes. He also revealed its failures in the continued suffering of the lower class. Recollecting his experience as a muralist Rivera wrote that he attempted to "mirror the social life of Mexico as I see it and through the reality and arrangement of the present the masses were to be shown the possibilities of the future" (Wolfe 183). The future that Rivera represented in his murals of the masses included the union of the proletariat and the agrarian worker side by side. Rivera included the poetry of Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz (1897-1930) a communist who incited the uprising of the proletariat against the capitalist powers. Vasconcelos required that one poem written above the entrance to a mine shaft be removed, a request to which the artist eventually conceded but not before concealing the poem in the wall in a bottle (Wolfe 188-189). This hidden poem calls upon miners to violently rise up against the owners of the mine and take the metal for themselves, "Haz puñales con todos los metales, / y así, / veras que los metales / después son para ti" (Wolfe 188-189). For Vasconcelos this call to violent action, even if figurative and not literal, was a world apart from the plan he had set forth for the integration of the working

class into the newly established democracy. Vasconcelos had planned to integrate these people into the existing social and political structures while Rivera dreamed of changing these structures to suit the needs of these people. Both men believed in the power of education to change society. Rivera's father was a schoolteacher who saw education as the redemption of the indigenous peons in his home town (Wolfe 8). The difference between them is the society that they wanted to build in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Vasconcelos saw the uneducated masses as a malleable cohort that could be transformed in his own image. Much like the pupils of the new education system, Vasconcelos erroneously believed that his teachers would adopt his pedagogical doctrine and abandon their previous methods and remain neutral in political matters. The federalization of the public school system was supported by the teachers who since 1917 had suffered the decentralization of the national schools which resulted in inconsistent pay and lack of funding and materials. The budget cuts of 1924 forced the SEP to abandon much of its expansion, close schools, and discontinue projects like the anti-illiteracy campaign. These budgetary constraints which would also lead the SEP to stop the publication of *El Maestro* were seen by Vasconcelos as a direct attack on him from the Calles administration and led to his resignation. In the last months at the SEP, on 15 of May 1924 Vasconcelos gave a speech on Teacher's Day in which he describes the role of the teacher to intercede between the minority of powerful citizens who own both the culture and the capital and the impoverished majority of workers. In his speech Vasconcelos extols the virtues of his teachers, calling on them to continue their mission to civilize Mexico with religious fervor and moral virtue. In doing this he hopes to

transform the society by taking strength away from militaristic caudillos because as he sees it, “Si perservera [el maestro] y cumple de veras su misión moral, tarde o temprano el maestro reemplazará en el mando al soldado y entonces comenzará a civilizarse México” (*Textos* 142). Vasconcelos emphasizes that politics should remain outside the classroom setting and that he has grown tired with the way the government has transformed the message of the revolution, “De tanto mirarlo prostituido, he llegado a rebelarme contra el nombre de la revolución” (146). Yet, it seems that by speaking to the increasingly politicized working class the government has adapted the message of the revolution in a way that Vasconcelos was unable to do. The teachers follow suit by uniting and eventually forming teachers unions. From 1920 to 1924 the teachers unions began to transform. Early on the unions sought power by making demands for better conditions through their alliances with parents in their communities and other teachers. The vast majority of the members did not feel an allegiance with the workers or populist movements. Nevertheless, by 1924 this had changed and the majority of members of the teachers union were becoming radicalized and drawing closer to the “socializing” discourse espoused by the CROM (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*) (Fell 114). Class consciousness and solidarity with the proletariat became primary interest to the teacher’s union. Vasconcelos acknowledged that teachers had served important roles in the revolution and many were representatives in the government, but he wanted to limit the teacher’s influence in their community. Vasconcelos opposed multiple requests from teacher’s associations and workers unions in favor of the “rationalist school” system like the one set up in Yucatán (116). Vasconcelos wished to empower the teachers so

that they would civilize the nation but did not foresee that they would do so while taking into consideration their own need and that of the communities in which they worked instead of following the path set forth from the capital.

When he loses his run for governor in Oaxaca in 1924, Vasconcelos's political career is already on track to being completely stifled by his opponents. Vasconcelos begins to openly criticize Calles in *Antorcha*. According to José Joaquín Blanco, Rivera depicts Vasconcelos in a mural, "de espaldas, como cobarde que no da la cara, mojando su pluma en una escupidera" (Blanco 100). As he writes his autobiography and *De Robinson a Odiseo*, Vasconcelos may still be casting ignominies upon the choices of the Mexican government, but Blanco's interpretation of Rivera's depiction of Vasconcelos as cowardly does not ring true. Rivera is clearly echoing the negative public sentiment towards Vasconcelos, by this time Vasconcelos has had to defend himself against the nickname of "el amargado". However, his defensive retorts in the face of his detractors express his own desire to turn his back on a Mexico that has decided not to follow his vision for it. He wants nothing more to do with the government that has refused to heed his advice and instead allowed itself to slip into what he perceived as the clutches of US imperialism and lesser culture, not to mention the crassness and ungentlemanly conduct of statesmen who take their positions of power through intimidation and assassination. Vasconcelos's education policy was an attempt to create the nation in his image, just as his autobiography is an attempt to portray the national identity through his own. However, Vasconcelos's main failure is his inability to see beyond the western epistemological tradition; he is trapped in the safe embrace of his mother's traditional

*criollo* nationalism that protects him from the threats of the outside world but at the same time removes him from reality.

## **Chapter 2: Theater and Dance in *El Maestro Rural*: The *Campesino* as Performed by Post-Revolutionary Mexico**

This chapter will open with the historical backdrop of the post-Vasconcelos education reform because it is a key element in understanding the way the SEP restructured its efforts of civilizing the nation's rural population. Previously, I proposed that by assuming a continuation of the positivist ideals of progress the nature of the education project was reproducing the social and political structures of the colonial era instead of implementing the rupture that the Revolution was meant to bring about. When the *maximato* comes to its end the government of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) begins to deliver on some of the promises of the Revolution including the dismantling of large estates and the redistribution of land into *ejidos* for the peasants the SEP reinvents its content. *El Maestro Rural* unlike its predecessor *El Maestro* takes a greater interest in the needs of the rural population and derives lessons more often from recent revolutionary history and the traditions of the indigenous cultures of Mexico instead of the European traditions that *El Maestro* had proposed as a key to universal knowledge. This is not to say that the educational project is not longer a colonizing effort, on the contrary the government is replicating models of control instituted during the colonial era by reshaping community life around the school as the Catholic missionaries had once done with the Church. Although, the official message of the SEP is that the Revolution has brought education to the countryside to liberate and empower these communities it is imposing a national model of progress on localities to which it is not suited.

Now that the schools were focusing on teaching national history, the narrative of the Mexican Revolution began to evolve. Disparate ideological groups like the anarchists who spread their message throughout the countryside were set aside and replaced by a unanimous effort to bring about a socialist institution, which the state was then attempting to consolidate. The Revolution was fought in the countryside by peasants whose allegiances were born from within their communities. To centralize the Revolution meant re-teaching the Revolution and the roles of the citizens and imposing a system of patriotic signs and meaning on communities who had fought the revolution for their own reasons. In this chapter I will look at how the rural peasant population was taught what it meant to be Mexican in the post-revolutionary era by looking at the lessons in performative citizenship that *El Maestro Rural* distributed. By performative citizenship I am referring to the way the idealized citizen is meant to participate within the family and society according to the national model. It is performative citizenship because it is imposed by the educational institution through instruction in cultural, civil, and social norms. The dance instruction and theater pieces that are included in *El Maestro Rural* teach the students of the rural schools how to move, look and speak like a Mexican citizen. Men and women are explicitly divided into two distinct gendered subjects: the macho, virile male and the domestic and coquettish woman. These roles reinforce the patriarchal structures within the community and the nation. By looking at several dances and plays included in *El Maestro Rural* this chapter will show how the national education project became a re-colonization of the peasant population. The way the SEP used *El Maestro Rural* to bring cultural lessons into the communities via theater

and dance exemplifies a process of colonial semiosis. As Walter Mignolo explains in his study on colonization in the New World, colonial encounters are not simply “transmitting meaning or representation” but involve “a process of manipulation and control” (xvi *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*). The encounters between the SEP and the rural communities mirror the power structure of the colonial era but the colonizing is happening from within the nation itself, a form of internal colonialism that overrides the interests of the community for those of the nation.

## I. TRANSFORMING THE LEGACY OF THE REVOLUTION

In 1926, two years after José Vasconcelos had left his position as the head of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) John Dewey visited Mexico and recounted his trip in *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico – China – Turkey* (1926). In this collection of essays, he gives his assessment of Mexico’s advances since the Revolution of 1910 with special interest in the progress of the national education project. Dewey, a foundational member of the pragmatist American style of education which Vasconcelos derided as unfit for Mexico’s “Latin” minds was the inspiration for his 1935 treatise *De Robinson a Odiseo* which emphatically states Vasconcelos’s position against the American pedagogue.<sup>31</sup> However, Dewey’s style of practical pedagogy that drew school’s lessons from the skills needed for the future lives of its students and their communities strongly influenced the leaders of the SEP during and after Vasconcelos’s tenure. Dewey does not draw direct attention to his own influence in Mexico but instead

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<sup>31</sup> For more on Vasconcelos’s relationship to Dewey and the pragmatist style of pedagogy see the previous chapter.

points out those aspects of educational reform that he deems exemplary. In *Impressions* Dewey expounds on how the greatest accomplishment of the revolutionary world is not the ascension of Bolshevik ideals or the installation of Communism but the achievement of a “revolution of heart and mind, this liberation of a people to consciousness of themselves as a determining power in the shaping of their ultimate fate” (8). Dewey admires the way this change has taken place in Mexico. He is impressed by the many advances that have transformed the lives of the farm labor from what he calls “a state of complete serfdom” comparable to the slaves of the United States prior to the Civil War into a people who had not only begun to organize but had also formed politically relevant syndicates (171-172). Dewey particularly found the efforts of the post-revolutionary government to educate Mexico’s rural indigenous population a positive contrast to the contemporary work of the education system in the United States vis-à-vis their Native American population. For Dewey the education of the “native Indians” as he calls them, is a revolution in itself that sets Mexico apart from the rest of the world because, “it marks a deliberate and systematic attempt to incorporate in the social body the Indians . . . . was not only neglected, but despised” prior to the Revolution (152-154). He goes on to note that “This educational revolution not only represents an effort to incorporate the indigenous population into the social life and intellectual culture of Mexico as a whole, but it is also an indispensable means of political integration for the country” (155).

The official narrative of the SEP echoed Dewey’s description of the task that the post- revolutionary education policy had set forth. The magazine, *El Maestro Rural* (1932-1940) proposes as its objective in its very first essay to serve as a means for the

Escuela Rural Federal to educate the nation because only then will unity be possible. The anonymous author of the essay, “Nuestro objeto” writes:

la necesidad de su existencia [de la Escuela Rural Federal] y de su multiplicación es un hecho cuya utilidad no puede discutirse siquiera, si se piensa que el futuro de México depende de su integración como país y que esta integración no puede realizarse sino cuando se haya logrado dar a todos sus habitantes una lengua común, ambiciones idénticas, necesidades iguales y los mismos medios de satisfacerlas; fruto poliédrico que solamente puede rendir en el futuro la profusa semilla de la educación. (3)<sup>32</sup>

What the author is describing as the ideal outcome of the education project set in motion after the Revolution is, as noted, a multifaceted and complex system in which many people with various ethnic backgrounds and allegiances to different political and community groups were going to be syphoned into one coherent nationality. In so doing, the educational project is attempting to recreate the colonization of the country by coopting many of the same tools used by the Catholic Church and Spanish colonists before them. Although not specifically mentioned in this essay, the indigenous groups of Mexico are the main target for the SEP’s efforts as is evident by the mention of teaching all the inhabitants of Mexico one common language which would supplant those indigenous tongues that do not aid in the efforts to unify the nation with common goals and needs.

Mexican sociologists and political scientists, Pablo González Casanova, has noted that post-revolutionary states such as Mexico often maintain and renew much of the colonial structures that keep the elites in power through what he calls internal colonialism. The rural regions to which the education project was directed were inhabited

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<sup>32</sup> *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 1. 1 marzo 1932, 3

by people that González Casanova would describe as the minorities of Mexico. As he explains:

Los pueblos, minorías o naciones colonizados por el Estado-nación sufren condiciones semejantes a las que los caracterizan en el colonialismo . . . habitan en un territorio sin gobierno propio; se encuentran en situación de desigualdad frente a las élites de las etnias dominantes . . . no participan en los más altos cargos políticos y militares del gobierno central, salvo en condición de ‘asimilados’; los derechos de sus habitantes y su situación económica, política, social y cultural son regulados e impuestos por el gobierno central” (410).

He goes on to explain that “en general, los colonizados en el interior de un Estado-nación pertenecen a una ‘raza’ distinta a la que domina en el gobierno nacional, que es considerada ‘inferior’ o, a lo sumo, es convertida en un símbolo ‘liberador’ que forma parte de la demagogia estatal” (410). The divide between the indigenous “race” as a symbol at the service of what González Casanova calls the state demagoguery and the ideal citizen is exemplified in the above quote from *El Maestro Rural* explains the central government’s primary objective for the SEP’s work in rural education. By using education to unite people with a common language and goals the SEP would serve as an agent for this internal colonization of those people who did not currently reflect the central government’s ideal image for a Mexican citizen. According to González Casanova with internal colonialism the only path open to individuals and communities for participation in the government is through assimilation. The need for assimilation is echoed in the pages of *El Maestro Rural* which extol the ability of the seeds of education to take root pulling together the disparate voices. González Casanova proposes a means of escape from the uneven power dynamic that internal colonialism inflicts upon the local

communities from the central government and that is to resist by creating autonomous structures of government within the nation-State, a process that carries a resemblance to the anarchist roots of revolutionaries who spread propaganda throughout the rural countryside prior to and during the Revolution such as Ricardo Flores Magón. Since *El Maestro Rural* combines the work of SEP authorities working from the central government and the input of the teachers and supervisors working in the vast and loosely connected network of rural outposts it is possible to see a confluence of these contradictory visions of the future of Mexico, one in which autonomy brings strength to the community and the other in which allegiance brings national unity.

As Dewey perceptively noted, the change that the Revolution instilled was a sense of political enfranchisement amongst the agricultural and industrial workers who had previously been easily overlooked by government policies. After the Revolution it was clear to the federal government that to create stability and end the violent uprisings throughout Mexico there needed to be a way to understand and address the needs of the vast majority of their population that lived in or near poverty. Politics and education became tightly entwined as community, primary, and vocational schools began to serve as a means of managing this previously disconnected portion of the population to the centralized federal government. To open this chapter, I will give a brief overview of what was taking place in the political landscape of Mexico as the SEP transitioned from the supervision of the immediately post-revolutionary government of the ex-generals towards the centralized federal government that would define Mexico's political structure in the Cárdenas era and beyond. The pages of *El Maestro Rural* reflect the political shifts

taking place and how these affected the changing nature of the SEP's growing influence in the rural communities which their schools serviced.

The revolutionary caudillo Venustiano Carranza was president from 1917 to 1920. He appointed a civilian politician, Ignacio Bonillas, as his successor. When Ignacio Bonillas won the presidential election, the armed forces lead by generals from the northeastern state of Sonora revolted against his government in support of Álvaro Obregón, one of Carranza's former revolutionary generals.<sup>33</sup> Two of the principle men involved in the plot to unseat Carranza and his successor — which ultimately lead to his death — were Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles. These men would directly or indirectly maintain the power of the presidency for the next fifteen consecutive years.

After the overthrow of Carranza, Obregón took over the presidency from interim president Adolfo de la Huerta. As president, Obregón did not aggressively seek to institute the changes outlined in the 1917 Constitution that would have allowed the state to actively participate in the agrarian land reform by redistributing large land holdings. Obregon understood that the federal government still lacked the cohesion necessary to institute large-scale social and political changes, so he focused instead on education and to some extent agrarian reform (Voss). It was during Obregón's presidency that Vasconcelos consolidated the public education system under national control and created the Secretaría de Educación Pública. Like Plutarco Elías Calles, who succeeded him in 1924, Obregón was a member of the group of politicians known as the *veteranos*. After

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<sup>33</sup> The generals from Sonora proclaimed their revolt against Carranza's government in the Plan of Agua Prieta (Tenenbaum).

successfully leading the revolution, these men from the north had taken possession of vast tracts of land and thus joined the ranks of the wealthy landowners. Therefore, they fought to protect their wealth as well as the holdings of others in similar positions thus strengthening the landowners against which the revolution had been waged. Plutarco Elías Calles stood in opposition to the desires of the *agraristas* who were most famously led by Emiliano Zapata during the revolution. The *agraristas* fought for the redistribution of large land holdings by the government into *ejidos*. When Calles' term as president ended in 1928 he installed a series of successors gaining him the popular title of the “Jefe máximo”. This nickname of Calles’ led the period of 1928 to 1934 to be called the Maximato; it was marked by a series of presidents who for the most part defended the interest of Calles and the *veteranos*. The militarization of the post-revolutionary government during the Maximato was accompanied by the increase influence of what the contemporary philosopher, Samuel Ramos, would label a culture of radical nationalism that, according to him, allowed men like the caudillo Calles and his successors, to hide the precarious nature of their power with the bravado of masculine virility. The counter to this radical nationalism was the intellectual imitation of Europe, which Ramos also deems unsuited to the national progress. Writing in 1934, Ramos appeals to his readers to neither practice a false imitation of European nor an equally false “mexicanismo”, “Tal mexicanismo es el que, animado de un resentimiento contra todo lo extranjero, pretende rehacer toda nuestra vida sobre bases distintas a las que ha tenido hasta ahora, como si fuera posible en un momento anular toda la historia” (Ramos 90). The battle between “mexicanismo” and “europeísmo” had its ramifications on the educational field.

The shift in government leadership from one style of revolutionary caudillo – Obregon – to the political stronghold of Calles’s Maximato meant great changes in the nation’s growing education program. As noted in the previous chapter, by 1924 Vasconcelos had begun to feel the stifling influence of the Calles government; his funding was slashed, causing among other things, the closing of the publication *El Maestro* (1921-1923). In addition to this, the influence of the dissenting voice of the CROM (Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos) provided an opposing populist voice to Vasconcelos’ project (Fell 114). In November of 1924 Lombardo Toledano, the president of the CROM’s Education Committee criticized the SEP for attempting to do away with indigenous culture in favor of an elitist cultural unification that gave preference to bourgeois European-derived culture: the enemy of the proletariat class (Blanco 125). One of Vasconcelos’s successors under President Calles was Moisés Sáenz. In response to the criticism of the CROM, Moisés Sáenz attempted to institute pedagogical changes that incorporated the local communities’ economic and social needs and fostered local cultural practices. Thus the compromise that Samuel Ramos had indicated as necessary between the European and nationalist cultural practices was on its way and the country would soon unseat the last of the caudillo-style presidents with the election of Cárdenas in 1934.

Moisés Sáenz was head of the SEP for a brief period in 1928 but his influence and role in the SEP continued with subsequent education projects such as the work he led in the indigenous communities of Carapan, Mexico, from 1932 to 1933. Sáenz’s interest in indigenous culture shows the growing influence of the *Indigenismo* movement in the

SEP's public education programs. In his essay "Models for the Nation to Model Citizens" Alexander S. Dawson explains how the members of the *Indigenismo* movement such as Sáenz and anthropologist Manuel Gamio often represented the indigenous communities as models for revolutionary politics and culture. Dawson goes on to note that these representations of indigenous people relegated their political participation to those goals and desires that coincided with the post-revolutionary modernizing programs and branded those indigenous people who did not follow those programs as "primitive" and unworthy of the national identity or political citizenship. Sáenz and others defended their intervention in rural communities as Dawson notes, "In the mid-1920s certain SEP officials adopted the practice (which would become much more important later) of arguing that the government's conception of reform process was very popular even aggressively demanded in the countryside which was already undergoing great changes" (297). However, the relationship was not always so simple and violence often broke out against those rural schoolteachers who actively pressed political and social issues that indigenous communities, often strongly influenced by their Catholic religious leaders, were not prepared to accept. In the prologue to his memoirs of the experience working with indigenous communities in Carapan, *Carapan: Bosquejo de una experiencia* (1936), Moisés Sáenz describes his arrival in the following terms "unos nos aplaudieron y otros nos apedrearon" (Sáenz xiii). Whatever their reception may have been, the members of the SEP who interacted with the rural indigenous communities were meant to accomplish one thing: the integration of the indigenous communities into the modern nation as productive members of a growing economic and social structure. According to Sáenz the

purpose of his time in Carapan was “estudiar y tomar acción en una región indígena con el propósito de examinar de cerca la cuestión de la incorporación de los grupos nativos al medio nacional” (Sáenz vii). Of course, this meant the incorporation into the nation as defined by the central government. The SEP saw the use of school activities such as theater and dance that involved the active or passive participation of the entire community as a means of fomenting the ideal integration of the indigenous population, one that would result in a *mestizo* citizen who appreciated the art of his or her ancestral culture while adhering to the European model of “rational” thought.

While leading the SEP the remainder of the Maximato (1931-1934) Narciso Bassols continued the work of forerunners like Moisés Sáenz. Bassols reinforced the national imagery that had been depicted in the works of muralist like Diego Rivera by reinstating public mural projects, especially as incorporated in the design of primary schools.<sup>34</sup> The SEP continued its efforts to bring culture, hygiene and healthcare to rural areas. The main changes that took place under Bassols were the installation of a sexual education curriculum and the increased promulgation of socialist style of education. The sexual education program was abandoned due to fierce pressure from politically powerful conservative groups. The theatre pieces and dances often serve as a model for courtship, marital and familial relationships in *El Maestro Rural*. The traditional gender roles are solidified in these as well as in the lessons in domestic crafts included in the magazine specifically for the female teachers and the girls in their class. Sexual education would

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<sup>34</sup> For more on the use of murals and architecture by the SEP during this time see Renato González Mello and Deborah Dorotinsky Alperstein's study *Encauzar la Mirada. Arquitectura, pedagogía e Imágenes en México. 1920 / 1950* (2010).

have threatened the patriarchal structure of these gender roles by removing the Church as the traditional regulator of heteronormative family structure from its place as the bastion of marital knowledge.

Meanwhile socialist education which hoped to secularize education in an effort to place the government and not the Church as the ideological head of the nation met with resistance as well. David Espinosa's study on the effects of these educational changes on students and national politics notes that teachers were also meant to promote land reform, the unionization of urban workers and collective actions by peasants to address socioeconomic problems (547). These are the efforts for progress that eventually galvanized communities through workers unions. The efforts of these educators would enable the shift towards the corporatist one-party state that began under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. As Alan Knight points out, "Although Calles and Cárdenas may have disagreed on the means of transforming the society they both felt that the state should play an active role in doing so (Knight "State and Civil Society" 21). Whereas Calles had seen the future of Mexico in the shape of large modern agro-business, Cárdenas supported the redistribution of large land holdings and would eventually form cooperatives, extend credit and open irrigated lands (Meyer 244).

It was during this important economic and social transition between the Maximato and the Cárdenas presidency, 1932 to 1934, that *El Maestro Rural* was first published by the SEP under the direction of the intellectual Salvador Novo. 1932 was also the year that a very public cultural debate took place that would come to shape the future of the intellectual elite's influence in Mexican politics. The two sides that faced off were the

intellectual vanguard represented by the members of the literary group known as the *Contemporáneos*, to which Novo belonged, and the more conservative, nationalist group which claimed to be the only true supporters of the revolution. Although these nationalists aligned themselves with the revolution and its liberal ideals regarding the redistribution of lands into *ejidos* and better regulation and benefits for laborers their views on gender roles supported traditional patriarchal modes which were more conservative than the modernizing *Contemporáneos*. Guillermo Sheridan's study of this 1932 polemic notes that the central figures of the *Contemporáneos* including Salvador Novo and Samuel Ramos removed themselves from the public debate early on (73). Alfonso Reyes and Jorge Cuesta were left to defend the position of the avant-garde intellectual who believed that to understand the national contemporary realities one could pull from the universal human experience. This argument was their main defense against the attacks by the nationalists who argued that the *Contemporáneos* were unpatriotic because their interest in the European vanguard made them anti-nationalist and therefore anti-revolutionary.

Although much of the curriculum that would enter *El Maestro Rural* was clearly be influenced by recent historical events and pulls from national cultural sources that were favored by the more inflexible nationalist side, as the first director of the magazine Salvador Novo had control over the content and the style of the magazine. Novo's vision resulted in a combination of European vanguard and nationalism. Novo explained his desire for compromise in the following way: "Buscar lo *mexicano* dentro de la forzada literatura inspirada en la Revolución [...] parece tarea tan inútil como pretender que en la

literatura de la Revolución francesa, y solo en ella, puede hallarse *lo francés genuino*” (qtd. in Sheridan 103). Even from its inception the magazine’s content under Novo’s direction did favor the nationalist’s desire to emphasize the cultural production of Mexico’s people. For instance, the magazine’s cover art was produced by artists like Diego Rivera instead of following the art-deco style of its predecessor *El Maestro*. As *El Maestro Rural* evolved the European civilization brought over from intellectuals who had studied in Europe ceded ever more pages to the culture and art of Mexican traditions including those of indigenous communities that were being studied and brought into the national public eye. In the years after Salvador Novo’s appointment concluded the SEP increasingly favored the nationalist cultural agenda that was supported by the government.

Despite the inclusion of indigenous themes in the artwork and content of *El Maestro Rural* the indigenous population was still a mystery to many of the intellectuals involved both directly and indirectly with guiding the SEP’s rural education project. Novo’s contemporary, the previously mentioned Samuel Ramos, wrote in his *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934), “Ninguna cosa mexicana puede substraerse a este influjo [indígena], porque la masa indígena es un ambiente denso que envuelve todo lo que hay dentro del país. Consideramos, pues, que el indio es el "hinterland" del mexicano”(78). As an essayist who was linked to the government through various appointments, Salvador Novo shared the point of view of his contemporaries that the indigenous population of Mexico was oft maligned and misrepresented and was in fact rife with opportunity for progress. Novo’s efforts as the head of the SEP’s editorial wing

and the director of *El Maestro Rural* from 1932 to 1933 revealed his interest in constructing educational materials geared toward the rural and indigenous population. In a brief essay from the collection *La vida en México en el período presidencial de Lázaro Cárdenas* entitled “No tiene la culpa el indio...” Novo describes the population as follows, “El indígena es un factor muy importante en el desarrollo del país, y su educación y transformación están dentro de las posibilidades del gobierno” (49). He goes on to describe the ways in which the indigenous people of Mexico have already begun to actively contribute to the nation’s political, literary and scientific vanguard. Novo recounts an interview with Cárdenas from *Excelsior* in which the president tells of his recent trip to Guerrero. Novo is quick to distinguish Cárdenas from his contemporaries by noting his close proximity to and understanding of what he calls Mexico’s “diversas razas aborígenes que no suelen llegar a la ciudad” (49). He pulls a direct quote from the president who attributes the negative stereotypes of indigenous people as lazy and selfish to the spectacles induced by intoxication and hunger that have been part of their daily lives due to exploitation. Although Cárdenas does not explicitly say that the Church has been responsible for exploiting the indigenous people of Mexico he concludes by pointing out that once schools are made available to these communities they will turn to them as the preferred institution of guidance. As Cárdenas explains, because schools contained the potential to coopt the indigenous communities allegiance from the Church they were seen as a threat: “Esto lo saben los enemigos de la revolución, y por eso consideran a la escuela como la fortaleza contra la cual han de dirigir sus ataques” (49). Cárdenas was well aware of the power the educational system had to supplant the

longstanding patriarchal authority of the Church with its strong ties to the landowning elite. His own political campaign was won through the support of peasants and industrial workers who had been drawn together against the landowning elite to consolidate their political ties with unions and worker's organizations. As Mexican historian Guillermo Palacios, who has written on the post-revolutionary educational project, notes:

Hay que recordar que durante los años inmediatamente posteriores a la lucha armada propiamente revolucionaria se operó en el universo campesino una transferencia del simbolismo de la figura del hacendado o del cacique local --el 'jefe político' porfiriano-- hacia la figura del Estado o de sus representantes, a los cuales se entregó la función paternal que antes cabía al patriarca agrario. (*La pluma y el arado* 68)

Cárdenas takes full advantage of the *campesino*'s transference of patriarchal loyalties and consequently takes the previously unrepresented masses under his wing into the center stage of Mexico's political life.

A major strength of Lázaro Cárdenas as president was his ability to coopt support with his belief in the power of education to bring about social progress. Two of the major changes, which Cárdenas pressed for during his presidency, were education and economic reform. The greatest legacy of his economic policy is his vastly popular decision to nationalize Mexico's petroleum reserves and the expropriation of foreign oil companies' equipment in 1938. Although his legacy in education reform is often viewed through the same utopic lens he faced numerous obstacles when attempting to place a socialist inspired teaching curriculum into practice.<sup>35</sup> Recent scholarship on the Cárdenas era has attempted to transform the image of Cárdenas as a leader who enjoyed the full

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<sup>35</sup> See León y González's *El cardenismo, 1932 - 1940* for a current assessment of the challenges that Cárdenas faced during his presidency including a detailed account of his "política indigenista" and the creation of the Departamento Autónomo de Ausntos Indígenas in 1936.

support of his constituency during his six years in the presidential palace. As historians Samuel León y González, Alan Knight, and John Sherman have noted, the work of Cárdenas to reform education often met with opposition from political and social conservatives with allegiances to both the army and the Roman Catholic Church.

In his recent evaluation of Cárdenas's legacy, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut of Jalopy?", Alan Knight notes that those who supported the government during the period of 1934 to 1940 were likely to identify with four major efforts: labor and agrarian reform, economic nationalism, socialist education and progressive foreign policy. However, it was only the most popular of these efforts that were most successful. Agrarian reform resulted in a four-hundred percent increase in the redistribution of the land of large landowners, thanks in no small part to the continued support of Mexican communists (despite the president himself shying away from communism because of international disfavor for the movement) (Knight 84). Meanwhile the socialist education reform, which included sex education, did not celebrate the same degree of success. Knight explains that education reform was impotent without the state having popular support, "In other words, the relationship between the state and popular movements is a mutually conditional one, albeit rarely if ever an equal one ... the state needed popular support; popular causes needed state champions" (93). Whereas agrarian reform was a movement in need of a champion the top down driven socialist education reform and *Indigenista* programs that Cárdenas attempted did not find the popular support they needed to survive. One teacher recalls how locals would not let her take charge of the school, "La educación socialista, al decir de los enemigos del progreso, iba a enseñar no sólo la

coeducación, sino la educación sexual a los niños, y también deseaba desterrar de sus mentes todo tipo de ideas religiosas . . . yo no era una maestra renegada sino una mujer que necesitaba trabajar honradamente . . . que opinaba que Cristo fue realmente el primer socialista y que mi único objetivo era enseñarles desde la escuela la manera de mejorar sus condiciones de vida" (Cano 33). This teacher knew that to propose the unpopular education reforms, such as including sexual education, would have been dangerous, she only wants to teach those lessons that would help the community grow, without inciting its fury.

Without popular support, or what Hannah Arendt refers to as support of the masses, Lázaro Cárdenas would not have had the power to move the divided interests of the government towards lasting reform. In her study, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt describes the masses not as a class or a group with a shared political affiliation but instead as the majority of politically indifferent people who do not vote. Therefore, before the installation of a totalitarian style of government "democracy" depended as much on "the silent approbation and tolerance of the indifferent and inarticulate sections of the people" as it did on the minority who organized and articulated politics (312). Mexico as a political setting differs vastly from the European context from which Arendt is writing, especially in the nature of the masses stepping forward to support a totalitarian movement. If one presupposes that Cárdenas could garner the support of the national majority because they previously were part of this group that held a "silent approbation and tolerance" for the old democratic leaders, it is more accurate to say that those masses were not stricken by indifference so much as forced into inaction because of a lack of

political and social enfranchisement. It was through the work of Cárdenas and other members of the PNR who helped organize both labor and agrarian organizations that the once silent (or silenced) were able to quickly voice their opposition to the Maximato and support Cárdenas.

One way to ensure the continued support of these masses was through an education program that would reach these once disenfranchised rural communities and provide a coherent message for the post-revolutionary government to counter the effects of both conservative (Catholic Church) and more radical (Anarco-Communist) ideologies which were already in circulation. The rural schools placed the teacher in between the community and the government as an intermediary armed with state-sponsored lessons in communities who were only beginning to understand the impact of their own involvement in the state.

## **II. NATIONAL EDUCATION AND NATIONAL TEXTBOOKS: UNIFICATION AND THE FIRST VOICES OF *EL MAESTRO RURAL***

Prior to Cárdenas's presidency and the great propulsion he gave to socialist education reform, the SEP was already looking to fill the need of a standard national textbook that would serve to spread its increasingly politicized message throughout the network of national public schools. The government wanted to construct a political identity throughout the nation by using the textbook in the same way that Vasconcelos had attempted to construct a cultural identity with his magazine *El Maestro*. In a chapter for *Encauzar la Mirada: Arquitectura, pedagogía e imágenes en México 1920 -1950* Claudia Garay Molina traces the first search for a standardized national textbook back to

a contest held by the then Secretary of Public Education Aarón Sáenz in 1930. The contest sought a text for the first and second year of elementary school that would bring a sense of national identity into history, reading and civic lessons. As Garay Molina explains, these texts were meant to reflect a specifically national and local experience: “La intención era que los niños comenzaran su aprendizaje por medio de ejercicios que abarcaran la comprensión de cosas y escenas vividas por ellos, y la representación gráfica de ellas” (110). However, of the three finalists none were deemed appropriate for use in the rapidly increasing number of rural schools because they lacked relevance to the rural landscape and lifestyle. Therefore, the Segundo Concurso Nacional de Libros de Texto specifically called for submissions that would take into account in the rural setting of the pupils (112). On July 13, 1932 Narciso Bassols, in his role as Secretary of Education, made a presentation for the Seminario de México in which he supported the search for a rural textbook and made an argument in favor of school material designed specifically for the majority of Mexico’s population whose livelihood depended on their agricultural surroundings by emphasizing, “el contraste violento que ofrece la inmensa mayoría de la población, que es campesino, frente a la ciudad, permite hablar de dos mundos educativos diferentes y, por lo mismo, correlativamente, de dos sistemas ideológicos, de dos doctrinas independientes desde muchos puntos de vista: el de la educación urbana, por un lado, y, por el otro, el de la educación rural” (cited in Garay Molina 113). Bassols recommends that urban and rural education be treated as if they were geared towards different worlds populated by two very different kinds of people, one of which, the rural, would be alien to the urban inhabitants. As a means of creating a bridge to that other

world, in March of that same year the SEP sent *El Maestro Rural*'s first issue to the rural schools throughout the country free of charge. It contained lessons for pupils and teachers that were meant to be specifically attuned to the schools and the agricultural communities they served. *El Maestro Rural* served as a substitute for the textbook created for rural schools that would not arrive until 1935 when the SEP published *Simiente*, its first national textbook specifically geared towards the interests of the peasant population in rural areas. Even after the SEP published *Simientes*, one frequent complaint of teachers was that they lacked educational materials. One teacher interviewed for a study on educational materials and their impact on nationalism recalls that textbooks “were not available, the problem was that they were very scarce” (vom Hau 143). The study goes on to note that teacher training was deficient and that pedagogical content was usually embraced when teachers were able to access it. *El Maestro Rural* therefore had a dual purpose, to continue the education of the teachers as they were performing their duties in the field through correspondence courses and providing much needed content for the classroom.

*El Maestro Rural* along with other pedagogical magazines stood in the lieu of a textbook as a means for SEP headquarters to maintain its contact and influence with its network of rural schools. Rafael Ramírez, a longtime advocate of rural education in the SEP and leader of the Cultural Missions, was a constant and central figure in the formation of rural schools who advocated the necessity of classroom materials and course content that prepared its students for their life in the increasingly modernized Mexican agricultural economy. As Chief of the Department of State Education in 1933, Ramírez

published a memo in *El Maestro Rural* advising teachers to bind the magazine by volume: “La revista “El Maestro Rural” debe encuadrarse por volúmenes y hacerse constar en los inventarios de las escuelas”.<sup>36</sup> *El Maestro Rural* was an important tool for the SEP which, according to Ramírez, “tiene vivo interés en que la revista “El Maestro Rural” sea convenientemente aprovechada por todos los maestros federales, a fin de que el esfuerzo que hace la Secretaría para publicarla no resulte inútil” (6). He goes on to address school inspectors directly as to what they should be looking out for when they visit each school house. They should ensure that the magazines arrive at each school under their jurisdiction, and personally review during each visit “que están siendo aprovechadas las enseñanzas que contiene y vigilen la cuidadosa conservación de las colecciones que se forman para que no desaparezcan de los archivos de las mismas escuelas al cambiarse los maestros” (6). A paragraph from each semester’s report should include detail on the fact that the magazines arrived to the school. The inspectors should also specify if they have recommended that the teachers bind together the fifteen issues comprising each volume and add them to the school’s library archives that teachers had to turn in at the end of the school year. If teachers complied with these indications the SEP guaranteed that it would reflect positively on the final score given to them by the supervisors. By thus incentivizing the teachers the SEP meant to ensure a supply to each rural school of sanctioned material.

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<sup>36</sup> Ramírez, Rafael. “La revista “El Maestro Rural” debe encuadrarse por volúmenes y hacerse constar en los inventarios de las escuelas”. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III. Número 9. 1 Oct. 1933, 6.

The creation of a resource, such as *El Maestro Rural*, was critical for the SEP as it attempted to establish the pedagogical content that would shape the political and civic identity of the national populous throughout the post-revolutionary period. Historian Mary Kay Vaughan has studied the effects of state-sponsored education on cultural identity in Mexico during and after the Revolution. Vaughan's *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasant and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* explains the creation of national identity, citizenship and social behavior as a negotiation between the state and peasant population. Vaughan uses several sources to support her arguments: information provided in bi-monthly reports from the supervisors of rural SEP schools, interviews with the local population and the content of educational magazines, including *El Maestro Rural*. These sources point to the difficulties and successes of the rural school teacher as they attempted to forge links with the communities in which they lived. Vaughan argues that the SEP used the work of muralists like Diego Rivera and other members of the Revolutionary Syndicate of Painters as well as pedagogical texts to forge an image of the Mexican Revolution as a popular movement (Vaughan *Cultural Politics* 38). The goal of the Revolutionary Syndicate was to emphasize "the leveling and liberating aspects of the revolution" by creating "art to deepen class consciousness, awaken struggle, and depict a prominent place for the subaltern classes and indigenous peoples as agents of Mexican history" (38). The popular movement which these artists celebrated, unlike the varied ideologies that were actually present during the Revolution, was depicted as culminating in and supporting the idea that "[t]he Constitution became the implantation of the 'socialist' principles on a liberal base" (39). After the Revolution the government saw

the peasant population as a potentially dangerous active member of the national political landscape and therefore the stability of the nation depended on convincing this vast majority of the population that their voices had and would continue to be heard.

In addition to the artistic movements impelled by the muralists described in the previous chapter there was an increasingly important performativity to national culture. Dance and theater became a staple of the school's education program. Many of the dances and plays were collected and created by teachers who were working within the rural communities starting with the *misiones culturales* of the 1920s that sent *maestros misioneros* to various rural communities to teach lessons that varied from hygiene to artisanal trades. The *maestros misioneros* were so dubbed to liken them to the early Catholic missionaries who once brought a different brand of education to the same communities. The work of these teachers as they attempted to stage these new forms of national performance at the schools brought the SEP's voice into the community by drawing people in to attend the performances. In these theatrical and dance performances patriotism was as important of a lesson as the moralistic or historical content the performances shared, and these entertaining lessons were meant to reach well beyond the classroom walls.

### **III. POST-REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM ON DISPLAY**

For the SEP, it was not enough to include lessons that taught schoolchildren about their civic responsibilities and their rights as citizens. *El Maestro Rural* made it clear through its essays on the role of theater and dance in pedagogy that the teachers were

expected to bring a sense of patriotism to the greater community by installing an open-air theater where the community could join in the pleasures of cultural performances as part of the didactic practice. In their attempt to share and strengthen a uniform vision of Mexican nationalism the work of the rural schoolteacher echoed that of the literature and film throughout the country in the post-revolutionary era of national consolidation. Mexican anthropologist Ricardo Pérez Montfort explains that the educational system and media worked together to produce a singular character for the national Mexican identity after distilling the vast regional differences into one. This distillation of the diverse regional expressions of cultural practice into a singular patriotic repertoire is evidenced by the example of the *jarabe tapatío*. José Vasconcelos declared the *jarabe tapatío* the national dance of Mexico in 1924 since it combined folkloric music, dances and costumes from various regions including the state of Jalisco as the name *tapatío* - which refers to something originating from Guadalajara, the capital city of that state - suggests (Saylor 91). The women's brightly colored, long, sequined skirts, white embroidered blouses, *rebozos* and colorfully adorned braids were modeled of the dress on the *china poblana*, a popular style for women in Puebla since the sixteenth century. The *china poblana*'s mestizo attire distinguished her from the indigenous and European modes of dress and became a symbol of nationalism as early as the mid-eighteen-hundreds during the Wars of Reform when these women would accompany their men into battle with the tri-color's woven into their braids (Vaughan "China Poblana" 385). Her masculine counterpart who woos his dance partner with a combination of machismo and charm wears the three-piece, ornate riding suit of the *charro*. Like the *china poblana* the *charro*'s attire carries

both social and historical significance. The *charro* was the member of the *hacienda* who had the requisite riding skills to help manage the farm and therefore held a higher rank than the average *peon* (Nájera-Ramírez “Engendering Nationalism” 4). As folklore became a more important part of the national identity, official celebrations in the capital and beyond began to feature the couple of the *charro* and the *china poblana* dancing the *jarabe tapatio*. This collage of various traditions from around the country, all harkening back to the supposedly lost era of the Porfirian *hacienda*, became the representatives par excellence of Mexican nationalism. Citing Montfort, “En materia pedagógica, el patriotismo, íntimamente ligado al ‘goce estético’ —en el que la representación de ‘la mexicanidad’ jugaba un papel determinante— parecía apelar a sensaciones y conceptos muy caros para el nacionalismo conservador” (Montfort 116). As Montfort suggests in his analysis the patriotic aesthetic that developed during this time had close ties to the traditions of the group of conservative nationalists whose livelihood relied upon keeping the *haciendas* that the post-revolutionary government had promised to dismantle and repartition through agrarian reform.

The SEP seems to be aware of this contradiction between laudatory depictions of a bygone era as a celebration of the new post-revolutionary Mexico when choosing the brand of national patriotism which they would include in the pages of *El Maestro Rural*. Looking at the theater and dance pieces which the SEP proposed to have performed in rural communities one does not find a *charro* as the protagonist but rather an indigenous person, a revolutionary *campesino* or a factory worker. Analyzing the popular films of the post-revolutionary period known as *rancheras* because the comedies were set in

country estates, Hector Domínguez-Ruvalcaba notes that the celebration of the revolution accomplishments is notably absent. He notes that instead of promoting revolutionary optimism the films recreate Porfirian culture so that a “nostalgic view dominates the cultural panorama” (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 79). He goes on to explain that most of mass culture was aimed to please the conservatism that dominated in those families who had been wealthy during the Porfirian era and now represented the middle-class. Contrarily, the heroes represented in the theater and dance pieces the SEP provided for its students in the rural areas reflect a different national history. In these stories the battle lines drawn by the revolution are still very fresh and the owners of the haciendas are forces of evil against whom an emancipatory hero must battle. As Domínguez-Ruvalcaba notes, this emancipatory hero is present in the films of Emilio Indio Fernández and the revolutionary novel, he is a man in whom “an admiration for virility goes hand in hand with brave actions taken on behalf of the collectivity” (80). The theater and dance pieces in *El Maestro Rural* present this revolutionary hero as an ideal and propose an idealized setting in which he could thrive.

However, although the conservative ideal of the hacienda filled with charros is not replicated, the role of the women and men on stage are very much the same. Elsa Muñiz explains that the *jarabe tapatio* became the national stereotype not only of the idealized appearance men and women but their ideal behavior as well. “El baile asimismo señala alegóricamente el coqueteo de “la china” y el cortejo de “el charro, en cuyo colofón . . . salen del brazo en un simulacro de la relación ejemplar entre hombres y mujeres” (165). Elsa Muñiz looks at gender in the post-revolutionary 1920s through the

lens of Judith Butler's analysis in which she conceives of gender as the cultural trapping of the natural body. Following Butler, Muñiz suggests that the body is not inherently gendered but is sculpted through the process of acquiring gender roles which give it its cultural form. This civilizing process of the community-nation is based on the normalization of gender roles through different institutions and becomes especially evidenced during periods of great national change such as after the Mexican Revolution. For Muñiz, the steps the state takes to control gendered subjects can only be understood as a construction and consolidation of power. By including dances and plays reflecting gendered roles, the SEP ensured models of ideal female and male citizens would be available to its students. These models, though dressed in different clothing, followed the same figurative, if not literal, steps of the *charro* and *china poblana*, enabling a continuation of patriarchal power structures aligned with the conservative ideals of the pre-revolutionary state.

The school's open-air theater was a way to put the national education project on display for the entire community, allowing the educational institution to stretch well beyond the classroom. Dance choreography and its accompanying music were a prominent feature in the early pages of *El Maestro Rural*. Although dances were only featured in the first two years of the magazine they played a vital role in setting the tone for how the magazine was meant to be used as a resource for performances that would involve the entire community. The first four volumes of the magazine, which included fifty-eight issues, featured nine different dances collected by various *maestros misioneros* and then compiled and transcribed by Rafael M. Saavedra. In its nearly eight years run

from March of 1932 to November of 1940 the SEP published one hundred and fifty-eight issues<sup>37</sup> with a play appearing in nearly every other issue at a grand total of sixty-two<sup>38</sup>. The high volume of plays and dances of domestic origin marks a sharp contrast to the content of *El Maestro*, the magazine published by the SEP under Vasconcelos. Although there were some dances in *El Maestro*, these were drawn from European traditions and there were no plays included. The children's section of the first issue of *El Maestro* labeled "Aladino" contains a "Baile Escocés" complete with piano music and photographs of two girls completing the dance steps. One might infer from *El Maestro*'s photographs of young children dancing as opposed to the sketches outlining choreographies that *El Maestro Rural* would later include, that the dances of the former were more of a curiosity to be read about than something that would be performed by the readers. In addition, the music included for most of the dances in *El Maestro Rural* was written for instruments more readily available in the countryside than a piano such as guitars, violins and drums. The lack of theater and this unpractical representation of dance in *El Maestro* suggest that culture could and should be enjoyed foremost by the individual and not the community. *El Maestro* proposes an urbane, European and modern interpretation of culture which contrasts sharply with the needs of a rural community. *El Maestro* followed Vasconcelos's model in which the post-revolutionary citizen was fashioned from an ideal conceived by the *criollo* elites in the capitol. To that effect the emphasis was not placed on cultural practice as a means of enfranchising the

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<sup>37</sup> Nearly every year the magazine would release at least one double issue and in 1940 every issue was a double issue. To be clear my tally accounts for a double issue as two separate issues.

<sup>38</sup> When a play was divided into several issues of *El Maestro Rural* as three of the longer plays were, I have counted these appearances separately to show the prevalence of theater as a feature in the magazine.

communities that had fought the revolution but instead on the “civilizing” virtue of a universal cultural experience.

As noted in the previous chapter, by the time Vasconcelos left the SEP in 1924 a dramatic shift was taking place. Not only was the SEP as an institution changing, but the artistic, intellectual and political spheres in Mexico were turning toward socialism as the next step in national evolution. Public art and political celebrations invited the public to participate in a new experience of nationalism. *El Maestro Rural* drew from this movement and asked its audience not only to read and absorb the ideologies of post-revolutionary citizenry but to enact and react to the magazine’s representations of what it meant to be a citizen of Mexico through participating in cultural production in the form of theater and dance. In Diana Taylor’s study *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* she discusses the way both the archive and the repertoire are important sources of information for both literate and semi-literate societies. The repertoire includes any form of embodied memory such as a way of speaking, moving or of particular interest here, dancing. Dance has been a part of the repertoire of indigenous communities since before the conquest but with the arrival of the Catholic missionaries became a means of subjugating the newly conquered people. Taylor explains, “Civil and ecclesiastical powers tried to replace the indigenous peoples’ opaque and ‘idolatrous’ practices with other, more ‘appropriate’ behaviors: shows of obedience and acquiescence” (42). The SEP’s use of dance echoes the attempts of the Church during the colonial period to supplant the cultural practices of the communities where they worked by placing themselves at the center of daily life and celebrations. The

shift is that the government is now recycling the indigenous cultural practices the missionaries wished to supplant and repurposing them as a national symbol.

If teachers wished to follow the guidance of the SEP and put on the plays and teach the dances that were included in the magazine they would require active participation from their students and the community alike. In this way the SEP is supplanting communal traditions in the same way the Church had before it. This is a step towards the internal colonization, which González Casanova explains as resulting from the uneven power dynamic between the indigenous communities and the mestizo elite. If, as González Casanova has described, a community or minority suffers within the nation-state conditions that resemble thos of colonialism on the international scale they will only be able to participate in the nationl government inasmuch as they assimilate to the dominant culture. He goes on to explain that

los colonizados en el interior de un Estado-nación pertenecen a una “raza” distinta a la que domina en el gobierno nacional, que es considerada “inferior” o, a lo sumo, es convertida en un símbolo “liberador” que forma parte de la demagogia estatal; la mayoría de los colonizados pertenece a una cultura distinta y habla una lengua distinta de la “nacional” (Gonzales Casanova 410).

The plays and dances featured in *El Maestro Rural* to some extent fall under the category of transforming the race of the internally colonized subject into a symbol at the service of the state’s power. The involvement of a community in a play or dance put on by the SEP

is a step towards assimilating even if that play is meant to reflect the lives and cultures of the peasants themselves because the representations have been repurposed.

*El Maestro Rural*'s use of indigenous culture echoes the national penchant for converting the aesthetic of the popular class into a national cultural artifact. In the same way the *jarabe tapatio* draws from several regions, the dances and cultural practices that the SEP used in their materials were a mosaic of diverse traditions. What was the proposed impact of having students throughout the nation learn the steps of traditional dances collected from other regions of Mexico to which they had most likely never been or would go? How do these dances, often drawn from the syncretic tradition that combined both indigenous and Spaniard-Catholic sources, maintain or challenge the power structures in place prior to the Revolution? Why, as the sheer number included suggests, was theater presented as an ideal tool to teach and share the lessons promoted by the SEP? The sources of these dances and plays were often teachers who were working in the rural school system. The SEP even sponsored a contest amongst the teachers who could send in plays that followed certain guidelines. Is it possible to interpret those lessons which they, often active members in the community, found most valuable to their students and their families? Close readings of the dances and plays included in the magazine will show how these pieces attempt to open new doors for civic and political participation to the rural communities but often ended up replicating pre-Revolution power structures by placing the school in the role once occupied by the Church or cacique.

#### **IV. STEPPING IN TIME: A NATION DANCING TOGETHER**

In the decade previous to *El Maestro Rural*'s publication the SEP's *Misiones Culturales* had already begun compiling information about the rural communities that they serviced. In the third issue of *El Maestro Rural*, published in April of 1932 the *Dirección de Misiones Culturales* calls on teachers to compile the dances of the communities where they worked and send them in to *El Maestro Rural* so that they could be featured in the magazine. Mexico's intellectual elite was increasingly interested in strengthening the image of Mexico as a country that took pride in its indigenous heritage. When the SEP's *Escuela Nacional de Danza* opened under the auspices of the *Departamento de Bellas Artes* in 1931 they decided that instead of beginning a professional dance company they would draw from the material culled by experts during the *Misiones Culturales*.<sup>39</sup> The interest in indigenous dance was such that one of the proposals that the *Departamento de Bellas Artes* considered was to use the school as a place to bring indigenous people to demonstrate their traditional dances (Tortajada Quiroz 67). Ultimately, the *Escuela Nacional de Danza* would focus on the creation of a categorically Mexican style of dance which in a similar way to muralism and national music would attempt to create a social art form that synthesized fine and popular art into a new and original form of expression (68). The author Nellie Campobello and her sister Gloria Campobello taught classes in Mexican rhythms and dance which were fundamental in the growth of this new form of Mexican dance as a national performance

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<sup>39</sup> Some of the names associated with the compilation of regional dances are: Fernando Gamboa, Luis Felipe Obregón, Francisco Domínguez and Marcelo Torreblanca (Tortajada 71). For more on the creation of the SEP's *Escuela de Danza* see Margaret Tortajada Quiroz's *Danza y poder* (1995).

(Nájera-Ramírez “Ballet Folklórico Mexicano” 166). As one journalist who was present for the press release announcing the opening of the *Escuela Nacional de Danza* explained, the purpose of the *Escuela* was “elaborar un baile de contenido mexicano, pero sin estorbosos regionalismos, es decir comprensible a todos los hombres. En otros términos, no creo que se pretenda un baile estrechamente étnico, sino un ballet universal” (Tortajada Quiroz 70). For the journalist, ethnic traits would have gotten in the way as would have any regional distinctions to the dances. Instead the goal is to have a dance that can be understood and is universal; but understood by whom? Following the thoughts of this journalist from the country’s capital it would seem that the dances were meant to please an urban audience. Stripped of any ethnic particularities, in other words those traits of the dance that would directly link them to a particular indigenous culture, the dances provide acceptable cultural enjoyment for its urban audience because they do not have to understand the origin of the dance to appreciate it. In this way the dances become a national display, enjoyed and marketed as a typically “Mexican” dance, which for that reason should instill pride in the nation and not one particular community. In this way the national project coopts indigenous and regional differences so as to appeal to a national audience. The process does not end here, this new nationalized dance is then redistributed to the regions of the country where it had originated and taught as Mexican culture. By teaching this style of coopted culture the school system is performing an act of colonial discourse, supplanting the communal culture with one that the mestizo audience of the capital appreciates and understands. Walter Mignolo has explained colonial discourse as the process through which the colonizer and the colonized

communicate the conflictive relationship in which they are bound which is not limited to the written word but includes all forms of symbolic interaction. The act of the state intervening in the production of a cultural production makes it part of the colonial discourse which goes beyond colonial literature and “places colonial discursive production in a context of conflictive interactions, of appropriations and resistances, of power and domination” (Mignolo 7).

The *Festival de Danzas Mexicanas* held in the Teatro Hidalgo in 1934 was the first show to present the work of the students of Mexican Rhythms course. There, Gloria Campobello would direct two dances that had appeared in the pages of *El Maestro Rural*, *La danza de los malinches*<sup>40</sup> and *La virgen de las fieras*.<sup>41</sup> Although on a much smaller scale, when *El Maestro Rural* brought these dances to the remote rural communities serviced by the rural school system they were meant to create the same effect of pride in the post-revolutionary Mexican nation. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, a historian who has worked extensively on the evolution of dance in Mexico, notes: "By the 1930s and 1940s, folk dance performances formed an integral part of the elementary-school experience throughout the country as a way of promoting ideas of nationhood" (Nájera-Ramírez 169). Since Justo Sierra led the SEP in 1902, dance had been a part of the yearly

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<sup>40</sup> In *El Maestro Rural* *La danza de los malinches* is recorded under its more common name of *Los Matlachines*. For more on this ritual folk dance see J.D. Robb's "The Matachines Dance – a Ritual Folk Dance" (1961)

<sup>41</sup> This style of folk dance was complemented by a different and more grandiose style of national dance exemplified by the 1931 *Ballet Simbólico 30-30* choreographed by Nellie Campobello. Based on the Mexican revolution, the show was divided into three dance sections: revolution, sowing and liberation (Pratt 181). During this massive ballet in which over four hundred dancers took the stage the Mexican revolution was translated into an object of national formation in which the red shirted dancers rose up and brought a wave of change across the countryside.

festivities that invited families to celebrate the end of each academic year (Dallal 72). However, unlike previous dances that allowed children to draw from the music and dance steps that were popular at the time, the dances in *El Maestro Rural* provide the teacher and his pupils detailed choreography, costume design and music that would ensure a faithful representation of a dance deemed to be a source of national pride.

Diana Taylor notes in *The Archive and the Repertoire* the ways in which what she describes as "embodied culture" succeeds in transferring otherwise non-reproducible knowledge within a community. To Taylor, "embodied culture" means that performances such as dances are included in a repertoire compassed of scenarios that are not simply narrative descriptions but embodied practices and gestures. Taylor's inclusion of "embodied culture" into a community's epistemological framework challenges the power of the written archive by acknowledging the capacity of a community to transfer and store other types of knowledge. This other knowledge is what Taylor refers to as, "Nonverbal practices -- such as dance, ritual, and cooking, to name a few -- that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory, were not considered valid forms of knowledge" in the Colonial era (18). Taylor recounts the ways in which the colonial powers, especially the Catholic Church, attempted to supplant the performances so as "to replace the indigenous peoples' opaque and 'idolatrous' practices with other, more 'appropriate' behaviors: shows of obedience and acquiescence" (42). She goes on to note that "[t]he Church tried to impose itself as the sole locus of the sacred and organized religious and secular life both spatially and temporally" (43). After the Revolution the SEP saw an opportunity to fill the void that was left by the removal of the Church from

its position of communal authority and thus went about inserting itself into the central role the Church once held. The SEP, like the Church before it, transformed a practice of communal dance into the spectacle with a clear divide between audience and spectator. When the schools system continued its project of creating a practice of celebrating national dances as part of the education system it removed these dances as scenarios from within a community by transforming them into spectacles. *El Maestro Rural* recreates the moment of conquest by transforming the local tradition into a show or spectacle for the enjoyment of the community and school. As Taylor notes, a performance "forces us to situate ourselves in relationship to it; as participants, spectators, or witnesses, we need to 'be there', part of the act of transfer. Thus, the scenario precludes a certain kind of distancing" (32). The gaze of the audience is unidirectional, there is not reciprocity and the students who are performing these dances are also distanced from it because they are participating in a spectacle, not a local practice.

The last pages of the first issue of *El Maestro Rural* in March of 1932 contain the dance *Matlachines* which I will discuss below. Then director Salvador Novo also published a dance in the third issue of *El Maestro Rural* entitled *Los inditos, danza del señor de Chalma*. In the pages immediately following it he includes an excerpt of an article labeled "La danza en México. Fragmentos de un bello opúsculo en prensa" by Guillermo Jiménez.<sup>42</sup> The article traces the origins of dance to pre-colonial religious rituals and praises the current iterations of these dances as "codices palpitan tes" in which

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<sup>42</sup> Jiménez, Guillermo. "La danza en México. Fragmentos de un bello opúsculo en prensa". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 3. 1 Abr. 1932, 23.

"los indios que bailan en honor de los santos en los atrios de las viejas iglesias; forman un cortejo ornamental, escapado de los venerables papiros . . . con el ritmo de un movimiento unánime" (23). The magazine includes this author's words of adulation for these dances in the hopes that the teachers will accept dances as an important part of their curriculum. Mary Kay Vaughan notes that nationalizing popular culture was one of the main goals of the SEP, throughout the country children were taught to dance the traditional dances of distant communities in an effort to unify them through a singular shared cultural experience. Vaughan argues that in this way, notions "of national, popular culture rested heavily on the achievements of the Indian past and contemporary Indian aesthetics, which were nationalized as symbols, objects, and artifacts" (Vaughan *Cultural Politics* 46). However, these symbols, as evidenced by the dances, were used without the cultural context in which they were produced in so doing created a common, but unrooted, culture. Before they became part of the national education project each of these dances had transformed within a communal experience and become part of a particular localities embodied culture. By removing these dances from their origins, they are disembodied. Ripping them out of context allows the SEP to create a new patchwork quilt of nationalism from the pieces of cultures it has sewn together. This appropriation of past traditions, like dances, did not mean that the SEP admired the way of life that had developed these customs. Vaughan explains that the "educators' notion of modern Mexico appeared to be the antithesis of indigenous society, which was seen as insular, religious, and subsistence-oriented, abjuring the modern market and the Patria" (46). However, the article on Mexican dance in *El Maestro Rural* concludes with what seems

to be a celebration of this insular fanaticism, "Ese tun-tun de los tambores indígenas y esas notas en las chirimías y esos gritos gemebundos, siguen expresando en los campos callados, en los pueblos distantes, a la hora del crepúsculo y a la luz de la luna el alma afligida, fanática, supersticiosa de la raza" (23). Jímenez celebrates this fanaticism of spirit but only as it is displayed in the confines of these local dances. Diana Taylor notes the way the gaze of the outside observer transforms native traditions into a show or spectacle and thus replicates the moment of conquest: "The native is the show; the civilized observer the privileged spectator. We, those viewers who look through the eyes of the explorer, are (like the explorer) positioned safely outside the frame, free to define, theorize, and debate their (never our) societies" (64). Just as the gaze of the explorer described by Taylor, Jímenez's gaze is unidirectional, admiring the dances from afar and separating himself from them. If these words are to serve as an introduction to the use of dance in the rural schools, they enable a process by which there is a continuous distancing from the dance by making them an object of admiration but foremost an object of study in which can be seen a fanatical and superstitious race with whom the participants and spectators are not meant to identify.

Following the article is a direct appeal for teachers to use these dances in their schools and the aforementioned request that other local dances they find be compiled and sent in. It reads as follows:

La Dirección de Misiones Culturales al dar a conocer estas danzas, desea que los maestros rurales las utilicen en las fiestas que organizan en sus escuelas; al mismo tiempo les llama la atención (a los Maestros Rurales), sobre estas expresiones tan bellas del alma popular indígena y les recomienda la representación y exaltación de las danzas locales, así como

su estudio, suplicándoles las recopilen, recojan su música, indumentaria, coreografía, etc., y la envíen a esta dirección de Misiones Culturales, la que como en el presente caso, hará su divulgación. (23)

The SEP is replicating the work of the colonial powers which came before it. The Church attempted to relegate communal dances into the confines of Catholic religious celebrations in an effort to control the indigenous population. The SEP is resituating the practice of communal dance again, this time into the confines of national celebrations overseen by the school. Furthermore, in much the same way as the conquerors of the new world were meant to bring evidence of their conquest in the form of jewels and exotic goods from the new world to the monarchy in Spain, the teachers are meant to pay tribute to the centralized SEP with the booty of cultural practices. These folkloric dances are therefore proposed to be conserved and circulated like an aesthetic cultural product. Though it is hard to tell how closely the SEP's wishes were followed, in 1934 a teacher from Durango recounts what he dubs "una verdadera labor nacionalista" of organizing the first dance contest in that state (31).<sup>43</sup> Although not many dances were included in the magazine the local dances, at least as represented by the participation in this competition, remained an important part of daily life as many of the surrounding communities visited to compete and each performed "al ritmo de su música netamente regional" (31).

Despite the repeated assertion that compiling these dances was being done to conserve distinct rituals from various regions the practice of taking down a practice

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<sup>43</sup> "Primer concurso de danzas en el estado de Durango – por la Misión Cultural Número 2". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IV. Número 5. 1 Ene. 1934, 31.

inevitably transforms it into a product of its author. Rafael M. Saavedra who wrote every dance section included in *El Maestro Rural* was responsible for condensing the accounts of the dance that the *maestros misioneros* had shared with him.<sup>44</sup> In the first issue of *El Maestro Rural* the preliminary description that prefaces Saavedra's compilation of the dance, attire and music for the *Matlachines* the elements of a foundation to *mestizo* culture are mentioned: the Church and indigenous cultural practices. The *Danza Matlachines* is described as a primitive dance which Spanish missionaries used as a means of catechism during the conquest, "aprovechando los elementos que usaban los aborígenes en sus representaciones teatrales, así como los actos sacramentales que por entonces se usaban en España" (14). Saavedra creates an image of peaceful syncretism out of the brutal conquest and conversion of indigenous peoples. He explains that the dance is practiced throughout the country but this particular variety is from "la huasteca potosina" and is said to be completely different from the other dances practiced in the Republic that still conserve the dialogues, cantors and an "argumento primitivo". When reading the description, one notes that although indigenous dress is described in detail, the *Matlachines* dance compiled by Saavedra emphasizes that he has removed the "primitive" elements which are present in other variants. The style of dress that the dancers should wear includes guayaberas for the men and *quexquemilts*<sup>45</sup> for the women. Even the colors of the flowers used and style in which the women should wear their hair

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<sup>44</sup> Rafael M. Saavedra would later work as a screenwriter and actor for the Mexican movie industry. One of Saavedra's better-known screenplays was *La Sandunga* (1938) named for a dance from Oaxaca which he wrote alongside Fernando de Fuentes and Salvador Novo.

<sup>45</sup> A typical indigenous garb worn by various indigenous peoples in Mexico including the huastecos and otomís, it consists of a white poncho style blouse often embroidered with brightly colored patterns.

is included, "Además, se tocan con una especie de pañuelo, detenido por las trenzas, que se enrollan en la cabeza, y el cual tiene las mismas labores del "quexquemetl"" (14). The elements of indigenous culture, which are useful to the creation of patriotic pageantry, such as the colorful dress and hair adornments, are conserved alongside the structured dance of Christian tradition while any "primitive" markers are discarded. State-sanctioned participation of the *campesino* in dances such as this rendition of the *Matlachines* enforced structures of control upon what was a local tradition of community dances. In this way the SEP imposed itself upon the dances practiced by communities so as to situate the acceptable representations of *mestizo* culture within the national narrative while erasing the "primitive" elements of the communities.

In the wake of the revolution which saw the birth of the politically mobilized "revolutionary peasant" the state became more interested in weaving the *campesino* into the fabric of the nation to ensure his pacific participation in the national project. As Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla points out, the development of *indigenista* policies by the state aimed at helping "civilize" the indigenous population defined the indigenous people in such a way that it recreated the moment of colonization by blurring ethnic particularities and erasing their historical trajectories. The creation of the sociopolitical category "*indigena*" by the early twentieth century *indigenistas* paralleled the conquistadors' invention of the term "indio" which negated the ethno-historic particularities of the multitude of civilizations they encountered although dances note specific indigenous peoples they are represented under the guise of a national display in service to the national aesthetic.

As historian Rebecca Earle points out, the category of Indian was created in 1492 and has since been used in Latin America in various ways to strengthen the national imaginary. For instance, during the War of Mexican Independence representations of the betrayal of the Aztec emperor by Hernán Cortés were used to instill hatred against the treacherous Spanish colonizers. Thus, upon attaining independence the nation was indebted to the loyalty of its citizens to the bygone Aztec emperor. The nation continued to celebrate the Aztec empire which fomented an allegiance to and interest in ancient indigenous civilizations. The archeological study of ancient indigenous civilizations and their nationwide glorification would culminate in what Earle refers to as the near godlike status of Aztec royalty after the 1910 revolution. Yet Earle is careful to point out that for all the admiration of indigenous antiquity the iconographic framing of indigenousness as part of the nation was limited to a narrow and abstracted notion, much in the same way as iconic feminine representations of the nation and liberty in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not translate to contemporary women's civic rights or freedom. What is evidenced by the inclusion of indigenous cultural practices, such as dance, in *el Maestro Rural* is the way the SEP hoped to create a new idealized image of indigenous Mexico. However, the indigenous cultures that would ultimately be considered acceptable to the nation would have to pass through the filter of the state so as to ensure that they reflected a Mexican nation that was proud of its indigenous heritage but not attached to barbarous or antiquated (read non-European) forms of civilization.

The representation of local dances presented in *El Maestro Rural* by the revolutionary state also blurred ethnic particularities in an effort to pacify and unite the

indigenous population. These blurred divisions erased old lines of allegiance, allowing them to be redrawn them in ways that better fit the government's divisions of communities into states and districts. One clear example of how performances and displays of culture could do this is the *Homenaje Racial* promoted by the SEP in 1932, the same year *El Maestro Rural* commenced publication. The *Homenaje Racial* was an antecedent to Oaxaca's famous *Guelaguetza* celebration during which indigenous communities from around Mexico perform their local dances. Deborah Poole notes that as opposed to the government of the Porfiriato that saw ethnic and racial diversity in Mexico as a failure of the liberal project, the post-revolutionary state coopted this diversity as a means of strengthening the homogenizing *mestizo* culture promulgated by the SEP's Cultural Missions and rural schools. Though the *Homenaje Racial* was meant to celebrate the diversity of Oaxaca's indigenous traditions, new regional divisions were created and enforced by the state and each region's "beauty" paid homage to the one Miss Oaxaca. Erasing the ethnic distinctions that existed in reality and redrawing practical regional divisions meant that each region displayed their diversity only to emphasize their new unity as a region and adherence to a central state, and by extension national government. This realignment of regional borders pacified the complex community ties by realigning allegiances. Although this is done during the process of a pageant, as Rebecca Earle aptly notes, "Ceremonies and symbols help make nationalism imaginable" and thus have repercussions on participants day to day lives (12).<sup>46</sup> For the

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<sup>46</sup> In *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1890-1930* Earle examines how the category of Indian was created in 1492 and has since been used in Latin America in various ways to strengthen the national imaginary.

post-revolutionary state the acceptable indigenous subject was one that represents the indigenous past of Mexico but abandons his or her claims to contemporary indigenous practices that did not adhere to state-sanctioned models.

In the third issue of *El Maestro Rural*, Rafael Saavedra includes another dance, “Los inditos: Danza del Señor de Chalma” which was collected by two “Maestros Misioneros” and a “Maestra Rural”. As its title suggests, “Los inditos: Danza del Señor de Chalma” has strong ties to its colonial origins. Saavedra describes it as follows: “La melodía, de procedencia otomí, tiene todas las características de la música indígena y la letra, de grande ingenuidad, acusa una mezcla del castellano importado por los frailes misioneros, con el idioma y expresión de los naturales” (21). The song's non-normative Spanish of the “naturales”, as Saavedra calls the otomíes, is placed in quotation marks, thus separating it from the Castilian Spanish in the verses:

“Güenas” tardes mi “pagrecito”,  
te “venimo” a saludar.  
Pases gustoso este tu día  
y en este tu día de felicidad. (22)

As with the first dance, the primitive indigenous traits are circumscribed, set apart using quotation marks, when they are not removed. They are bracketed and labeled, ascribed to a category of display or showcase and not part of a daily tradition. Like the decorative braids in the female dancers' hair, these indigenous traits are to be worn only on special occasions as a display of pride for their national heritage. The stage becomes a spectacle or exhibition apart from the everyday life of the community. The process of inscription and deletion that can be seen in the presentation of these two dances is an example of the

way *El Maestro Rural* integrated indigenous culture that coexisted in *campesinos* daily life into the national narrative. Gónzalez Casanova noted that the only path for the rural citizen whose allegiance to indigenous communal traditions makes him an outsider to the centralized government was through assimilation of the customs of that government. By collecting and exhibiting these dances the traditions from which they arose are cordoned off as items in a museum. Like the objects brought by the early explorers back to the center of the empire these dances do not bring the observer closer to community in which they were created but instead create a separation.

The subsequent dances that Saavedra presents in the article are accompanied by a short story depicting the setting in which Saavedra first saw the dance take place. He moves from these vivid descriptions of the activities and ceremonies that surround the dance in each town to the intricate description of each of the dancer's attire before explaining the choreography and music. One location that features prominently in all the dances he describes is the church. In the “Danza de los apaches” Saavedra writes, “A pesar de intervenir en ella un personaje litúrgico (el diablo), y bailarse en el atrio de la iglesia el día 4 de febrero de cada año, fecha en que conmemoran el santo patrón, esta danza no tiene ningún carácter religioso, y sí, más bien, guerrero, pues tanto su música como su coreografía, parecen estar inspiradas en la evocación de costumbres bélicas precolombinas” (25).<sup>47</sup> Similarly, when describing “La virgen y las fieras (Danza simbólica descriptiva)” he avers:

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<sup>47</sup> Saavedra, Rafael. “Danza de los apaches”. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 1. 15 Oct 1932, 25-26.

. . . esta danza no tiene en realidad ningún carácter religioso, a pesar de que el grupo de indígenas que la baila lo hace en el interior de las iglesias, y durante las fiestas que celebran en honor de sus Santos Patronos. Se ignora su origen, y su argumento tiene analogía con las distintas danzas precolombinas que nos describen los primeros cronistas de Indias; sin embargo, tanto su preparación como su ejecución, es todo un ritual que nos recuerda la seriedad de estas manifestaciones en el México anterior a la Conquista. (30) <sup>48</sup>

Even when Saavedra uses the description “danza religiosa” in the title of the dance as he does with *Los tecomates* he will, as with the other two dances, emphasize that its origin is pre-colonial and therefore not tied to the Church. Nevertheless, he goes on to explain that *Los tecomates* is performed by a particular group of Otomís known as the Xitas during religious holidays. Saavedra is repeatedly trying to distance these local dances from the Catholic Church and yet the setting for most of the dances is within the Church on Catholic feast days. Why is Saavedra making what seems like a futile attempt to separate these traditional dances from the Catholic Church that is so intimately linked to their origin?

The postrevolutionary government emphasized the importance of removing the Catholic Church from their role as the primary educators in the nation. In a short article entitled “Alcoholismo y fanatismo” from early in 1934 Ordoñez Vila, a teacher from San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato, describes what he perceives as the twin vices of alcoholism and fanaticism among “nuestras clases campesinas” (16).<sup>49</sup> After describing the many social ills that are caused by alcohol, Ordoñez tells his fellow teachers that it is their

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<sup>48</sup> Saavedra, Rafael. “La virgen y las fieras (Danza simbólica descriptiva)”. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 9. 15 Feb. 1932, 29-30.

<sup>49</sup> Ordoñez Vila. "Alcoholismo y fanatismo." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IV. Número 3. 1 Feb 1934, 16.

responsibility to set these rural communities free. He then points out, “he observado en distintos lugares de la República . . . que algunos elementos del magisterio rural, progresan el fanatismo católico, que con este principio hacen una labor obstrucionista contra los ideales de la revolución social, y en perjuicio del adelanto de nuestras clases campesinas” (16). In a similar article the same year another teacher, F. de la Cruz M. writes: "Cumpliremos con el dictado de la libertad, matando el fanatismo religioso, hasta el día en que el hombre y la mujer mexicanos dejen la iglesia por el hogar, las pláticas del cura por las conferencias en la escuela, y la preparación de una vida para después de la muerte, por la idea de ser útiles a la patria" (13). Throughout the countryside the Church was deemed an oppressive force that thwarted the goals of the social revolution the new laic education of the SEP was trying to bring to these rural communities. These attempts at controlling religion by the SEP’s teachers would lead to violent backlashes against the public schools and their teachers.

It is no wonder then that Saavedra attempts to distance the traditional dances from their roots in Catholicism. It is the same form of aesthetic cleansing that attempted to remove the distinct “primitive” elements from these same dances so as to make them acceptable representations of national culture according to the central government. However, these origins inevitably leave their traces behind despite Saavedra’s efforts. Much in the same way, the education that the work of these rural school teachers are meant to provide is only a partial replacement for the void left by the Church. Just as when liquid is poured out of a glass it will still cling to the sides, the new national education filled a cup that still held traces of the old religious models. The Church

continued to have its place in the supposedly secular education of the post-revolutionary period. In the years *El Maestro Rural* was published, the violence of the Cristero Rebellion was still a recent memory, and teachers continued to be killed or harrassed for bringing secular education into communities still loyal to the Church. It was not until 1935 that President Lázaro Cárdenas took steps to repeal the laws the Plutarco Elías Calles had put in place to limit the powers of the Catholic Church in an effort to appease the public. Perhaps it is this complicated allegiance that brought about the end of including dances in *El Maestro Rural*. When in December of 1934, President Cárdenas's administration took over control of the SEP and asserted the socialist model of education the SEP more strictly enforced banning any religious content. If the SEP hoped to assert themselves in the role once played by the Catholic Church, they would have to learn to do so without borrowing the old models.

## V. SETTING THE SCENE FOR A NATIONAL DANCE

An account from a teacher from La Escuela Normal Rural de Río Granda, Zacatecas in the September first issue of *El Maestro Rural* in 1934 includes a photo labeled "Viajeros huicholes bailando en un teatro al aire libre" (17).<sup>50</sup> As a group of huichols were passing through Río Grande the local school offered them a place to stop and rest. In return the huichols performed for the school in the open-air theater. The teacher describes the dance as, "una de sus danzas sobrias y magníficas, de perfecta ritualidad primitiva, expresando en ritmos directos la inspiración artística que la raza ha

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<sup>50</sup> "Trabajos de las escuelas rurales." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 5. 1 Sep. 1934, 16-17.

conservado al través de los tiempos, y que sobrevive, como un germen de civilización y de porvenir, a pesar de todas las miserias y humillaciones que la conquista y el abandono dejaron caer sobre su bronce virgin" (17). In the account of this dance the emphasis is placed on the primitive dance not only as a seed of a past civilization but one that points to the future. The author seems to follow a script written by the SEP that indicates that the indigenous cultures should be admired if they are untainted by the stain of colonization as the reference to "bronce virgin" suggests. Yet, unlike the dances transcribed by Saavedra, the purpose of this dance is unknown. It is pulled out of context and enjoyed as an artifact and not as part of a greater culture experience.

There is a difference between the indigenous dances that the magazine attempts to include and the dances pulled from mestizo culture. The indigenous dance is extricated from its context, whether that be a religious holiday or a tribal tradition to stand alone as a representation or artifact. On the other hand the dances from mestizo culture are contextualized in their modern rural surroundings as part of the daily lives of the men and women, who like the audience, are asked to participate and view them. An example of this is the final dance Saavedra describes in *El Maestro Rural*, "El huapango"<sup>51</sup> which is accompanied three months later by a play of the same name, also by Saavedra.<sup>52</sup> The dance and its corresponding play or "Ensayo de costumbres huastecas", as Saavedra labels it, describe the dance and its context as a display of a new post-revolutionary national identity. The dance is labeled as prototypically national because it is danced in

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<sup>51</sup> Saavedra, Rafael. "El huapango." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 5. 15 Sep. 1934, 30-31

<sup>52</sup> Saavedra, Rafael. "El huapango. Ensayo de costumbres huastecas". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 12. 15 Dec. 1934, 31-33 and *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo VI. Número 1. 1 Jan. 1935, 22-25

several Mexican states including Hidalgo and Veracruz, where it exemplifies the “agitación cálida y ardientemente colorida de estas zonas” (30).<sup>53</sup> Saavedra places it alongside the other two most well-known dances of Mexico, “El huapango es uno de los bailes regionales de México, que por ser la representación genuina del sentimiento artístico de una gran masa de habitantes de nuestro país debe considerarse, y de hecho lo es, tan nacional como el jarabe tapatío y la zandunga tehuana” (30). Saavedra goes on to describe the songs that accompany the dance including the classic “Cielito lindo” and then touches on the dance itself and the costumes that the dancers should wear. It is in these descriptions that the gendered roles of men and women in the post-revolutionary period are clearly outlined. The woman in her decorative “quexquémitl” must wait seated in a row of other women for the man to approach dressed in white pants “con sombrero de palma y . . . casi siempre un machete colgado a la cintura, del lado izquierdo” (31). The woman is a graceful yet passive figure awaiting the man to initiate the dance. The men carry at their hip a machete: a symbol of their active virility and potential for violence. The machete is an imposing presence at two feet long and sometimes bearing a decorative blade and handle for special occasions (Alisky 314). It is also, as the play will evidence, a potentially dangerous weapon. The dance and play echo the same stylized national gender roles proposed by the *jarabe tapatío* as Elsa Muñiz describe them: “El charro: valiente, bragado, trabajador, responsable y ‘muy querendón’. La china: bella, delicada, fiel, ‘muy de su casa’, dulce, tierna y tan casta que prefiere

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<sup>53</sup> Saavedra, Rafael. “El huapango.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 5. 15 Sep. 1934, 30-31.

muerte antes de que la deshonra” (166). This *huapango* like the *jarabe* is another example of forging model national citizens through patriarchal gender roles in which men impel the action and women follow suit or resist according to strict moral codes. The creation of a gendered national identity was an integral part of the State’s plan to unite the nation. In his analysis of twentieth century Mexican film Sergio de la Mora argues that in the post-revolutionary era cultural producers circulated narratives of national identity that included highly gendered and sexualized roles for men and women. The plays featured by the SEP in *El Maestro Rural* reflect the same interests the State hoped to disseminate through film including the virile portrayal of masculinity that came to be known as the macho. As Sergio de la Mora explains: “Machismo is intimately linked to State power and to the highly contested gendered social contract extended to Mexican citizens in the post-revolutionary period” (6). The macho is “virile, brave, proud, sexually potent, and physically aggressive” (7). The ultra-masculine character of the macho was popular amongst conservative nationalist in the central government beginning in the 1920s. The macho was a means of distancing the Mexican ideal citizen from the European model proposed by avant-garde intellectuals from the group known as the Contemporáneos, many of whom held important bureaucratic positions in art, culture and education. The SEP attempted to influence the social consciousness of its audience through *El Maestro Rural* just as the film industry would do in the years to come.

The one act play, *El huapango*, has a simple plot with the song and dance taking place at the party in a cantina which serves as a background for the action. The cantina stands on the land of a large hacienda run by a powerful cacique whom the tenants and

workers refer to as “el amo”, the master. This setting resembles that of the popular post-revolutionary film genre, *la comedia ranchera* which developed a genteel masculine hero for the conservative middle class whose interests were more often rooted in personal and familial melodrama rather than the social struggles of the revolutionary hero. In his analysis of Mexican representations of masculinity Hector Domínguez Ruvalcaba describes the hero of the *comedia ranchera* as, “a heroic figure without heroic actions—forceful, bellicose men who lack the ability and inclination to fight against oppression (80). By analyzing the prolific creation of Mexican films sponsored by the state and directed by the Department of Filmic Activities during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas Domínguez Ruvalcaba explains the ways in which the gendered relationships of the characters reflect the nation’s prescription for a heteronormative patriarchal hegemony.

*El huapango* seems to follow the model of the popular *comedia ranchera* which revolved around a personal story of a family or individual living in a rural setting and having problems with women or a family feud of some other sort. This play, like the literature, art and cinema of its time, paints a picture of a postrevolutionary state stuck in the caciquismo of the Porfirian era. As Domínguez Ruvalcaba points out, “Rather than revolutionary optimism, it is the constantly painful Mexican history that visibly unfolds... showing the persistence of the Porfirian culture” (79). From its onset the play presents its protagonists as trapped by wicked and tyrannical owner of the land on which they work. *El huapango* opens with two old men discussing the young men of the day. One of these old men, Don Juan, laments that his goddaughter Charo’s boyfriend has not taken her out of harm’s way since the “amo” wants her delivered to his house to serve as

his mistress that very night. There, outside the cantina, the men discuss the fate of the women who are passive actors in the story. This homosocial space provides coherence to the hegemony of masculinity. Domínguez Ruvalcaba has explained the way the cantina serves as a space in which male characters, “disclose private issues, which rather than being considered family concerns, are used to increase or reduce macho prestige in this collectivity. The public space is not used to dispute social issues, such as peasants’ exploitation or social welfare, but to discuss private and intimate sentimental matters (84). However, here in the play the strict demarcation of social class as well as a divide between the peasants who continue to serve their “amo” and those who refuse to do break the mold so often present in the filmic versions of these stories by reintroducing revolutionary discourse and motivation in its characters.

Don Juan’s dialect is typical of the language used throughout the play and is meant to reflect a Caribbean regional way of speaking with dropped consonants. He says, “Si yo juera el noio, era l’ hora que ya habría arrendao con ella pa cualesquier partes... pero ya no hay hombres como en nuestros tiempos...” (32).<sup>54</sup> The audience later learns that his goddaughter and her boyfriend are both unaware of her uncle’s plan to sell her to the “amo”. The sides are easily delineated between Charo, her boyfriend and the tough old men and the evil “amo” and Charo’s aunt and uncle who hope to serve him. The “amo” a representative of the landowners, or hacendados, is the exemplary enemy of post-revolutionary Mexico, as are those who, like the aunt and uncle, would

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<sup>54</sup> Saavedra, Rafael. “El huapango. Ensayo de costumbres huastecas”. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 12. 15 Dic. 1934, 31-33

continue to happily bend to his will in an effort to curry favor. Don Juan refuses to do this and therefore falls out of favor with the “amo” and is out of work but he assures his goddaughter Charo that he has made his choice with pride, “Nomás que tú lo mandes, hora que los pelones ya no saben ser macho pa defender sus querencias” (33). The audience finds out when the play concludes that contrary to Don Juan’s assumptions, when Chencho finds out the plans the “amo” has for his girlfriend he does act like a “macho”. The police commander arrives at the party looking for Chencho because he has killed the “amo” with a machete. Don Juan and the others do not reveal the whereabouts of the escaped lovers and it seems even the commander and his “rifleros” give their tacit approval to the murder when they agree to stay for a drink before continuing their search for the fugitive. The hero, Chencho, is a violent and virile man who refuses to bend to the will of the old patriarch, the landowner, and instead, like the revolutionaries before him, rises up against him. Meanwhile the heroine, Charo, serves as the inspiration for this act of valor but nothing more. Just as the dance had suggested, the woman must move only at the behest of her partner who wields his authority as easily as the machete that swings from his hip. The difference between Chencho and his cinematic counterparts is that he is a postrevolutionary hero who is still taking part in the violent acts which would overthrow the Porfirian status quo. Rafael Saavedra is taking into account the audience for this play, peasants and their teachers who have been tasked with teaching them that the Revolution had been fought and won for their benefit.

## VI. THE REVOLUTION ON A STAGE

*El huapango*'s treatment of revolutionary themes like the triumph of the honest poor over the treacherous landowning class accounted for nearly a quarter of the pieces that were included. As mentioned above, the pages of *El Maestro Rural* were filled with theater from their earliest issues. Like *El huapango* many plays were short, consisting of one or two acts. Most of the plays that touched on the theme of the Revolution were more overtly didactic than *El Huapango* and often included a character that would explicitly tell the audience all the good the Revolution had brought the small town in which the action transpired. Intellectual and political forces prior to the Cárdenas era had assumed, incorrectly, a lack of civic and political understanding on the part of the indigenous communities. In a brief essay from Novo entitled “Prehistoria”, he points out the sharp contrast between the portrayal of the Revolution in Vasconcelos's SEP and how it was portrayed by the SEP during the Cárdenas administration. He describes Vasconcelos's description of the indigenous people in his *Breve historia de México* as follows: “Vasconcelos pone verdes a los indios, alaba a los españoles y enaltece la religión católica que vino a dar armonía a sus vidas, a liberarlos de sí mismos” (50). Vasconcelos refutes centuries of indigenous traditions and communal practices in favor of the colonial powers that arrived to conquer them. In regards to contemporary history, Novo aptly points out the way in which Vasconcelos's rhetoric whitewashes the Revolution of 1910 to render the conflicts between class and race indistinguishable from one another, “Parece que lograda la independencia, si la Colonia escatimó a los indígenas oportunidades de desplegar sus talentos, un siglo liberal se olvidó de todo distingo de

color y la lucha no fue de clases, intestina, sino nacional y patriótica, de una raza común” (50). The faith that Vasconcelos showed in the indigenous people was in its ability to form part of an imaginary common race that would bend to the post-revolutionary government’s economic and social goals by aligning its own cultural interests with those of the nation. Novo, who had worked among indigenous communities, is quick to refute this belief of Vasconcelos’. Accordingly, Novo ensures that during the transition towards the Cárdenas-era popular socialism the SEP directly addresses the difficulties of the indigenous people who live in rural small towns and how post-revolutionary changes will affect them. These contrasting portrayals of two important politicians, Vasconcelos and Cárdenas, and their influence on the education of the rural indigenous population reveal the shift that took place between the publication of *El Maestro* by the SEP and the later *El Maestro Rural*. Whereas Vasconcelos attempted to do away with the diversity of the indigenous population by continuing the cultural take-over begun by the Catholic Church, Cárdenas celebrated the different races of Mexico and hoped to strengthen their political allegiance to his government.

The plays of *El Maestro Rural* were an opportunity for the SEP to share the message of the Revolution with an audience that was seldom reached. Naming a few from over two dozen plays included in the *El Maestro Rural* that directly address the Revolution gives one a general sense of the body of work and how it constructs the Revolution as a source of salvation for the community. In *Resurgimiento*<sup>55</sup> (1932) by the

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<sup>55</sup> Castellanos, Carmen y María. (Maestras Rurales). “Resurgimiento.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 3. 15 Nov. 1932, 24-26.

two teachers Carmen y María Castellanos<sup>56</sup> the play depicts a community in which, with the help of the new schools brought by the Revolution, children are able to outsmart the landowners to benefit their families. In *Redención proletaria*<sup>57</sup> (1934) by another teacher, José Ruiz, the Revolution brings about the union of the peasants so as to demand fair pay and land in recompense for their work. In *Desencadenadas*<sup>58</sup> (1936) by Prof. Ignacio Ramirez a community is brought together to fight and free themselves from oppression. These revolutionary plays use familiar situations for the audience who, throughout the years have been subjected to unfair treatment due to disenfranchisement. The hero of each play is either the maestro rural or a revolutionary, sometimes a poor farmer turned soldier, or a poor soldier turned farmer. These male heroes offer salvation to the town by educating them regarding their new rights under the post-revolutionary government. These include the rights given to them through various social and agrarian reforms, which the community then knows they can take advantage of for their greater good. There is sense that the old way of life needs to be left behind, and as in *Huapango* where an older generation may be inclined to continue to lay claim to paternalistic favors from the landowning class in return for their subservience in plays like *Revolución Redentora*<sup>59</sup> (1933) by the federal rural teacher, Ruperto Torres L.<sup>60</sup>, from November of

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<sup>56</sup> Under their names Carmen and María Castellanos are described as “maestras rurales” in *El Maestro Rural*.

<sup>57</sup> Ruiz, José (Maestro rural). *Redención proletaria o Las conquistas sociales de la Revolución. El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 9. 1 Nov. 1934, 32 - 35

<sup>58</sup> Ramirez, Ignacio. “Desencadenadas: Pasaje revolucionario.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IX. Número 2 y 3. 15 Jul. 1936, 37-39.

<sup>59</sup> Torres L., Ruperto. “Revolución Redentora.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 3. 15 Nov. 1932, 38.

1932 the younger generation is eager for the older generation to step aside. As a young man explains, “según mi modo de pensar, esos viejos que se oponen a todo lo que es progreso, deberían ir a la tumba inmediatamente, para que dejaran seguir a los jóvenes la evolución natural de las cosas” (38). The older generation does not believe in the Revolution and is maintaining a status quo that inhibits the youth’s desire for social and political change.

Although the young man in the aforementioned insinuates that he would like it if the older generation were to die no violent actions are taken against these members of the community who stand in their way. Instead, in the vast majority of these plays it is up to hero or heroes to defend the Revolution, not to take the offensive. Such is the case with the play published in November of 1932 entitled *Lacras conservadores que contaminan a la revolución social Mexicana* by a “maestro federal” named Victor Manuel Bucio in which a *maestro rural* comes to the aid of a peon whom a landowner and corrupt judge have falsely accused of attempted murder.<sup>61</sup> As in many plays the figure of the cacique stands recalcitrant against the changes brought by the Revolution. He wants to evict this peon because he has brought up the idea of building a school and the redistributing of land. Instead of the peon standing up against the cacique himself he obeys the law and goes to prison. It is up to the town to unite under the leadership of the *maestro* and demand that the judge uphold the rights for which they had fought Revolution. Though

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<sup>60</sup> Again, as with other authors the magazine specifies that this playwright is a “Maestro Federal Rural” thus distinguishing him from other contributors who come from literary backgrounds as well as students who will later contribute their own work.

<sup>61</sup> Bucio, Victor Manuel. “Lacras conservadores que contaminan a la revolución social Mexicana.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 2. 1 Nov. 1932, 28-30.

the judge and cacique seem to stand in the way of the "magna Revolución Social Mexicana" (28) the *maestro rural* rallies the town people who have come to witness the sham of a trial and exhorts them: "¡Qué dice usted de esto! ¿Será justo lo que hace el capitalista con el trabajador, todavía en estos tiempos y en estos lugares donde no han fecundado las conquistas de la Revolución?" (30). The crowd rises up and demands justice and the peon is freed. Just as in *Revolución Redentora* the Revolution is discussed as an inevitable force, once the seed has been planted it simply needs to be tended to give birth to the new society it has promised.

The hero of Rafael Saavedra's *El huapango*, Chencho, is a celebration of the traditional "macho" who uses violence as a means of defending his honor. In this way, even though the peasant may win a victory over the landowner the play itself recreates the conservative paternalistic model of prerevolutionary Mexican society. It is *maestro federal* Victor Manuel Bucio's *Lacras conservadores*, which does in fact represent a new power structure. The hero is yet again a man; however, he draws his strength from his ability to unify the community. In this way the play is presenting a model of social involvement that counters the traditional patriarchal structure by having the educated autonomous community demand its civil rights be respected instead of having them be protected by a benevolent leader.

In many ways these plays, written by teachers who are working within the rural communities, resemble those of the political militant, Ricardo Flores Magón. In Flores Magón's first play *Tierra y Libertad* (1916) he tells the story of a falsely accused peon who is imprisoned through a corrupt justice system much in the same way as the peon

from *Lacras conservadoras que contaminan la revolución*. In a similar way to *Huapango*, a young couple, Marta and Juan, is powerless in the face the unsolicited advances the cacique is making towards a young woman who is spoken for, in this case Marta is married to Juan. The authoritarian power of the cacique is described through the abuse against those who are powerless to defend themselves against an immoral proposition. As in *Lacras*, the cacique takes advantage of his power by putting the young man in jail. In *Lacras* when the couple tries to ask for their priests help his response is to chastise them. Aware of the priest's response to Marta and Juan's plea for help the *maestro rural* alludes to the complicity of the Church in the corrupt justice system by demanding of the judge, “¿Ya hemos vuelto a la época de la conquista o a la de la Inquisición? ¿Qué delito ha cometido este pobre indefenso?” (Bucio 29). Similarly, in Flores Magón's play a priest appears as a crony to the cacique who uses his power as the community's spiritual guide to try to convince the peasants to do the cacique's will. Flores Magón, whose plays were mostly disseminated in print form and not enacted on stage, did not have to fear the backlash of speaking out against religion that might occur in the countryside and so his priest is a villain who riddles his speech with shockingly honest asides, “Estáis excomulgados. (*Marta y Juan, horrorizados, se llevan las manos a las sienes.*) (Aparte.) Si supieran los pobres diablos que yo no creo lo que digo. (*A ellos.*) Dios, justamente ofendido por vuestras culpas, os castigará aquí, en la Tierra, mientras llega el día de castigaros después de la muerte con las llamas del Infierno. (*A parte.*) Si no les meto miedo, son capaces de matar a don Julián y tal vez hasta a mí” (Magón *Tierra y Libertad*). It seems all is lost for the couple as they have no one left to defend them

against don Julián and Juan awaits his trial in jail. However, as in *Lacras*, those who suffer are aided by the presence of an individual who leads the community to rise up. For Juan, this individual is Marcos, who has learned of the systemic corruption through the Mexican anarchist newspaper *Regeneración*, which was edited by Ricardo Flores Magón himself. This young man knows that the only way to rise up against corruption is to unite. So he and a group of peasants do so and liberate the imprisoned Juan. *Tierra y Libertad* emphasizes the power of the community to change the corruption and repression that has been their reality for so long by uniting against it. In both Flores Magón's play and *Lacras* the peasants successfully develop what anarchist activist and anthropologist David Graeber labels a counterpower in his study of anarchist theory. A counterpower develops as an imaginative alternative to the state and capital and can take the form of social institutions as varying from popular militias to self-governing communities. In an unequal society, such as the one represented in both of these plays, “imaginative counterpower often defines itself against certain aspects of dominance that are seen as particularly obnoxious and can become an attempt to eliminate them from social relations completely. When it does, it becomes revolutionary” (Graeber 36). Flores Magón and the *maestro rural*, Victor Manuel Bucio, come to the same conclusion in their plays: the individual is able to rally the support of his peers by decrying the corruption of those who stand in power. However, *Tierra y Libertad* (as is the case with Flores Magón's other play, *Victimas y Verdugos*) ends with the death of all those heroes who had come together to combat injustice because they are betrayed by their fellow workers who fight against them in the hopes of currying favor from the government and their employers, whereas

the plays in *El Maestro Rural* end with the success of those who fight for the ideals of the Revolution. For Flores Magón, writing in 1916, the fight had just begun but the plays in *El Maestro Rural* are meant to convince their audience that the fight is over and each community just needs to catch up with the new and more justice system that the post-revolutionary government has set. Nevertheless, if the audience who is reading or watching these plays sees the corruption of the play reflected in their daily lives it is clear that the changes have not come. Then these plays could be read as rallying cries to continue the revolution that Flores Magón helped set in motion. They serve as a call to action for a community that is set apart from the post-revolutionary government that purports to bring them the promised changes and therefore must create the change from within. The autonomous community must unite to bring about the changes necessary to combat a corrupt and unresponsive power structure.

However, the reflection that the plays in *El Maestro Rural* creates is not a mirror for the communities where they were meant to be performed so much as a canvas upon which the SEP could portray the ideal citizens it wished to create. In an instructional article, “Instrucciones para orientar y facilitar la creación de la obra de teatro” addressed to teachers, Rafael M. Saavedra explains that it is best if teachers and students alike write simple plays based on the lives of the communities where they teach since their goal is not to fight the traditions of the community but instead “enaltecer las expresiones del

alma popular” (25).<sup>62</sup> According to Saavedra the goal of the theater program should be described to the community in the following way:

. . . su importancia como medio educativo y la urgencia de convertirlo en una necesidad espiritual para nuestro pueblo, lo que sólo se conseguirá llegando hasta su corazón, observándolo con cariño, contándole su propia vida en la escena, interpretada por él, recordando siempre que la expresión de los sentimientos y las pasiones humanas, varía ya no sólo en cada país o raza, sino aun en cada región. (25)

Theater is meant to become an intimate part of the lives of the community by reflecting their own lives in their specific regional manifestation. Nevertheless, the director of *El Maestro Rural* had a somewhat different vision for the use of culture in schools. Moisés Sáenz writes in “La escuela y la cultura” that “Civilizar . . . es perder algo de lo que es nuestro propio y limitarlo con el objeto de ajustarlo a lo que es universal” (9).<sup>63</sup> These two contrasting opinions show the give and take that took place on the stage of the rural schools that were meant to display regional particularities that spoke to each community while at the same time uniting them with one unified vision of the future. At play here are two distinct understandings of history within the construction of the national narrative. As Homi K. Bhabha has suggested, the nation is defined by an interplay between the authoritative pedagogical time and the fluctuating reality of performative time. The individual resides within both of these, at once understanding him or herself as a part of a teleological history of the state and as a member of a community in the present. Bhabha builds on the 1882 essay “What is a Nation?” by the French historian Ernest Renan and the work of Benedict Anderson, among others, to theorize the ways in

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<sup>62</sup> *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V. Número 3. 1 Ago. 1934, 25-27

<sup>63</sup> *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 5. 1 May. 1932, 6 - 9

which narrative inscribes the margins of the nation into its history. The race and remote rural surroundings of the pupils and teachers who read *El Maestro Rural* place them in the margins of the nation. Pupils and teachers alike are pressured by the forces of internal colonialism to assimilate the centralized government's teleological representation of history. This representation of history is one in which Mexico is meant to progress toward the popular socialist model of government brought about by the reforms of the post-revolutionary era. The instructions for these plays shed light on the way the national authoritative voice, in the shape of the SEP, desired to produce a teleological pedagogy for the national narrative and yet at the same time admitted the need to reflect the cultural reality of the performative time of the individuals it wished to reach. The emphasis on the power of community, as portrayed in Victor Manuel Bucio's *Lacras conservadoras que contaminan a la revolución social Mexicana* challenges the centralized government's version of progress by exemplifying the ability of the community over the government to govern, protect and ensure its own wellbeing. This style of play that is born within the communities continues the propaganda of the anarchists and communists during the prerevolutionary time, thus promoting a political and social voice to strengthen a counter narrative to that of the central government.

In an early essay on theatre from *El Maestro Rural* the “teatro campesino” is portrayed as a continuation of the classic Greek theatre that taught civic lessons through dramatic representations.<sup>64</sup> Coherent with the ongoing theme of the SEP and by extension rural school teachers as disseminators of a “nueva fe” of progress and

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<sup>64</sup> Novo, Salvador. “El teatro campesino”. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II, Número 1. 1 Jan. 1933, 3-5.

modernization the essay shows how the theatre can be used to spread revolutionary ideology in the same way that the Spanish evangelizers had used it during the colonization and transculturation of indigenous Mexico. The early plays of *El Maestro Rural* were often written in a colloquial style using regional language including slang and incorrect grammar as was seen in *El Huapango*. This laxity was seen as a problem and one teacher, Santiago Pacheco Cruz, expresses his concern in the pages of *El Maestro Rural* (31).<sup>65</sup> For Pacheco Cruz it was important that the “teatro escolar” featured in *El Maestro Rural* did not replicate the provincial speech and local idioms which are present in the regions with high concentrations of indigenous populations. Pacheco Cruz acknowledges that this language was used in an effort to stimulate the minds of the communities but wants to remove the “errores en pro de la castellanización” from future plays.<sup>66</sup> He does not see how the education project can advance if these works continue to use Spanish where “se conservan esas palabras defectuosas en su pronunciación que emplean en su expresión diaria esos **pobres de espíritu, nuestros indígenas del interior,** y que por fatalismo racial legan a sus hijos” (emphasis mine 31). His condescending terms to refer to the indigenous population reflect the ambiguous relationship of the SEP to their audience. Although the SEP professed a desire to conserve local indigenous traditions the overwhelming result of their educational practice was that of a homogenizing education. The desire of the SEP was to expand and correct the

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<sup>65</sup> Pacheco Cruz, Santiago “Cual es la misión del teatro escolar”. *El Maestro Rural* Tomo III, Número 10. 15 Oct 1933, 31.

<sup>66</sup> This is one of many cases in which a teacher directly responds to literary content featured in *El Maestro Rural*. Other teachers criticized the length of speeches in plays, and the content of short stories thus showing the continuing negation of the content between SEP intellectuals and the teachers on the ground as well as these teachers’ increased understanding of their audience.

vocabulary of the indigenous children so as to unify the nation through the use of Castilian under the revolutionary ideals.

Guillermo Palacios's *La pluma y el arado* addresses the goal of public education to unify the nation under one language ("castellanización"), an effort which Palacios notes was accompanied by a warning that teachers not speak the indigenous languages because this could result in their transformation into "indios" (211). Though Palacios notes that the interest in instilling Spanish as a uniform "national" language throughout the *campesino* community is a "civilizing" effort, he fails to point out its innate deracializing quality, which is evidenced by the danger of the teacher becoming an "indio" through the act of speaking an indigenous language. The teachers, who often were *campesinos* themselves, run the risk of being re-indianized after having negated their backward indigenous heritage through their civilized education. In this way, although the SEP professed to respect regional differences, the regional dialects, which threatened a homogenous national language, were meant to be suppressed or removed to avoid what the SEP perceived as backsliding into traditional and retrograde *campesino* cultural practices. Despite the efforts of the SEP, although the inclusion of colloquialisms was drastically reduced, they did not completely disappear from the theatre featured in *El Maestro Rural*. Phrases like "Pues ora si" and "ai nomás"<sup>67</sup> persisted in theatre geared towards family audiences although they almost completely disappeared from plays specifically geared towards children.

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<sup>67</sup> These two examples of many were taken from Oropeza, Antonia. *El rapto de Aristea. El Maestro Rural*. Tomo V, Número 1. 1 Jul 1934.

One way in which the SEP shifted its mission towards the united future was to begin to leave to one side the adult education in favor of children's. If adults had participated in the Revolution on their own accord, they very well may have brought to it their own ideologies. On the other hand, adults who had been a part of the counter-revolutionary Cristero Rebellion were hard-pressed to accept socialist education in their communities and homes. However, the children could be taught what the adults had fought and won for them during the Revolution and those reasons could be easily aligned with the current government's plans for social reform. In the later years of *El Maestro Rural* the plays were more often specifically addressed to children as opposed to the community as a whole. The quantity of plays directed specifically at children through *El Maestro Rural* increased substantially during the latter half of 1934 to 1940. Of the fifty plays published in *El Maestro Rural* from 1932 to 1940 twenty of them were specifically written to be performed by and for children. In fact, children's plays were one of the most consistent recurring features in the magazine alongside lessons on pedagogy, hygiene, medicine, agrarian techniques, toy building, local arts and crafts. The focus on education in Mexico was not new to the post-revolutionary governments. As Alberto del Castillo Troncoso's study *Conceptos, imágenes y representaciones de la niñez en la ciudad de México (1880-1920)* shows, the children of Mexico were seen as a critical sector of the population in need of reform for Mexico to be able to enter the modern era. In a 1938 article from *El Maestro Rural*, "La moral en el teatro infantil",<sup>68</sup> the author

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<sup>68</sup> Bustillo Oro, Juan. "La moral en el teatro infantil." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XI. Número 11 y 12. Nov. 1938, 36-37.

explains that “[a] poderarse del niño, hacerlo para la Revolución, he aquí la tarea de la Educación impartida por el Estado en la que el teatro debe tomar su lugar dignamente, y con el espíritu de sacrificio que nuestra época de transición exige” (36). The theater is meant to lead to the self-sacrifice of each student for the cause of the revolution. The author proves that this is working by giving the example of how the play *Comino vence al diablo* has a “moral secreto” which the children carry with them for days, as evidenced by the pupils creating drawings of the puppet Comino besting the devil. Comina’s exemplary hard work and intelligence produce in the children “incalculables consecuencias revolucionarias que el autor deseó y logró sin decirlo” (37). It is possible to understand how the SEP was attempting to formulate the productive agrarian citizens of the future through rural education by looking at the plays that were targeted at these young minds. The production and interest in the creation of this component shows a need to reach the citizens of tomorrow on a moral level so as to instill the conception of a civic duty as a productive member of the nation.

The plays featured in *El Maestro Rural* were used as tools to transmit the lessons that would inculcate the SEP’s version of revolutionary ideals and help the communities to understand the historical significance of the revolution as well as their civic duty to protect the rights the *campesino* had gained. Besides its lessons about the revolution, some of the most often repeated themes included the concept of discipline and hard work as a necessary prerequisite for happiness<sup>69</sup>, solidarity within the community<sup>70</sup>, the

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<sup>69</sup> Plays include: *Tres ratoncitos perezosos*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XII. Num. 7-8 Jul. 1940, and *Comino vence al Diablo*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XI 11, Num. 10. Oct. 1938.

importance of education<sup>71</sup>, responsible stewardship of the land<sup>72</sup>, and the dangers of alcoholism<sup>73</sup>. The brief two acts play *Bosquejo agricola* featured in the October issue of the magazine's first year is an early example of the "Teatro Escolar" which was to be put on by the school for the benefit of the community<sup>74</sup>. The style of the play is tedious, containing many long-winded speeches and poor dialogue formation. It is clear that the author Isauro Mejia, a federal rural schoolteacher, aimed to insert almost every lesson the SEP hoped to bring to the rural communities. The play takes place at the end of the day in the home of a poor *campesino*, Don Roque. As per the setting description, Don Roque arrives to his humble home to find his wife Juliana mending their children's clothes and informs her that he will be sending their son to the "Escuela Central Agricola" because "quiere que no pase la vida tan triste como la hemos pasado nosotros, deseo que trabaje, sí, pero que trabaje con la mente" (29). From these very first moments, education takes center stage as a possibility for social and economic advancement. The author clearly understands and anticipates the arguments that would be made against an advanced education and places these doubts in the mouth of Juliana. Juliana argues that if the family would have to sell several pieces of their best livestock and half of their crop to pay for Robertito to go to school the cost is too high. Juliana misunderstands how long

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<sup>70</sup> Plays include: *El caballito de la escuela*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo VIII, Num 1.1 1 Jun 1936, and *Somos hermanos*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XII, Num 6. Jun 1939.

<sup>71</sup> Plays include: *Bosquejo agrícola*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo 1, Num 15. Oct 1, 1932, *El poder de la instrucción*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IV, Num. 11. Jun 1, 1934, and *A la escuela*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XI, Num 1-2. Jan-Feb 1938.

<sup>72</sup> Plays include: *El árbol*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III, Num. 3. Jul 1, 1933, and *La condena del árbol*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo 9, Num 6. Nov 1936.

<sup>73</sup> Plays include: *La herencia maldita*. *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XII, Num. 11-12, Nov-Dec 1940.

<sup>74</sup> Mejia, Isauro. "Bosquejo agrícola." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 15. 1 Oct. 1932, 29-33.

school will take and believes she may die before seeing the fruits of Robertito's education. Don Roque explains to his wife that the "Escuela Central Agricola" is free and that their son is smart and will receive his degree quickly. He reminds her of the benefits of the "Escuela de Acción" by recounting the story of their son recognizing a disease plaguing the neighboring corn fields and seeking advice from the schoolteacher. The wife repeats the recipe for the spray used to cure the disease down to the exact combination of cubic centimeters of oil and liters of clean water and gasoline that were used to combat the disease (perhaps the audience was meant to take notes). The school is portrayed as a source of modern techniques that can improve the crop yield but at the same time their son has learned techniques that were similar to their ancestors such as leaving fields fallow so as to improve the quality of the soil. Juliana points out that these techniques were used by her father, thus the school is seen as a way to reconnect with indigenous traditional stewardship of the land. The parents have also learned new habits through the "Misión Cultural" which is run by the local school. For instance, when preparing dinner Juliana emphasizes the importance of cooking the healthy recipes that she was taught there and using clean water.

The second act of "Bosquejo agrícola" begins with Don Roque addressing the audience in a soliloquy extolling the virtues of the teachings of the school while brushing his teeth. He begins by discussing his past dental afflictions and then says, "Cuántas enseñanzas nos trae la escuela rural, y cuántas cosas no llegaban a los pueblos pequeños antes... desde que acostumbré a lavarme los dientes cuatro veces al día, mi dentadura está limpia y fuerte" (31). Don Roque continues for several minutes before concluding

regarding the importance of a good work ethic: “El que solo consume y no produce nada, no puede ni debe llamarse ciudadano mexicano” (31). After this speech Don Roque meets with his wife and she agrees to send their son to school as he wishes. Don Roque expresses his pleasure in the good education and values that his wife has instilled in their children (after lauding these qualities of obedience and discipline in Juliana) “el cumplimiento del deber y el respeto”(32). When the children arrive from school the audience learns what they have been doing there. While Robertito has been busy working in the school’s farm, his sister Matilde has been learning to sew, and will soon be learning to make soaps, perfumes, creams, lotions, candies, and fruit preserves. This task driven and gendered style of education that strives to create productive agrarian citizens is modeled after American educational reformer John Dewey’s style of action pedagogy.<sup>75</sup> In the last scene of the play Don Roque’s *compadre* has agreed not only to pay for the trip Don Roque and his son must take to and from school, but he also offers that Robertito takes care of his lands once he has completed his degree. As he prepares to take his son to school Don Roque hopes that the SEP teachers will be “celosos en el cumplimiento de sus deberes, de esos sagrados deberes... que su labor sea social, económica y moralizadora, y así nuestra querida patria pronto la veremos grande, rica y respetada”<sup>76</sup>.

This play overtly conveys the principal messages of the SEP: the importance of a secular morality that centered on the creation of industrious and educated citizens to

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<sup>75</sup> Narciso Bassols, the Secretary of Public education from 1931 to 1934 was a strong proponent of John Dewey’s methods but emphasized the importance of practical learning to increase agricultural production.

<sup>76</sup> Mejia, Isauro. *Bosquejo agrícola. El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 15. 1 Oct. 1932, 33

strengthen both individual and national economic development and growth. In addition to this the play shows the importance of hygienic practices, and the love for national culture (the children sing several songs and recite poetry in praise of national education). The father also mentions the dangers of alcohol and his hope that through education his son will not fall into that evil vice. The format of the play, which centers on convincing Juliana that it is best to send her son to school despite the sacrifices this will entail, shows the author's ability to anticipate the rural communities' arguments against continuing education. Childhood was being redefined as a time to construct a future citizen for the nation. As education began to form a larger and longer part of children's lives they were removed from contributing towards the family unit's immediate economic sustenance in the hopes of contributing to its future growth.

The theatre became a central feature of the school. One article describes the construction of the theatre by the students as a task and a source of inspiration for the first play that would be given there (for and by the students of course).<sup>77</sup> The article is followed by diary entries from a young boy describing what he has learned from the process. The boy replicates in his stories phrases that could be pulled directly from the plays which will be enacted on the stage they are building such as the following: "Yo digo que no hay cosa mejor para tener disciplina que tener trabajo" (38).

The revolutionary plays for adult audiences that spoke to the frustrations of the *campesinos* in the face of corruption give way to a different message. The evils of society are no longer imposed by an oppressive force from above such as a cacique or

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<sup>77</sup> "Trabajos de teatro infantil." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IX, Número 4. Sept 1936, 37-38

corrupt judicial and religious system; instead they have taken root within the community. The antagonists are those lazy members of the community who do not contribute to the common good or hurt their families with drunken behavior. A final example of a children's play will help to illustrate the way in which the message of the post-revolutionary ideologies was modified for *campesino* children to emphasize the importance of the disciplined worker. *Los tres ratoncitos perezosos*<sup>78</sup> by Carlos Manuel Carrillo traces the adventures of three young lazy mice who decide to pretend to be blind so they can beg for money instead of having to work. Their plan works and the naive "ratón campesino" takes pity on them and gives them some of his hard-earned money. When they join forces with the Gato Bandido the cat tricks the three mice into giving him all their money and then threatens to eat them. Not only do the three mice realize they have been duped, they understand why it is unfair and unkind to be deceitful. The three mice call out for the police mouse that chases away the cat and saves them. After this incident they decide to work hard for their money and gladly accept the broom the police mouse hands them. Laziness is therefore equated with theft and misconduct while hard work and responsibility bring happiness. The play is resolved as the mice joyfully sing this refrain "Hay que trabajar / y después jugar. / Sólo así se puede ser feliz" as they start to sweep (27). No longer is the police a force of corruption in league with a cacique, or fat cat, who would aid in swindling the poor. The state institutions represented here by the police mouse protect the mice from the fat cat who would trick them out of their

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<sup>78</sup> Carrillo, Carlos Manuel. "Los tres ratoncitos perezosos." *El Maestro Rural* Tomo XIII, Número 7-8. Jul-Aug 1940, 24-27.

money and help them become self-sufficient through work. The dialogue is quick and catchy and age appropriate. The mice behave like children but are capable of understanding the important lesson before them just as the school children are meant to do.

The rural school teachers who directed the performance of these plays were participating in propagating the cultural ideals of the post-revolutionary Mexican nation. Nevertheless, one feature of the SEP's message that does not appear in the pages of *El Maestro Rural*'s children's literature, though it features prevalently in the pages of adult literature and essays for teachers, is combating the countryside religiosity which was seen as an impediment to progress. These schoolteachers must have been wary of treading upon the religious beliefs of the *campesino* population. No doubt the obituaries that dotted the pages of *El Maestro Rural* were an indication that the role of the teacher was still a much-contested space within these rural communities. The teachers and intellectuals who composed the pages of *El Maestro Rural* chose their battles. The focus of their work, as an overwhelming amount of the plays content reveals, is an effort to cement a reciprocal relationship between the national government and its future citizens in which hard work would be repaid by the opportunity to voice dissent against unjust working and living conditions. Thus, the cultural project of reshaping the minds of the countryside through rural education became a process of reshaping socially, politically, and perhaps most importantly economically the next generation that would become the foundation for the continuing progress of the nation.

The problem with the models set forth by these plays was that they no longer took into account the desires of the communities themselves. National progress meant adhering to the lessons of the school but this progress meant following the model of civilization imposed upon these communities from without. To belong in the nation the rural communities that *El Maestro Rural* was meant to reach would have to abandon their traditions and adopt those proposed by the state.

As theater moved away from explaining what the Revolution meant to attain and towards exemplifying citizens who obey the post-revolutionary government it lost the commitment to creating autonomous community movements in support of justice and reform that it once had. The theater replicates the same form of internal colonialism that the use of regional dances as a national unifying project attempted. Theater became an educational tool used to curry support for the national government in the periphery. In earlier plays which centered on revolutionary themes the role was reversed, the government supported the interests of the periphery as exemplified by the hero/*maestro rural* who was sent to each town to help the poor defend themselves against corruption. Similarly, the early efforts to disseminate regional dances through the magazine were not so much a celebration of regional customs but an attempt to supplant religion as a traditional source of community unification and replacing it with national celebrations held by the school. Performances within the communities were a space in which the national education project was displayed delimiting post-revolutionary national culture for generations to come that would or would not choose to see themselves reflected on the stages of their local schools.

In many ways the dances and plays of *El Maestro Rural* were affecting a re-colonization of the peasant communities by the intellectual pedagogues writing for the federal government's SEP. They reinforced gender roles that ultimately contributed to the continuation of patriarchal hegemonic structures. However, the plays written by some school teachers aligned their interests more closely with those of the community. As the contributions of teachers who worked in the field increased the tone of the magazine itself often comes to reflect the needs and interests of the community over those of the SEP. I hope to show that through their contributions to the magazine the rural schoolteachers contested the socialist *mestizo* cultural unification that the SEP proposed.

## **Chapter 3: Storytelling in *El Maestro Rural*: Language, Knowledge and Dialogue**

This chapter will look at how the short stories that *El Maestro Rural* disseminated were a means of presenting different visions of postrevolutionary Mexico under the banner of national unification and progress. From their headquarters at the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) the editors of the magazine controlled the content of *El Maestro Rural* reflecting the centralizing goals of the national government while at the same time including the regional and communal interests of the *maestros*<sup>79</sup> and their pupils. As we saw in the previous chapter, dance and theater were used to teach students the performativity of citizenship: how the community should transform itself to meet the needs of the nation. When reading the stories written by the *maestros rurales* one can see beyond the top down directives from the SEP and start to understand the dialogue that developed between the community and the SEP's vision of national progress. These *maestros rurales* served as intermediaries between the education goals set forth by the SEP in Mexico City and the reality of the life in the small towns where they worked amongst peasant and indigenous communities. In my analysis of Vasconcelos's plans for the SEP we saw the way he designed the rural education project to reflect his own reality and not that of the indigenous communities to which it was destined. The content of *El Maestro Rural* is built instead out of the time teachers spent working with and becoming a part of these same communities. The SEP tasked *maestros* with teaching academic

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<sup>79</sup> I use the term “maestro” or “maestro rural” interchangeable in this chapter with the word teacher as it helps to remind us that these teachers were specifically working in the rural schools.

disciplines and sharing stories that would speak directly to their pupils' interests and because they knew their communities needs more intimately, the SEP suggested that they should also write stories to that effect. These directives were dictated by the notion that although the culture of the indigenous people of Mexico should be celebrated the survival of indigenous backward traditions impeded the progress of the nation. *El Maestro Rural*'s narrative content reflects the same conflict at the root of the indigenismo movement in contemporary anthropological and intellectual circles. A conflict that remains at the heart of debate about how to define, celebrate and represent Mexican culture and by extension Mexican citizens themselves. During the postrevolutionary push for modernization, the central government saw the way of life of many indigenous communities of Mexico as an impediment to social and economic progress. Therefore, intellectuals like Manuel Gamio encouraged the mission of Mexican anthropology to better know the indigenous people to facilitate their assimilation into contemporary national cultural practices. However, at the same time, Gamio and his contemporaries were convinced that the particularities of pre-Columbian civilizations in Mexico were what made the country unique. This is how the content of *El Maestro Rural*'s eight years of publication includes information on the lifestyles of remote indigenous communities alongside directives on how to change and modernize the domestic, agricultural, and cultural practices that define those same communities. In a comparable way, the stories featured in *El Maestro Rural* include legends collected from indigenous sources alongside didactic tales celebrating the schools and the work they do to transform the communities by eradicating the superstitious beliefs transmitted in those legends.

At the root of these two conflicting missions is the fact that the SEP was trying to supplant the role of the community storyteller and while at the same time preserving the stories traditionally told by these storytellers for posterity. What happens in the pages of *El Maestro Rural* is analogous to the archiving of pre-Columbian artifacts in national museums. Indigenous cultural artifacts are labeled and categorized as antique and therefore devoid of contemporary value. In the same way, removing the legends from their communities removes their intended meaning. As José Rabasa points out in *Without History*, Mexico's practices of gathering indigenous knowledge and artifacts have "tended to privilege antiquarian historiography" (18). This process of antiquarianism has the twofold effect. Firstly, it relegates cultural practices of indigenous people to Ancient Mexico, and therefore dead and not viable (especially that which can be labeled superstitions and idolatry). Secondly, it appropriates the institution of history deeming the indigenous communities as incapable of writing for themselves. Rabasa uses the example of the sixteenth century codices created by Catholic missionaries to document everyday lives of Nahuas after the Nahua documents had been destroyed. I will show the way that the school is proposed as a replacement for the Catholic Church but continues to impose the same colonial power structures on the community.

There are inconsistent missions outlined in the pages of *El Maestro Rural*, where tradition is celebrated but also relegated and controlled. *El Maestro Rural* dictates that at school, indigenous traditions can be shared only by the voice of the maestro, who speaks of and for national culture. Teachers and children alike are warned that speaking in indigenous languages will inhibit their education. It is the same conflict which will be

replayed throughout Mexico's history in the political, anthropological and literary fields: the celebration of indigenous traditions and the denigration of their living manifestations in indigenous communities. *El Maestro Rural* attempted to make indigenous stories and traditions part of the archive of national culture, but it also gave teachers an opportunity to become authors of their own stories which were meant to reflect the new life of the indigenous communities since their arrival. At first these stories mirror the pedagogical texts which enumerate the goals of the SEP. Heroes convince their towns of the correct path to improve the lives of the people around them by ridding themselves of vice, working together on infrastructure to modernize their school or their town, and above all giving up habits of laziness. However, living alongside the communities where they worked allowed the *maestros* to subvert the notion of progress which the central government supported in economic and social policy thus allowing the seeds of subaltern insurrection sown during the Revolution to continue to germinate.

It was not only the maestros and their students who were meant to profit from the ideas planted in *El Maestro Rural*. Publishers hoped that the magazine would serve as an asset to the community as a whole. In *La Pluma y el arado: Los intelectuales pedagogos y la construcción sociocultural del “problema campesino” en México, 1932-1934* Guillermo Palacios divides *El Maestro Rural* into two different sections: in the early years the magazine has a utopic vision of education as having the capability to unite the nation by allowing all citizens no matter their origin—be it urban, rural, poor or wealthy—to share one cultural discourse. By bringing the contents of *El Maestro Rural* with the entire community, the teacher would foment the construct of this shared cultural

experience. The culture in *El Maestro Rural* was provided for all by the intellectuals, artists and authors of postrevolutionary Mexico working in the capital. Any cultural practices such as the dances seen in the previous chapter or folktales which we will look at in this chapter were filtered through the SEP's editorial process. As an early director of the magazine, Moisés Saenz had proposed this utopic cultural vision, but Palacios argues that faced with the real-life challenges of working in the field and a lack of success, the SEP dismissed this first attempt at cultural unity as a failure. Palacios's study does not look at the second half of the publication of *El Maestro Rural* noting that it had given up on the cultural revolution that Vasconcelos had envisioned in 1922 to unite the city and the subaltern classes in the countryside. In 1936, Palacios argues that the fact that *El Maestro Rural* is no longer specifically designed for adult *campesinos*<sup>80</sup> but instead only for the maestros "significa que Cárdenas haya abandonado la idea de una 'revolución cultural'" (242). I challenge this assumption because, as Palacios himself notes, the entire community looked to the teacher to share *El Maestro Rural*, including adults, "Según testimonios de maestros rurales, la lectura de cuentos se tornó una de las actividades más esperadas por los campesinos que, en ciertas localidades, asistían en gran número a escucharlos" (215). Supposing that this is the case, that, at least in some regions, *El Maestro Rural* maintained its position as a source for entertainment and information within the communities and not only within the schoolhouse, by tracing the

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<sup>80</sup> I use the term "campesinos" here following Palacios's own use of the term as well as Carlos Fuentes. Both have noted that John Womack finds the term to more aptly describe the people whom he is studying than the English translation of "peasant" because it links them to their cultural lives in a particular locality.

stories included therein I can analyze how the message which the SEP shared with the campesino communities evolved.

### I. DEFINING THE IDEAL: EL MAESTRO RURAL AS A GUIDE

The stories in *El Maestro Rural* could only reach their intended audience through the efforts of the *maestros* who served as a spokesperson for the SEP and by extension the national government. The *maestros* role as a storyteller in the community highlights the liminal place in which he existed within the rural community. The *maestro* must at once elicit the interest of his community and follow the rules and guidelines produced by the SEP. Let us look first at the ways in which the SEP told the teachers to speak to their students and the community and how they wanted to limit the presence of indigenous language and by extension indigenous thought in the learning experience.

The goal of the school's presence is to supplant vestiges of institutions that would stand in the way of national progress. The *maestros* were at the frontlines of a battle between the old guard (the Church and the landowners) and the new (the post-Revolutionary government) and had to tread with care in their new surroundings if they wanted to succeed in their work and survive potential local aggressors. The stories written by *maestros* reveal the complicated nature of this position: trapped between the rural indigenous communities and the SEP with its nationalist agenda. A position which the *maestros* negotiate by drawing from scenes of their own lives and the lives that surrounded them when attempting to tell the story of the progress which they had committed to bring to their rural outposts when they accepted their jobs. In this way

*maestros* are writing for a dual audience, warily turning their head back and forth between the gaze of the State and that of their pupils and speaking accordingly.

Primarily the stories included in the magazine authored by the *maestros* were examples of what a rural school and teacher should be. They showed the ideal working of a rural school and its teachers and offered solutions to common problems faced by teachers in a new community. The very first story in *El Maestro Rural* was written by Adolfo Velasco and entitled “El maestro rural,”<sup>81</sup> it tells the story of Anselmo, a young teacher sent to work in a small town. He arrives carrying a letter from the Inspector of the Federal Education Zone which is meant to present him to the town. Before his departure the Inspector reminds him:

Procura hacer labor no solamente enseñando a leer y escribir a los niños de tu aldea, sino levantando a sus habitantes de su bajo nivel social, haciéndoles comprender que hay que renovarse material y espiritualmente, para responder a las exigencias actuales del progreso del día. Ármate de buena voluntad y de amor para los que vegetan en la ignorancia . . . ¡a la lucha recia pero noble! Del bien contra el mal, de la luz contra las tinieblas. (18)

The language used to convey the mission that Anselmo is sent on is telling. He must be prepared for a battle when he attempts to renew the community both materially and spiritually. The nobility of the battle is that he, like the Catholic missionaries who crusaded before him will be attempting to thwart evil with good. His mission appears to be identical to that of the church, but the protagonists are recast as teachers in lieu of priests. The same familiar imagery of salvation through a battle between good and evil, light and shadow, is recycled. By using this imagery, the author is speaking to his

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<sup>81</sup> Velasco, Adolfo. "El maestro rural". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 14. 15 Abril 1932

audience in a language that they will understand because it is the language of Christian doctrine used to instruct communities and teachers alike prior to the Revolution. Although the language is the same, the source of salvation is different, the reader and his pupils should not turn to the church but to the schoolhouse. According to Mary Kay Vaughan, by the 1930s the church and government had reached an accord in which the church was able to remain a major power in Mexico's society as long as it "curbed its zeal for establishing its own hegemony" (199). Although the SEP disparages the role of the church in subjugating the indigenous population instead of attacking the church, the SEP is attempting to insert itself in the space that it has conceded. If hegemonic control is granted to the power that most aptly responds to the needs and demands of a civil society, the teacher in this story is proving that he is available to do so at every turn.

First Anselmo must understand what the needs of the community are. Upon arriving to the "pluebecillo de indios", Anselmo is met by "topiles" who do not speak Spanish. Here the story uses the Nahua term, "topil", to describe the assistants to the town leader, thus inviting the reader to share in Anselmo's struggle as he attempts to explain who he is to a group of men who do not understand him.<sup>82</sup> Eventually, the secretary of the town leads Anselmo to a decrepit schoolhouse and then the story enumerates the problems he runs up against attempting to find food, find pupils, wash his clothes and convince the town of the school's worth. Among the first problems he describes is how when he approaches women he finds that they hide themselves from view. He states, "Aquel pueblo tenía en su seno a los prototipos de los hombres celosos"

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<sup>82</sup> Definition of "topil" from the Native Languages of America.

(19). The jealousy of men is seen as a backwards shortcoming of the town which inhibits women's participation in the community.

He cannot convince parents to send their children to the school despite travelling to meet with them because the parents believe he is a protestant. This was a frequent conception of the rural population who saw those who would attempt to bring socialist education as enemies of the Church. According to Anselmo, parents especially saw no reason to send their girls to the school explaining that, "para qué necesitaban ellas saber castellano y leer y escribir, si nunca tendrían necesidad de salir de su pueblo" (20). This concern for women's involvement in the community and in education in particular is especially important for the SEP within indigenous communities. The magazine features recurring articles on domestic work, how to tend to children and babies as well as hygienic practices for the home. The SEP saw the home, and therefore women, as a crucial element needed to change the lives of the indigenous communities. The SEP was participating in what Vaughan describes as "statolatry," Gramsci's notion that the state can serve as a tutor to help strengthen civil societies until they have reached a level of maturity that makes them capable of participating in the state's development project. This included the notion that civil society must expand the participation of women. Of course the SEP wanted to control the way women did participate in civil society to reflect their own interest, by removing them from the exclusive influence of their families, the school would change the way girls would behave as future mothers.

Faced with these challenges, the narrator notes ironically that, "Anselmo sonrió dolorosamente al comprobar cuánta diferencia hay entre lo que se escribe desde un

cómodo gabinete y la verdadera realidad" (19). However, he has a breakthrough with the town when he proves himself as a musician. This is the first need that Anselmo can fulfill for the town. Using what he has learned of music in his training at the Normal School he begins to work with the town's existing band at the behest of the town secretary. Slowly the town warms up to him and the school begins to fill with students and turn to him when looking at ways to improve their community. The work of Anselmo in the school culminates with the day when the Inspector of Rural Schools pays a visit. The Inspector is impressed with Anselmo's work saying, "me llena de alegría ver cómo se reúnen alrededor de este templo de educación para recibir a un humilde maestro, que no trae más empeño que el de estudiar vuestro medio, sugerirles lo que más os convenga para vuestro progreso económico, social y mental . . . La Secretaría de Educación Pública y nosotros, siempre estamos interesados porque los pueblos vayan progresando de verdad, porque sabemos que sólo así cumplimos con el deber de buenos mexicanos "(20). And thus the story meets its happy conclusion, with the town slowly acquiescing to the "corrections" doled out by Anselmo. Accepting the new temple of education in lieu of the old religious one. The author notes that in addition to the town being taken care of by pupils and adults and the rise in attendance "Desde luego, lo más notable era que ya las mujeres concurrían a las reuniones públicas con anuencia de sus maridos" (21). Therefore, one of the greatest impediments to social change, in the eyes of the SEP, the exclusion of women from education, was already being surmounted by the work of Anselmo.

There is an interlude in the story when another teacher, Manuel Luna, arrives after having been evicted from his school and his town by the community. He recounts that "Don Rafael Ramírez, Jefe del Departamento de Escuelas Rurales"<sup>83</sup>, had asked teachers to create dolls representing the styles of the people in the communities they served and to send these prototypes to Mexico City where they could be studied. While visiting Manuel Luna's school, a father sees the dolls and hours later Manuel hears a crowd in an uproar outside his door. They ask him to leave and close school, sending him away with a notice in which "se indica que ya no me entregarán la escuela, porque me he querido burlar de ellos, mandando los muñecos a México para que la gente se ría de los indios."

(22). Anselmo responds, "Hermano, si antes hubieras reunido a la comunidad explicándole las razones y las causas que te obligaban a reproducir sus tipos, estoy seguro de que no se habrían sublevado" (22). Anselmo adds that the reason teachers should work with the community is that they would understand the reasons behind the teacher's actions and even help in these types of endeavors. This episode from the first story reflects a degree of intellectual self-consciousness in the *maestros'* approach to the ethnographic fieldwork they are charged with as part of their work in indigenous communities. The angry reaction of the town shows an important way in which the indigenous communities are not willing participants in this new form of colonization. *El Maestro Rural* is an instrument of colonization because it provides a blueprint for how to transform a community to suit the needs of the nation-state. By collecting ethnographic information, such as the ways of dress, the SEP is requiring the teachers to participate in

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<sup>83</sup> Rafael Ramírez was the actual Head of the Department of Rural Schools at the time.

state sponsored anthropology that celebrated indigenous particularities but was also looking to assimilate these communities. Just as José Rabasa has observed the way that the chronicling of everyday lives of indigenous peoples by the missionaries relegated the lives of those subjects to antiquity by placing their practices in an archival record, the community in which Manuel Luna works feels that removing their likenesses to the capital places them on display in a way that is beyond their control. By allowing Anselmo, the idealized teacher, to respond to his colleague's experience the story is attempting to explain how their own work is different from the work of those who came before them. These teachers are not looking to ridicule or erase indigenous cultures, but instead to understand and conserve them. Anselmo is open to communicating with the community in which he lives as equals in the hopes that they will understand and want to help with the goals that the SEP has set forth.

## **II. LANGUAGE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES: DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE FOR “GENTE DE RAZÓN”**

This claim to attempt to communicate with the indigenous communities as equals that Anselmo makes reflects the concerns voiced by Rosarios Castellanos who worked within indigenous communities and struggled with what she perceived as the paternalism of educational projects which brought mandates for social progress into communities without consulting the communities' own interests.<sup>84</sup> In a brief essay entitled, “Language as an Instrument of Domination” Castellanos traces the use of language in Latin America

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<sup>84</sup> Rosario Castellanos worked for the Instituto Nacional Indigenista writing plays for the Teatro Petul that brought puppet theater into indigenous communities to teach children and adults about hygiene, alcoholism and other topics.

since the arrival of the Spanish missionaries and how it has been used to create privilege but when one language is shared it should allow for hierarchies to be leveled. For Castellanos, when introduced to indigenous peoples, "language-- like religion or race -- constitutes a privilege that, paradoxically (or at least apparently), tends to cease to be one when it is divulged, communicated, extended." (250). She goes on to explain how the profusion of baroque language in the colonial era was a way to prove oneself as a member of the criollo community: "The color of one's skin said a lot but not everything; one had to add the purity and antiquity of faith and something else: the command of the oral means of expression" (250). *El Maestro Rural* is attempting to accomplish a new means of communication when it comes to language. For *El Maestro Rural* the goal is to teach students to speak like citizens of post-revolutionary Mexico, not, as in the colonial-era, to match the style of the "ciudad letrada" as Angel Rama has described it. I would argue that this new style of speech and writing attempts to stories that will reach their audience using a style that is familiar but brings with it a hope to instill pride in the victories won by the Revolution. If the goal of a shared national language is meant to deconstruct hierarchies as opposed to erecting them as was done in the colonial era, then, Castellanos argues, the focus must switch from the one producing the language to the listener. This is how Castellanos explains that shift, "The meaning of a word is its addressee: the other being who hears it, understands it, and who, when he answers, converts his questioner into a listener and understander, establishing in this way the relationship of dialogue that is only possible between beings who consider themselves and deal with each other as equals. And that is only fruitful between those who wish

each other to be free" (251). *El Maestro Rural*, with this first story, "El Maestro" is claiming that an ideal *maestro*, such as Anselmo, must attempt to dialogue as equals with the members of the community where he works, an endeavor that is new and yet becomes, with this seminal story, a pivotal point for the educational plan set forth by the magazine. Anselmo, represents what Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, would call the "dialogical man" who understands that humans can overcome problems in their society and transform their lives only once they are able to cooperate, unit and organize through dialogue (91). In contrast, antidialogics, in the work of conquest, manipulation and cultural invasion.

Anselmo's dedication to his students and the community provides a sharp contrast to the teacher in Castellanos's, *Balún Canán* (1957). César, the major landowner in the region where *Balún Canán* takes place, recruits his brother's bastard son, Ernesto, to teach at the school as a means of giving in to the demands of the people who work his land. For Ernesto, the school is nothing more than a cruel farce for which he has no preparation, nor does he think his students have any need. He spends his days reading from the "Almanaque Bristol", the contents of which, "horoscopos, chistes, el santoral" betray the antithesis of the secular and pragmatic education which the SEP proposed in the post-revolutionary era (144). Felipe, the man the indigenous community has chosen to represent them in the matters relating to their new post-revolutionary rights after he comes back to town with news of seeing Lázaro Cárdenas in person, is pleased enough with Ernesto's teaching. However, as the students look up at him open-mouthed, Ernesto is aware that what he is doing is completely ineffective, "Para ellos era lo mismo que

Ernesto leyera el Almanaque o cualquier otro libro. Ellos no sabían hablar español. Ernesto no sabía hablar tzeltal. No existía la menor posibilidad de compresnsión entre ambos" (145). After months of this Ernesto shows up drunk to class and amongst a barrage of insults he tells his students, "No va a cambiar nuestra situación. Indio naciste, indio te quedás. Igual yo." (160). Ernesto feels trapped by racial hierarchies constructed in the colonial era which he cannot escape. Ernesto's own lack of self-worth is emphasized during his time with his uncle, "En el tiempo que llevaba junto a César había aprendido que el diálogo era imposible. César no sabía conversar con quienes no consideraba sus iguales. Cualquier frase en sus labios tomaba el aspecto de un mandato o de una reprimenda" (143). Castellanos's use of the words "mandato" and "reprimenda" remind the reader of her qualms with the paternalism of the *indigenista* movement. Freire understand the way in which this style of dialogue is meaningless and even counter effective in education. He writes, "Without faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation" (91). As previously noted, the work of archeologist like Manuel Gamio, who founded the Insituto Nacional Indigenista, was focused on understanding the indigenous population to better assimilate them into *mestizo* culture. Ernesto's complaint against César is telling, the problem is not that César does not understand, he does not consider Ernesto worthy of his attention. Ernesto internalizes this disrespect and passes it on to his students, with whom he does not even attempt to begin a dialogue. *El Maestro Rural* is proposing an answer to this problem of inequality and lack of understanding by advising the teachers it is instructing to listen to the communities in which they work, and the magazine in turn will print their findings so

that these voices can become part of a national conversation. *El Maestro Rural* provides top down pedagogical tools, including lessons on hygiene, agriculture and national history. These lessons have little to do with the lived reality of the communities they are meant to reach, and therefore would be part of what Freire describes as the banking model of education. In the banking model, students are seen as empty accounts which need to be filled by the information that will allow them to participate in the national economy. The language used by the inspector in “El maestro” betrays this view by referring to Anselmo’s future students as “los que vegetan en la ignorancia” whom he has to convince fo the need to “renovarse material y espiritualmente” (18). However, Anselmo reminds the reader that what is written is not always what one finds in reality. In reality, each town has its own cultural knowledge, some of which it indignantly protects against outsiders as his colleague Manuel Luna found. Therefore the work of Anselmo is what Freire calls the pedagogy of the oppressed, "a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (48).

The SEP struggled with challenging its teachers to treat the communities in which they worked as equals while at the same time asking them to transform their way of life. The guidance offered by Rafael Ramirez, the Director of Rural Schools, to the maestros teaching in indigenous communities contains advice and admonitions that reveal the conflicting messages the teachers received about the communities in which they worked. Rafael Ramírez writes, in an article from June of 1933 entitled, “La incoporación de los

indígenas por medio del idioma castellano”<sup>85</sup> that teachers should not assume that the children they are sent to teach are “torpes o que son muy tontos” because they do not speak Spanish (5). He goes on to explain that they are just as well organized and capable as children who speak Spanish but they speak a different language:

Pero ese lenguaje distinto de que hacen uso, es tan bueno como el castellano que emplean los otros niños, y es bueno precisamente porque es adecuado a las necesidades de su edad, a su escasa y rústica experiencia y a la rudimentaria vida social en que han vivido; es bueno, porque lo conocen desde muy pequeños y porque lo saben manejar con la misma destreza con que los otros niños manejan el que heredaran de sus padres. (5)

The way Ramírez describes indigenous languages is at once laudatory and derogatory revealing the conflict that will continue to surface throughout his article. Yes, the indigenous children possess comparable intelligence to their Spanish-speaking counterparts, but he belittles their language, and by extension the knowledge of their community by saying it is only capable of expressing a limited and rustic experience that is circumscribed by the rudimentary social life to which they have been exposed. Mary Kay Vaughan has argued that beginning in the 1930s the goal of schools was to create citizens who would be capable and willing to do the work needed to create a capitalist society. Here, Ramírez is describing what he sees as the first step in participating in capitalism, making sure that students were able to communicate outside their own community. In her study of Nahua intellectuals, Kelly McDonough points out that the school required that children and adults alike dress in clothes that did not reflect their

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<sup>85</sup> Ramírez, Rafael. "La incorporación de los indígenas por medio del idioma castellano". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III. Número 2. 15 Junio 1933, 5-8

connection to indigenous communities and that "The imposition of the Spanish language and the denigration of the native language were also key strategies for molding young Indian girls and boys into their desired forms" (McDonough 127). In the same way that indigenous dress could only be celebrated when it was put on stage during a dance, the language of the indigenous people could only be celebrated as a representation of a lifestyle that was inevitably going to be left behind in favor of national progress. Ramírez demands of the teachers, “[¿]Por qué has de seguir viendo a los niños indígenas como animales raros? [¿]Qué culpa tienen esas criaturas de haber nacido en un ambiente social en que no se hable español?” (5). Although Ramírez chastises the assumptions of the teachers, by presenting the comparison with animals he is replicating a racial hierarchy in which descendants of Europeans are placed above the indigenous peoples.

Ramírez goes on to explain that *maestros* are first and foremost charged with teaching Spanish to their pupils, “hasta ahora, querido maestro rural, te hemos considerado como un agente valioso de incorporación de la raza indígena al seno de la nuestra” so that they can communicate “ya que ningún interés práctico nos empuja a nosotros a aprender el suyo” (5). Not only is there no worth to learning indigenous languages, it is considered dangerous, Ramírez warns:

Pero si tú, para darles nuestra ciencia y nuestro saber, les hablas en su idioma perderemos la fe que en ti teníamos, porque corres el peligro de ser tú el incorporado. Comenzarás por habituarte a emplear el idioma de los niños, después irás tomando, sin darte cuenta, las costumbres del grupo social étnico a que ellos pertenecen, luego sus formas inferiores de vida, y, finalmente, tú mismo te volverás un indio, es decir, una unidad más a quien incorporar. Esto que te digo, no es una chanza para reír, sino una cosa seria. (5)

According to Ramírez, the teachers, who often were campesinos themselves, ran the risk of being re-indianized after having negated their backward indigenous heritage through their civilized education at the normal school. In this way, although the SEP professed to respect regional differences the regional dialects which threatened a homogenous national language were meant to be suppressed or removed to avoid what the SEP perceived as backsliding into traditional and retrograde campesino and indigenous cultural practices. Teaching Spanish does not only mean teaching a language for Ramírez. He explains that “La vida entera de los pueblos se condensa en su lenguaje, de modo que cuando uno aprende un idioma nuevo, adquiere uno también nuevas formas de pensar y aun nuevas maneras de vivir. Por eso yo considero como cosa muy importante el que tú sepas enseñar el castellano como Dios manda, es decir, sin traducirlo al idioma de los niños”

(5). By not allowing the teachers to translate, but instead using an immersion methodology in which indigenous languages and the lifestyles that accompany them are drowned, Ramírez is describing a battle in which the two sides are represented by languages. The teachers are under constant threat from the environment in which they live and should therefore expand their teaching beyond the walls of the classroom. "has de entender que alrededor de la escuela hay un caserío y un vecindario a quien también debes 'castellanizar' y civilizar, porque de otro modo destruirá la labor que hagas en la escuela con tus niños, y hasta es posible que te 'descastellanice' y te quite lo de 'gente de razón' a ti." (6). On its face these warnings are degrading to the indigenous ways of life that the teachers would encounter in their new lives working in remote rural areas. Yes, Ramírez is leveling threats toward his employees, the maestros, but in the act of doing

this he is acknowledging the viability of alternative knowledge production within the indigenous communities. These alternative knowledges, rooted in language, are accompanied by lifestyles and customs that do not adhere to the social models the SEP has embraced as the national ideal and it is for that reason that Ramírez wants to avoid losing any of his teachers and their pupils.

In September of the same year as Ramírez's article appeared, Erasto Valle, published a short piece entitled, "Los huicholes"<sup>86</sup> in which he describes what he had learned of one huichol community where he had spent some time teaching. He describes where and how the community lives, noting that some men practice polygamy and then goes on to explain, "Son de muy viva inteligencia natural, obran de acuerdo con un 'sentido común,' admirable, se orientan perfectamente bien, aun en el bosque . . . Tienen un gran apego a sus costumbres" (22). Similar to Ramírez who spoke of the indigenous community's knowledge being suited to the particular environment in which they live, the skills of the Huichol community described by Valles are linked solely to their natural surroundings. Valle then offers four examples of students from the Huichol community who had finished their studies in "la casa del estudiante indígena", special schools to which indigenous children were sent to learn skills "que requieren para vivir de un modo más humano y librarse de la ignorancia" (A.E. "Los centros de educación indígena" 6).<sup>87</sup> Upon completion of their studies in these "centros de educación", indigenous youths were meant to return to their own communities and teach the skills that they had learned.

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<sup>86</sup> Valle, Erasto. "Los huicholes". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III. Número 8. 15 Sep 1933, 21-22

<sup>87</sup> A.E., A. "Los centros de educación indígena." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo X, Número 1. 1 Jul 1937 6-10

Valles points out that while one of these students was currently a teacher in Santa Catarina, another no longer wanted to teach and, “ya se viste como sus paisanos, trae su arco y sus flechas, pero conserva cierta pulcritud en sus maneras, habla bien el español y tiene hábito de aseo” (22). These two men seem to be examples of more and less successful attempts to reintegrate the indigenous youths into their own communities as forces of change, in the shape of a maestro rural. However, the third Huichol student was said to have returned “completamente a las costumbres de su raza” and had begun to make peyote with other huicholes. Adding, as a final example, that “No es el único caso que se presenta; se dice de un individuo que después de haber disfrutado en Guadalajara, por mucho tiempo, de la vida civilizada, volvió a la sierra y adoptó sus antiguas costumbres” (22). He includes the rumor that this man was murdered by members of his community due to his exploitation of his fellow huicholes. Valle references peyote in association with a young man returning to the customs of the Huichol. As a people the Huichol and their use of psychoactive plants have been a source of ethnographic interest and a concern for the Instituto Nacional Indigenista which saw its use as an impediment to the assimilation of the Huichol into the proletariat workforce.<sup>88</sup> For Valle the backsliding of the young man who began to make peyote is seen as a loss for the work of the SEP, and by likening his fate to that of the man who was murdered by his fellow Huichols, Valle is insinuating that by rejoining the community and its customs this young man is descending onto a dangerous path.

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<sup>88</sup> For more on the ethnographic study of the Huichol see *People of Peyote: Huichol Indian History, Religion, and Survival* edited by Stacy B. Schafer and Peter T. Furst

Since the goal is to supplant the indigenous customs of the communities in which these teachers work, Ramírez argues that the education that begins with teaching Spanish must move far deeper into the everyday lives of the students and community. Ramírez explains to the teachers how he thinks they are perceived by the communities in which they work, "Es necesario que sepas que los indios nos llaman 'gente de razón,' no sólo porque hablamos la lengua castellana, sino porque vestimos y comemos de otro modo y llevamos una vida diversa de la suya" (Ramírez 6). These different customs and style of life that the teachers bring, Ramírez says "indudablemente son superiores a las suyas" (6) For this reason, he argues that each teachers goal "no consiste simplemente en 'castellanizar' a la gente, sino en transformarla en 'gente de razón'" (6). He compares the role of the teacher to the role of the mother in her home. Each teacher is capable of supplanting one style of life for another by playing with their students and telling "muchos, muchos cuentos, sobre todo, de esos maravillosos cuentos de hadas, en los que está condensada la herencia espiritual que las generaciones pasadas han dejado a los niños de hoy, herencia de la cual no hemos dado nada todavía a los niños que viven al margen de nosotros, alejados por el idioma indígena que hablan" (6). What he is proposing is to trade the traditional stories told by the community for "los cuentos de Perrault, los de Grimm y los de Andersen" (7). Ramírez is proposing that the teachers can invade the most intimate spaces of the community, replacing the teachings of home with those of school. Through stories the "herencia spiritual" which the students were transmitted by their families while growing up will be replaced. This is a continuation of the legacy of Vasconcelos's work at the SEP in which he believed indigenous people

would be transformed through contact with European culture into assimilated national citizens. However, the conclusion to Ramírez's advice on storytelling betrays a major difference between the SEP led by Vasconcelos and the one that came after, “En este capítulo de narraciones encajan perfectamente también las leyendas de las diferentes razas indígenas que poblaron nuestro suelo y que es necesario que conozcan nuestros niños, a fin de que se sientan solidarizados con los del resto del país” (7). Unlike Vasconcelos before him, Ramírez encourages teachers to include indigenous culture. But his language reveals a bias against contemporary indigenous culture that persists to this day. When he suggests that indigenous legends be included he refers to the indigenous races that inhabited Mexico, using the preterit form of the past tense. He then refers to the students as “our children” which, could seem like a benign designation except that it seems to be completing the work of the *maestro* turned mother by adopting these indigenous children into a new family which listens to tales of dead French and German fairy tale writers alongside the legends of indigenous storytellers from Mexico, making these indigenous storytellers appear equally distant in time. True, he hopes to create solidarity, but not with other specific indigenous groups. The solidarity that these legends would foster is with children in the entirety of Mexico, who like these students will be forced to accept these stories as exemplary tales on how to become an ideal student and citizen.

What Ramírez and his contemporaries who worked on *El Maestro Rural* are attempting with their mission of “castellanización” is to create a normalized national way of life so that all Mexico’s citizens become “gente de razon”. The teachers are charged

with creating a national identity through the combination of historical and folkloric sources that would come to define modern Mexico. Roger Bartra has looked at the way indigenous culture, but not necessarily indigenous people, are used to create national identity in Mexico, a national identity that is fostered by politically charged official nationalism borne of the state's institutions. Bartra's analysis of Mexican nationalism is wrought with the interstices of culture, politics and identity. Bartra argues that national culture in Mexico has always attempted to create or imagine a connection between the pre-Columbian past and colonial or Modern Mexico. However, as Bartra points out the "the only battered bridge left" between these two times are the indigenous people who "are a symbolic referent to the past, but they are usually rejected as an active presence" (*Blood, Ink, and Culture* 7). This is how Rafael Ramírez can encourage maestros to teach indigenous children legends from indigenous communities and at the same time ask them to transform indigenous lives in a way that would negate their connection to the communities that gave birth to those legends. This construction of national identity is, for Bartra, a formation of a myth. A myth which is inserted into institutional life, like the workings of the rural schools, through political culture. In post-Revolutionary Mexico, an official, state and eventually political party-controlled version of cultural policy was emerging and controlling the way this myth of national identity was inserted into schools. Ultimately this results in what Bartra describes as follows: "Nationalism is, then, an ideology that disguises itself with culture to hide its intimate means of domination" (8). The domination to which he refers is an allegiance to the main political party of Mexico which would eventually become known as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and

had come to power in its first manifestation as the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) (1929-1938) during the time *El Maestro Rural* was in circulation. In the pages of *El Maestro Rural* the allegiance to the party was not demanded so much as allegiance to the Revolution. The Revolution is depicted as a battle fought by and for the rural population and so to challenge or go against the changes that the teachers proposed was to be disloyal to the Revolution and therefore to the community. Consequently, to be a citizen in post-Revolutionary Mexico meant to adhere to the modernizing efforts of the school, efforts that were meant to push the communities into participation in capitalist society through labor and agricultural production.

### **III. LEGENDS AND LESSONS: REREADING COLLECTED VOICES**

Although the indigenous legends that were included in *El Maestro Rural* were meant to be read as vestiges of an outdated lifestyle they were being collected by teachers working in indigenous communities. It is important to think of these legends, not as ahistorical artifacts but as they were, stories recounted to outsiders during a particular time in the teller's life and history, a time in which the government, especially in the shape of the school, was attempting to insert itself into the community. There is a history of countering colonial powers through indigenous cultural practices, so it follows that the new form of colonization, forced modernization, would elicit the same reaction. Blanca Lydia Trejo, an author who contributed several stories to *El Maestro Rural*, wrote a historical account of children's literature in Mexico starting in the importance of education in pre-Cortés Aztec society and ending with the work of the SEP in the 1940s.

In her study, Lydia Trejo includes a section on folklore, a topic for which she had a significant interest given that many of her own stories are drawn from indigenous legends. Lydia Trejo writes how Aztec songs were once performed during festivals and dances, some of which survived the colonial era. However, most songs, "Se cantaron hasta treinta años después de la conquista, en que los hizo desaparecer la previa censura instituida por el Concilio Provincial de 1555. Esta censura . . . fue porque transformaron los cantares en fábulas o apólogos en los que referían su cautiverio y la opresión de los conquistadores" (*La literatura infantil en México* 23). The colonists erased songs from the public sphere because they could be overheard by colonial powers but stories, repeated in the intimacy of the home survived. These stories were a means of refuting the narrative of salvation brought by the Christian missionaries by retelling the conquest as time of captivity and oppression for the indigenous people. If indigenous communities told stories to challenge the Christian colonization of the Spanish missionaries it follows that stories could continue to be used to challenge the new colonization in the shape of modernizing efforts by the government.

Considering this, the stories and legends included in *El Maestro Rural* which were collected by teachers and other writers have different levels of interpretation. Kelly McDonough and other recent indigenous scholarship challenges the old ethnographic model in which indigenous subjects are treated as a passive source of knowledge. Instead, McDonough invites us to understand how the information an indigenous interviewee chooses to share with their interlocutors evidences his or her active role as a producer of knowledge. When McDonough analyzes the testimonial writing and short

stories of Luz Jimenéz, a Nahua woman who worked as a model, storyteller and informant, she does not look at how she was viewed by the world but instead how Luz Jimenéz looked at twentieth century Mexico. This was usually not the case as “more often than not doña Luz was viewed as a source of knowledge, but not a knowledge producer: she was raw material for artists, a vessel of information to be mined by anthropologists, or even just a cook who told stories, but rarely an intellectual equal” (*The Learned Ones* 134). Among the works that Luz contributed to are: *De Porfirio Díaz a Zapata: Memoria Náhuatl de Milpa Alta* (1968), *Los cuentos en Náhuatl de doña Luz Jiménez* (1979) which was written in conjunction with anthropologist Fernando Horcasitas and Anita Brenner’s *The Boy Who Could Do Anything and Other Mexican Folktales* (1942) for which she was uncredited and unpaid. Despite the lack of credit (and remuneration) for her work doña Luz’s stories are, according to McDonough, “intellectual work: they inform, guide and explain the world and our place within it” (136). Doña Luz, who was subjected to the government’s assimilative education prior to the Revolution, tells of the way the school attempted curb the use of Nahuatl in the community. Despite this, she can recount many tails from her community to her various interlocutors. Within these tales are those of a supernatural ilk, as McDonough explains, they are not ghost stories but didactic stories that "are entertaining, but they also encode a sort of handbook for social behavior: do this, don't do that " (140). McDonough provides a couple of examples of doña Luz’s stories and noes that in both “tales the Indian takes on the role of the trickster, the knowing subject who makes his way through a dangerous and unfair world by his wits” (141). McDonough goes on to explain that “James Scott

has read trickster tales as the 'veiled cultural resistance of subordinate groups.' As tricksters, the Indians of doña Luz's stories win small victories in a chronically unjust society" (141). The idea that victory over injustice is something that can be gained through trickery or deceit runs in direct contrast to the central message of the majority of *El Maestro Rural*'s fictional content: only through allegiance to and knowledge of the rights gained by the Revolution could peasants hope to triumph over injustices of the corrupt members of the landowning class, the Church or the government. Nevertheless, one of the stories featured in *El Maestro Rural*, "La culebra y el hombre" suggests that the law is not always the best way to right the wrongs of injustice. Originally collected by the filologist, Pablo González Casanova (1880-1936) it was published in *El Maestro Rural* in September of 1940. A woodcutter saves a serpent as he's walking through the woods. The serpent, about to strike to kill him asks, "Ignoras acaso que en este mundo un bien con un mal se paga?" (23).<sup>89</sup> He tells the man if he can find an animal who disagrees with that fact that he will spare his life. The man finds a coyote who helps the man outsmart the serpent. Upon escaping the man promises the coyote a recompense for his help. Instead of repaying him, the man unleashes his dogs on him. The story's final line indicates the coyote's revenge, "Y cuentan que desde entonces las gallinas de los campesinos se ven amenazadas constantemente por el coyote" (24). The coyote's theft is

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<sup>89</sup> González Casanova. "La culebra y el hombre". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XIII. Num 9 y 10. Sep 1940, 23-24

sanctioned by the fact that he is taking what is owed to him by the man who cheated him.<sup>90</sup>

#### **IV. OF MONSTERS AND MAESTROS: CHANGES AND THREATS TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

Even though *El Maestro Rural* was meant to provide reading material to complement the curriculum outlined by Rafael Ramírez, of the nearly fifty short stories published in the thirteen volumes of *El Maestro Rural* only seven are specifically attributed by their authors to indigenous communities. It was difficult to reconcile the endeavor to bring socialist education with the inclusion of legends. The stories that are included from indigenous communities are clearly labeled as legends in a way that markedly differentiates them for the other stories in the magazine. These stories usually include a disclaimer or introduction by the author who explains the origin of the story and translates any terms used from indigenous languages. Included among these is the Aztec legend of "Tzitzimime", written by Profesor Martín Cortina and set in Citlatépetl, Veracruz. A beautiful day suddenly turns to night and monsters descend on the village: "No se trataba de fieras vulgares, eran monstruos que al llegar a las casas, devoraban a los niños, a las señoritas embarazadas y a los ratones." (20).<sup>91</sup> The men who attempt to defend the victims against these monsters are not harmed but they cannot save their loved ones. The monsters are not attacking indiscriminately, they are attacking the future of the

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<sup>90</sup> I think that it is telling that when this story features in Blanca Lydia Trejo's compilation of short stories for children she ends the story with the coyote licking his paws and mourning his fate, ""¡Cuánta razón tenía la culebra -- se dijo --, es cierto que un bien con un mal se paga . . ." (*Literatura infantil* 95) thus removing the justice that the coyote exacts against his wrongdoer through theft.

<sup>91</sup> Cortina, Martín. "Leyendas Mexicanas: Tzitzimime." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 12. 1 Abril 1933, 20

village: the children and pregnant women leaving in their wake the ineffectual men. By including mice, pests normally found in the home, the attack is given more dimension. The monsters are purely attacking the domestic life of the indigenous community and also a weak or defenseless sector. A woman tries to defend herself using a stick but when she touches the monster with it the stick is pulverized. Cortina continues, “La mujer valerosa se defendía escrimiendo cuanto hallaba a su paso ; así fué cómo [sic] encontró un ceñidor de algodón gris, y con él azotó al monstruo, que huyó como si lo hubieran azotado con vara de fuego” (20). She then runs to all the houses in the neighborhood telling everyone how to defeat the monsters. The object that can defeat these Tzitzimime is a simple article of dress than can be found in every home. If, as McDonough suggests, the supernatural stories shared by indigenous people are meant to serve as didactic lessons, then this story indicates that the way to counter the destruction of the community is to fight with the familiar forces at hand. What then could one interpret are these monsters who descend with the intent of destruction?

The author of this legend, Martín Cortina, describes himself as a teacher who travelled around Mexico collecting stories from náhuatl, tzoque and mixteca communities.<sup>92</sup> The introduction to another Legend entitled “El trabajo” in the previous issue of *El Maestro Rural* states that Cortina’s " idea fundamental es que en el sentido profundo de estas tradiciones, leyendas y mitos, reside el secreto de la mentalidad y sentimiento propios de los aborígenes, y por consiguiente, pueden ser base para la técnica

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<sup>92</sup> These stories would eventually be compiled in a collection entitled *Maravillas de Altepapan (leyendas mexicanas)* 1934.

de una enseñanza rica y variada, tendiente a despertar en el indio capacidades dormidas, pero no muertas" ("El trabajo" 6).<sup>93</sup> "El trabajo" is the story of the town of Cohuatépec, which falls into vice and risks being destroyed by its patron goddess until it changes its ways and commits itself to returning to the productive life it once led. This lesson is easily transcribed into one of the central messages of *El Maestro Rural*, the belief that individual hard work builds strong and healthy communities. It follows that the "capacidades dormidas" which this legend would awaken are related to this message of diligence. The legend of the Tzitzimime does not correlate so neatly with Cortina's purported goals. This is not the first time the legend of the Tzitzimime has been recounted to an outsider. In her study of the Tzitzimime, Cecilia Klein has noted the transformation of the Tzitzimime from a pre-colonial feminine deity associated with pregnancy, healing and the regenerative life force into the Spaniard version recorded in codices that "conflated the Tzitzimime with the Devil and his servants" (50). In pre-Hispanic depictions of Tzitzimime, "It was only at moments when their efforts to keep the sun moving were in danger of failing that it was feared that they might turn into devouring demons and fall back to earth" (51). In this version of the story, evidently passed down through oral tradition to there we encounter the Tzitzimime at just such a time. Just as in the original legends Tzitzimime descend during a solar eclipse, a cosmological time associated with instability and change. Significantly, in the same issue of *El Maestro Rural* that features the Tzitzimime legend, there also appears the first

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<sup>93</sup> Cortina, Martín. "El trabajo, única fuente de felicidad." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 11. 15 Marzo 1933, 6-7

installment on “La civilización Maya - Quiche” by Luis Chavez Orozco who concludes his introduction by lamenting the difficulties to national unification that the multitude of languages, religions and customs in Mexico create. Chavez Orozco writes, “La solidez de esas estructuras culturales (náhoas, maya-quiché, etc,), es motivo de sugestivo estudio para el que mira el pasado, y fuente de inquietud para quien se siente apremiado por realizar en un futuro próximo la unidad nacional” (5).<sup>94</sup> If the main goal of the socialist education project was to unify the nation then Martín Cortina, like his fellow teachers, was part of this assimilative force that was attempting to insert itself into the domestic lives of the indigenous communities and while devouring and destroying their traditions. At the end story the monsters have fled the village, but they remain trapped nearby in the shape of rocky cliffs where no flowers grow and no animals tread. Cortina writes that mothers who take their children to bathe nearby remind them of the story of the Tzitzimime, "en casa ya les hemos referido cómo fué [sic] aquella noche de angustia cuando una mamá valerosa descubrió la manera de ahuyentar a esos monstruos" ("Tzitzimime" 20). When addressing their children these mothers remind them of the strengths, like the simple cotton belt which defeated the Tzitzimime, that lie hidden within the home. What if, instead of the capacities that the SEP intended to awaken, what this legend is proposing is to awaken the capacity of resistance. If read as a didactic lesson as opposed to a supernatural tale, the message is that outside forces can try to devour the future of the indigenous community, but they will not succeed. The women,

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<sup>94</sup> Chavez Orozco, Luis. “La civilización Maya – Quiche.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 12. 1 Abril 1933, 4-5

who are passing on these oral legends can remember those who have threatened the survival of their traditional way of life in the past and those monsters have no strength if the community pulls together to defeat them. They are like the Tzitzimime, trapped in a barren rock face which has the sole purpose of reminding the community of their own strength and ability to resist.

Another legend from *El Maestro Rural*, when read as the work of a knowledge producer and not a piece of local hearsay, as it is presented in the magazine, allows us to better understand the point of view of the indigenous individual in the face of ethnographic interest about their communities. “El jardín encantado” is presented anonymously in *El Maestro Rural* as a national legend. It begins:

Según cuentan las viejas del vecindario, en el cero de Coacoyotl (Agujero de Serpiente), cercano a este pueblo y a las orillas del mar, existen una huerta y un jardín encantados, sembrados de flores raras y frutales exquisitos, alrededor de un palacio de oro, en donde sólo habita una doncella india al cuidado de una gigantesca culebra que mata o convierte en animales a todos los que se atreven a internarse por aquéllos [sic] sitios. (38)

Just as in the legend of the Tzitzimime, the story is told by women. Two friends stumble into the garden by mistake, and because they had not intended to end up there they are spared by the guardian. However, they are drawn by their curiosity to the center of the garden where they find the young girl who tells them her story: "La doncella era la última princesa de un gran reino que hubo por estas tierras, y fue destruido por los conquistadores y ella, para salvarse, pidió a los dioses que la escondieran en la montaña, junto con su fiel esclavo negro" (39). Because their curiosity drove them to the garden they cannot marry the princess and get her lands back to their community, they must

remain secret. If this story is meant to encode messages of what to do and what not to do, as is the case with the work of doña Luz Jimenez, then it suggests that those who are drawn by curiosity into the protected traditions of the indigenous community have two options. They can remain trapped like the animals who live surround the princess or they can escape and never really understand that world of indigenous knowledge that had survived in secret the destruction of the colonial era.

The inclusion of this legend, and one other entitled “Anécdota Purepecha” challenge the assumption that indigenous culture could only be celebrated as a thing of the past. In “Anécdota Purepecha”, J. Jesús Torres Cárdenas recounts a story from the 1830s set in Capácuaro, Michoacán.<sup>95</sup> There, a man named José Juan Margarito was a student of nature who happens to see a serpent use a particular herb to mend himself after he accidentally cut him half. Years later, this “doctor indigena” is called to the bedside of a wealthy landowner after all the others doctors have not been able to help him. José Juan bleeds the patient without having to cut him, a feat the other doctors believed impossible, by having him breathe in one type of leaf and then stops the bleeding with the leaves he had seen the serpent use. The story proposes that indigenous knowledge has something to offer the rest of the country. As the doctors see the success of the treatment, Torres writes, “Entonces vieron que aquel hombre austero, activo y humilde, no era un simple indio rústico era algo más, un factor naturalista, que los había puesto en ridículo” (35). This is an anti-colonial idea, one that proposes that indigenous knowledge

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<sup>95</sup> Torres Cardenas, J. Jesus. "Anécdota Purepecha." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo II. Número 11. 15 Marzo 1933, 35

can challenge the information that comes from the metropolis. The voices in these legends refuse to simply be coopted into the SEP's mission, they challenge cultural assumptions of progress and bring into question racial hierarchies.

#### **V. TELL ME THE STORY OF HOW I TAUGHT YOU: CREATING NATIONAL CITIZENS THROUGH THE WRITTEN WORD**

These stories were collected from oral tradition, although they were included in *El Maestro Rural* they were not meant to exemplify the style of story that the SEP hoped to have its students write. Indigenous stories and legends were acceptable in the oral tradition and could be collected for use as national culture by teachers, anthropologists and authors but students needed to learn to take part in the progress of the nation through their use of the written word. This meant learning to read and write, and when writing they should follow the guidelines set forth by their teachers. One of the main purposes of the SEP and by extension *El Maestro Rural* was to combat illiteracy and in so doing bring the indigenous and *campesino* communities into the national fold. The attempted conversion of these communities from illiterate masses to literate citizens parallels the work of the Catholic missionaries in that it attempts to civilize the margins of the proposed nation so that they reflected the colonial institutions of power, namely the Crown and the Church. From the onset of the SEP's Misiones Culturales, itinerant teachers not only taught students to read but also encouraged and controlled the kinds of stories that their students and teachers should write. In the correspondence between the SEP and the Misiones Culturales in Hidalgo from 1927 there are a series of short stories sent in by several primary school students and *maestros rurales* as examples of their

capacity to write. In one such story entitled, “El huérfano” by E.G. Hernández a young orphaned boy is treated very poorly by his older sister who is meant to be taking care of him until his teacher guides him.

El niño mediante su asistencia a la escuela y por medio de cuentecillos que la maestra le contaba; invitándole [sic] a que se habituara al trabajo. Después de algún tiempo el niño era un trabajadorcito que desempeñaba los queceres [sic] más rudos de la casa; dando muestra a su hermana que se abergonzaba [sic] de que su hermano siendo pequeño desempeñaba su tarea mejor que ella.<sup>96</sup>

This simple narrative written by a student drives at the central mission of the SEP: hard work and discipline can lead to self-improvement and love, and there is no better way to find this than at the rural schools. These lessons align with the desire to modernize rural communities so that they would serve as a viable source of labor in the growing post-revolutionary agricultural and manufacturing industries.

In a story by another student, Leonardo Mota Morales, entitled “Al Volver de una fiesta” two students are walking home hand in hand from a school party, “cantando algunos de los coros aprendidos en la Escuela” when they stop to save a small bird they find on the road. As in this one, in each story from the collection of submissions the rural school features as a beacon of morality in the lives of the main characters who are meant to be representations of the authors themselves, local school children and their teachers. The way that these simple short stories from a remote rural school were collected and are housed in the massive dusty archives of the Secretaría de Educación Pública in Mexico City to this day evokes the work of the early colonists who brought back proof of the

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<sup>96</sup> I have attempted to faithfully reproduce these handwritten stories which were written on small pieces of paper and often included visible traces of students and teachers correcting errors in their writing.

civilizations which they were in the process of conquering in the form of codices written with and illustrated by indigenous informants. The stories tell what the SEP wants to hear, that the school and its teachers have become a central part of the community to which they students turn for guidance. The written word is thus serving a duel purpose: to enable the students to participate within the national discourse using the national language and having these students/citizens make the goals of the SEP their own by writing about them in their own words.

Language, especially in its written form has been at the forefront of imperial conquests since the earliest days of the Spanish arrival to the Americas. Walter Mignolo cites the *Gramatica castellana*, Elio Antonio de Nebrija's gift in 1492 to Queen Isabella of Spain, to explain how Nebrija's effort to civilize by inscribing and enforcing the laws of language was "the ideological seed of what would become a gigantic effort to colonize Amerindian languages by either writing their grammars or by teaching Castilian to the native speakers" (Mignolo *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* 40). In Nebrija's dedication of this first grammar of Castilian he explains how the Bishop of Avila defended its usefulness to the monarch, Queen Isabella, by stating, "Soon Your Majesty will have placed her yoke upon many barbarians who speak outlandish tongues. By this, your victory, these people shall stand in a new need; the need for the laws the victor owes to the vanquished, and the need for the language we shall bring with us" (Mignolo 38). The laws of language are thus intertwined and confused with those of conquest and subjugation. In teaching the school children to speak and write in "proper" Castilian in lieu of indigenous languages or regional dialects the SEP is exercising a continuation of

this coloniality. I use coloniality here to follow the work of Mignolo on the subject in which he explains coloniality as the patterns of power experienced in the everyday that emerge because of political and economic relationships in which one nation or people are under the control of another. Yes, the SEP, and therefore the central government, are attempting to control the rural communities in which they work but the teachers who work within the communities are aware that more than the prescriptions sent down from the SEP need to be interpreted to suit the lives of their pupils.

This is how, when *El Maestro Rural* held a competition for children's short stories the winners played with the rules in creative ways that betray their intimate understanding of the communities in which they worked. The first competition for children's short stories was featured in *El Maestro Rural*'s April issue in 1935 which was devoted in its entirety to the "Primer Congreso del Niño Proletario".<sup>97</sup> The first guideline for the competition demonstrates the goals of the children's literature that had been and would continue to be published in *El Maestro Rural*:

Tema libre, siempre y cuando el argumento desarrolle una idea que tienda a inculcar en el niño, el amor hacia la naturaleza, le identifique con ella y le revele sus maravillas; que despierte un interés por la escuela y le inicie en el trabajo del campo, de las fábricas y talleres, contribuyendo a crear una ideología de práctica y actividades colectivas que conduzcan a un mejoramiento económico del país e identifiquen al niño con la lucha de las clases trabajadoras. (34)

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<sup>97</sup> "Concurso de Cuentos Infantiles." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo VI, Número 7. 1 Abril 1935, 34. There was a call for applicants to a second contest for children's stories with the same guidelines in the July 15 - Aug 1 issue of *MR* in 1936. Other contests invited the participation of students and alumnae of rural schools such as the "Concurso Infantil de Biografías, Monografías, y Leyendas." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IX. Número 1. 1 Julio 1936, and "El maestro rural. Su vida y su obra. Gran Concurso Nacional." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo X. Número 2. Agosto 1937.

The content of the stories are directly linked on particular goal, the creation of a workforce for the economic success of Mexico.

Two issues later alongside a reminder that the short story competition would close at the end of the month, the SEP published an essay written by Prof. José Teran Tovar<sup>98</sup> entitled “Técnica del cuento”.<sup>98</sup> Emphasizing the importance of short stories in the setting of the rural schoolhouse, Teran Tovar reminds future authors that Mexican schools are socialist and should therefore avoid “los términos: Dios, Rey, Príncipe, y otras cuestiones por el estilo, que sólo sirven para fanatizar al hombre y embrutecerlo, imbuyéndole supersticiones y temores ridículos”(36). He adds, “Claro que podemos mencionar todo eso si es que lo hacemos para ridiculizar ciertas ideas y demostrar con hechos la poca consistencia de semejantes triquiñuelas” (36). More nuanced rules include the acceptance of speaking animals (because children’s imaginations call for miraculous things) but without associating this occurrence to any supernatural powers. Finally, Teran Tovar reminds authors that they should make sure their stories are appropriate to hear read aloud. He then counsels that stories should be memorized and read aloud because, “Al contar un cuento, hay que hacerlo con gusto, como si fuera cosa nuestra, procurando hacer ademanes y gestos de acuerdo con lo que narramos” (37). Teran Tovar is suggesting that the children’s stories can become part of a new oral tradition. In memorizing, and telling the stories featured in *El Maestro Rural* as if they were their own, the teachers are taking on the role of storyteller within the community.

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<sup>98</sup> Teran Tovar, José. “Técnica del cuento.” *El Maestro Rural* Tomo VI. Número 10. 15 Mayo 1935, 36-37

One of the contest winners, “El pueblo que tenía sed” by Octavio Amador begins by describing an idyllic mountain town that pulls together its resources so as to deal collectively through their representative, tío Chon, with merchants so as to get the most money for their cattle.<sup>99</sup> Although tío Chon is not the school teacher, he is described as his counterpart, “Si poseyera mayor ilustración, sería el maestro del pueblo, pero después de éste no hay otro como el tío Chón que resulte tan solicitado por los niños y aun por los adultos; aquéllos, para pedirle les refiera cuentos, y éstos para solicitar sus consejos” (63). Amador goes on to describe the types of stories that tío Chon tells, their description echoes the pragmatic guidelines of the short story contest and Terán Tovar, "creía más en los sucesos lógicos de la vida, que en especulaciones por mundos fantásticos, de los cuales solía negar su existencia, no sin dar convincentes razones por ello y sin dejar de alabarse y de agradecer a sus padres el empeño que pusieran para enviarlos a la escuela, pues no existe mayor desgracia en el mundo --solía decir--, como la de ser ignorante" (64). So it is surprising that when he hears the children calling out to the bats flitting around the tree under which they are seated, “ratones viejos” that he begins to tell the story of a vampire known as “el Caballero de la Sed”. The “Caballero de la Sed” is tired of being blamed for a town’s lack of water and asks a man what he can do to help if in return they will stop calling him by that name. The man describes the process of creating a dam and then surveys the work with the “Caballero de la Sed” after he magically completes it on horseback. The children that surround tío Chon ask, “¿el hombre de tu

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<sup>99</sup> Amador, Octavio. "El pueblo que tenía sed." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo VII. Número 5. 1 Sep 1935, 63 - 66

cuento tenía también un caballo rosillo como el tuyo?" (66). They then realize that tío Chon is the man from the story and he goes on to explain that the dam was really built "gracias al esfuerzo colectivo de todos los habitantes de este valle, con la ayuda que nos aportaron las autoridades gubernamentales, facilitándonos dinero, maquinaria e ingenieros que dirigieron las obras" (66). Tío Chon is performing a story like an indigenous storyteller and in the process breaking the rules of the competition by including supernatural elements. Then he removes his disguise and in so doing attempts to teach his audience a lesson. He explains:

"no hubo tal murciélagos convertido en Caballero de la Sed, porque los murciélagos son murciélagos desde que nacen hasta que se mueren, de igual manera como es mentira que sean ratones viejos a quienes les nacen alas, y que representen por transformaciones, papeles de personajes fatásticos, sólo porque así se le ocurre a la gente ignorante, pues estos simpáticos animalillos, lejos de encarnar figuras de cuentos y leyendas, son amigos desinteresados del agricultor . . . destruyen multitud de insectos nocivos a la agricultura" (66).

After this lengthy explanation the story closes with the children still calling out to the bats "¡Los ratones viejos!" just as before. However, they go on to say "de cada uno de estos murciélagos inventaremos un Caballero de la Sed para que se construyan muchas presas y muchos sistemas de riego que hagan fértil y productiva a nuestra patria" (66). The children, like tío Chon, are performing a story which synthesizes the "ignorance" of the past notion of old mice transforming into bats with the new modern concept of providing economic productivity through irrigation systems. In this story tío Chon takes the place of the maestro, negotiating his way between old traditional storytelling and the modernizing project. Tío Chon is equated to the town teachers who are charged with

bringing about technological and social changes in their communities. As Nestor García Canclini observes “modernizers need to persuade their addressees that—at the same time that they are renewing society—they are prolonging shared traditions” (107). The story replicates the value given to the present, the modernizing effort to install irrigation systems, and the past, the traditional supernatural explanations of phenomena, in the national patrimony. Nevertheless, that which pertains to the supernatural must be relegated charming local traditions and labeled as a holdover of an ignorant past.

*El Maestro Rural* is eager to take on these types of superstitious thought by name however when it comes to Catholic beliefs there is a degree of caution. It is true that early in the magazine’s run some content was included that directly attacked the influence of the Church within the communities. One example would be the play, “Lacras conservadoras que contaminan a la revolución social mexicana” by the maestro federal Víctor Manuel Bucio which I addressed in the previous chapter.<sup>100</sup> In later years, if the influence of the Church was mentioned at all it was only done in articles specifically addressed to the teachers and not in the fictional pieces they were meant to share with the communities. With the recent violent history of the Cristero Rebellion that rose up against the attempts of the government to remove the Church’s influence from Mexico, it is no wonder that the schools which brought the government’s “socialist” education became a battleground. Although the first phase of the Cristero Rebellion came to an end with the truce brokered between the government and the Catholic Church

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<sup>100</sup> Bucio, Victor Manuel. “Lacras conservadoras que contaminan a la revolución social mexicana.” Tomo II. Número 2. 1 Noviembre 1932

in 1929, persecution on both sides continued resulting in many federal teachers working in rural areas being tortured or killed. José Revueltas's gruesome short story, "Dios en la Tierra" (1944), tells of the small town which executes their schoolteacher after it is discovered that he has told the Federal Army where to find water during the Cristero Rebellion. The quivering body of the teacher at the end of the story is a reminder not only of the threat of violence that faced the *maestros* but their precarious position caught in the midst of a community while having consecrated themselves to fulfilling the government's will. Even without the basis of religion, the teachers were at risk of violence as evidenced by several notices on the deaths of teachers in *El Maestro Rural* in 1933. Teachers were still seen as outsiders attempting to upset the balance of existing powers in the community. In both the murder cases which are recounted in detail, the disputes against the teachers were allegedly related to the land the school was using to grow its crops. Juan Manuel Espinosa, working in the state of Mexico was murdered during a Mother's Day celebration by two men because he "atrajo la envidia, el rencor, el odio cainesco de algunos bárbaros" (4).<sup>101</sup> Upon their deaths these men become heroic emblems for the work of the school, in the case of Felipe Alcocer Castillo the magazine writes, "Cayó como caen los que mueren por la conquista de un ideal, con la majestad de quien al morir señala una ruta y deja un ejemplo noble" (4).<sup>102</sup> The eulogy goes on, "Fueron los enemigos de la educación popular, los eternos retrógradas, los que, en vano, pretenden detener la obra arrolladora y salvadora de la escuela, los que troncharon la vida

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<sup>101</sup> "Asesinato de un maestro rural." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III. Número 1. 1 Junio 1933, 3

<sup>102</sup> "En memoria del maestro Felipe Alcocer Castillo." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III. Número 5. 1 Agosto 1933, 4

noble y fuerte de un maestro joven” (4). If not mentioned by name, it seems that here at least, the remnants of the Cristero Rebellion is being blamed for the death of Felipe Alcocer. In a final article that references these, as well as two other recent deaths of teachers, *El Maestro Rural* lets its readers know that it will be organizing life insurance so that the families of murdered teachers will have some support. It concludes, “Afortunadamente hay en nuestras filas mucha sangre joven para ahogar a la reacción que nos acecha” (4).<sup>103</sup> Some have calculated that at least 223 teachers were victims of this reactionary violence between 1931 and 1940 (Sherman *The Mexican Right* 43).

In 1933 the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) convened in Queretaro to discuss the future of education as a purely state-run enterprise, as opposed to private or Church education. “Its leaders went back to a materialist interpretation of history and pointed out that education has always been oriented by the dominant classes, that is has attempted to mold the human being into the ideal of the period, and that the basis of education in all ages has been economic” (Booth 2). The result of these discussions on education was that Article 3 of the constitution was revised in the following way, “The education imparted by the State shall be a socialistic one and, in addition to excluding all religious doctrine, shall combat fanaticism and prejudices by organizing its instruction and activities in a way that shall permit the creation in youth of an exact and rational concept of the Universe and of social life” (2). Soon after, in January of 1934, the Catholic Church responded by having a letter read to parishioners which outlined four

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<sup>103</sup> “A la memoria de los maestros que entregaron su vida en el cumplimiento de su deber.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo III. Número 13. 1 Diciembre 1933, 4

fundamental principles, “no Catholic can be a Socialist; no Catholic can study or teach Socialism; no Catholic can condone Socialism; and no Catholic can approve pedagogic naturalism or sex education” (Booth 4). Faced with such organized opposition from the Catholic Church, upon ascending to the presidency Cárdenas learned to temper his efforts to transform education. Unlike Calles, he did not want to wage an active war against the formidable institution that would result in loss of life and political support. As Alan Knight has pointed out, Cárdenas could not effectively combat resistance to or disinterest in state-sponsored projects. So, while he was able to successfully deliver on agrarian reforms, improved labor laws, and the nationalization of petroleum, his attempted socialist education reforms did not perform as well. In 1936, Lázaro Cárdenas addressed teachers and the communities in which they worked directly on the topic of religious persecution in the pages of *El Maestro Rural*. In the brief article, “Combatir el fanatismo no es atacar credos religiosos” he writes, “Se ha dicho que la educación socialista combate la religión y arranca a los hijos al amor de sus padres. Eso es mentira. La educación socialista combate el fanatismo, capacita a los niños para . . . sus deberes con la colectividad y los prepara para la lucha social . . . cuando alcancen la edad suficiente para intervenir como factores en la producción económica” (3).<sup>104</sup> He goes on to boldly proclaim, “Es mentira que haya en México persecución religiosa” (4). He then insists that the goals of the “programa revolucionario son de carácter económico, social y educativo” (4). Suffice to say that the threat of being considered anti-Catholic was a real fear for the

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<sup>104</sup> Cárdenas, Lázaro. “Comabtir el fanatismo no es atacar credos religiosos.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo VIII. Número 6. 15 Marzo 1936, 3-4

rural school teachers who's only means of defense were often miles away, if any at all were available. It is also clear, that this was such an imminent threat because the life of the communities in which they taught were still very much entwined with the institution of the Catholic Church.

As mentioned before, stories did not tend to attack the Catholic Church directly, however among the guidelines for short story writing in *El Maestro Rural* is one written by a teacher, Maria Lavalle Urbina, specifically for teachers in the section “Cartas a los Maestro Rurales” entitled, “El cuento ante la escuela socialista” (15).<sup>105</sup> Although most of the guidelines resemble those set forth earlier by José Terán Tovar, LaValle also adds that the Christian values of humility, patience and acceptance should be avoided as they promote and sustain the "regímenes de injusticia y de opresión, porque vienen a tronchar todo brote de rebeldía y de ansia de mejoramiento individual y colectivo" (15). The school is finding ways to combat the teachings of the Catholic Church that stand in the way of the economic and social goals of the government without attacking it directly.

In August of 1938, the maestro Lorenzo Parra E. published a brief article in *El Maestro Rural* entitled “Desarrollo y manejo del programa: Técnica del cuento” in which he summarized the appropriate topics for the stories told within the school. Parra’s article reveals the SEP’s defensive attitude toward the art of storytelling, one which seeks to unseat local traditions and replace them with that which is prescribed by the state. Again, Parra notes that stories should avoid superstitious notions and enforce the lessons

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<sup>105</sup> Lavalle Urbina, Maria “Cartas a los Maestros Rurales 1. El cuento ante la escuela socialista.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo X, Número 1. 1 Jul 1937, 15-17

that the teachers are trying to instill. He is careful not to challenge the Catholic Church by name; using the term “supersticiones” instead of religious beliefs. He instructs his fellow teachers that their goal should be to: “contar a los niños los terribles y nefastos efectos que produce cualquier vicio por medio del cuento, o bien, las injusticias del régimen capitalista imperante” (21). The main vice to which Parra alludes is the one most often referred to in *El Maestro Rural*, alcoholism. Alcoholism and the use of alcohol during religious celebrations were customs that stood in the way of national progress because they interfered with the agricultural work of the rural communities. Ironically, immediately following this attempt to guarantee a stable workforce, the second topic for stories which Parra offers are the injustices of the capitalist regime. The capitalist regime, and its bourgeoisie are brought into contrast with the exemplary Russian socialist model often set forth as an example for cultural and social growth in the magazine.<sup>106</sup>

Using these ideas, the work of *maestros* was to unseat the Catholic Church as the center of the community. So, it is by no means a coincidence that Parra compares the work of his fellow maestros amongst the indigenous communities to that of the early missionaries from Spain. "Debemos tener presente que cuando España se impuso la tarea de transformar las costumbres y las creencias de la masa indígena, se valió de valientes misioneros que llevaban todo un conjunto de cuentos y paráboles que les llegaba al corazón, de tal manera, que no obstante lo arraigado de sus hábitos y costumbres, lograron transformar éstas" (21). Diana Taylor notes that during the period of

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<sup>106</sup> Early examples include the “Gejo y Yo” series of essays in which a teacher explains socialist concepts to a peasant. These began running in the magazine in April of 1932 under the penname of Gejo, (Tomo I, Num 3, 1 Abril 1932). Later articles include information on the Soviet author Maxime Gorky (“Maximo Gorky y la literatura sovietica” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo 9. Número 1. 1 Julio 1936

colonization, “The Church tried to impose itself as the sole locus of the sacred and organized religious and secular life both spatially and temporally” (43). Since its inception, *El Maestro Rural* encourages teachers to impose themselves in the same way. The goal of socialist education was to bring the *maestro* and the school into the center of the community as the Church had attempted to do before it. Yet, by 1938 the SEP had shifted its interest away from the community as a whole, and refocused on the children of the community. Parra goes on to explain why the purpose of these stories should not be to reach the entire community but instead to only reach children. "¿Por qué tanto tesón por llevar, pues, ideología revolucionaria en los viejos refractarios? Al fin ellos ya tienen arraigadas sus ideas propias de difícil exterminación; por lo tanto nuestras miras deberán convergir en esos soldados del mañana, que lo forman los actuales muchachos que concurren día a día a las escuelas" (21). The *maestros* did not find, as they had been told they would by the SEP, primitive and childlike minds in the indigenous communities where they worked. Instead they found deep rooted traditions, languages and forms of thought that they were asked to record but not understand. In the end, in many cases the only members of these communities that attended the schools were the children who were legally obliged to do so. Therefore, the *maestros* work would be to unseat the old storytellers of the community and take their place to create a new generation of revolutionaries who would fight for the lives they were taught to desire.

By the time *El Maestro Rural* began including a “Literatura para niños” section in the January to February issue of 1938 the style and structure of the authors of literature dedicated specifically to children wrote in a new style that seemed to focus on capturing

the attention of their young audience. The changes in story style reflect a growing understanding of their audience as children, and specifically as children from indigenous communities. After 1936, *El Maestro Rural* began to increase the amount of material in the magazine provided directly by teachers in the field. The introduction to the first issue from 1936 begins with the following proposal:

organizar sus labores con el objeto de que llegue a constituir un órgano de verdadera utilidad para los maestros del campo, de conocimientos de todos órdenes relacionados con sus actividades, de orientación en las finalidades que persigue la Nueva Educación y de consulta para los problemas que se les presenten, y parar los cuales se pretenderá dar una solución adecuada. Asimismo, se convertirá en un órgano de expresión de los maestros; de una expresión disciplinada. (3)<sup>107</sup>

This meant that sections like “Cartas a los Maestros Rurales” were written exclusively by teachers, for teachers. I believe that this also was the reason for the significant change in the stories that were included for children. From its inception in January 1938 the section “Literatura para niños” was featured in all but one of the twenty-six issues that appeared between then and final issue in December of 1940.

Florencio E. Usupa’s “Carretera” was published in the children’s literature section in 1940.<sup>108</sup> the story begins with a reference to "Pampa de Granito" by José Enrique Rodó, an allegorical story in which life is represented by an unforgiving granite fields upon which men are broken to bring about change through their suffering. It then goes on to describe the construction of a mountain road from the perspective of the mountains as they view the behavior of the men below. The story includes illustrations and its

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<sup>107</sup> "Plan de *El Maestro Rural* para 1936". *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo VIII. Número 1. 1 enero 1936, 3

<sup>108</sup> Ursupa, Florencio E. “Carretera.” *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo XII. Número 5 y 6. May-Jun 1940, 15-17

brevity and use of repetition shows respect for the traditional storytelling that the children are accustomed to in the home. There is a careful interest place in the use of language. The narrator's voice maintains the proper grammar and official Spanish sanctioned in the project of "castellanización", but although they were previously banned regional and slang terms are used in the speech of the local men who struggle through the mountain pass before the road is constructed. "Los arrieros apuran a los hatajos . . . y dejan caer una lluvia de palabras obscenas. ¡Mula! . . . ¡Córrele 'piebora' que ya va cayendo el 'duende'... Ora tú" (15). This speech is set apart from the proper Spanish used in the remainder of the story as are all nicknames for the workers through the use of quotations. The quotations are like a protective barrier between Usupa's writing and the regional dialect. He can write in a way that imitates this style of speech but is aware that using it himself would mean that he was risking losing himself in the community. Recall that the teachers were warned to not lose their precarious status as "gente de razon" among their pupils. But his students are not his only audience, Usupa is also writing for the editors of *El Maestro Rural*. Perhaps this is why Usupa introduces his story by referencing Rodo, to ensure his audience that he is creating a new allegory for the everyman's struggle that could be understood by the children in his community. Usupa, as a rural school teacher is caught in between these two cultural spaces, speaking to both, turning his head to one then the other to ensure he is understood.

Thematically Florencio Usupa's "Carretera" replicates some traditional narratives. For instance, the speaking mountains, are similar to the spirits in the mountains that advised and guided the characters in traditional indigenous stories. The mountains near

Mexico City are the subject of one such legend recounted by doña Luz Jimenez in which a shepherdess refuses to heed the council of a Catholic priest and seeks help from the god Popocatepetl. The legend states that Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl remained in the shape of the mountain and watch over their people (McDonough 136). Doña Luz's stories, and others, show the way the Nahua revered the spirits of the mountains, and would honor them and ask them for help. At first it seems that the mountains in "Carretera" will not share the same relationship of protection with the humans in this story. When news starts to spread about the road that is going to be built the mountains jeer at the audacity of the humans, "se ríen con carcajadas de polvo por la osadía humana ¿qué nos aplanarán nuestros flancos? ¿Qué nos derrumbarán nuestras peñas y quebrarán nuestras piedras y romperán nuestras entrañas para hacernos agujeros que llaman túneles? ¡No; no lo podrán hacer! ¡Pobres hormigas humanas!" (15). However, as the workers unite in vast numbers they begin to feel their strength, "Las montañas se sienten heridas y protestan, aprietan sus rocas para hacerlas más duras e impenetrables, pero el hombre sigue tenaz en su tarea" (16). The story goes on to describe the dangerous and sickly working conditions and the struggles of the men and women who travel along working on the road. Finally, when it is completed the mountains look down and see the road being used by luxurious fast cars "donde con toda comodidad van satisfechos los burgueses" (17). Meanwhile, crosses dot the highway marking the spots where worker died. The narrator states, "no imploran sino que exigen justicia social" (17). The tragic loss of life is not the only thing that demands justice. One of the men who worked on the road walks alongside it in the dirt and the mountains ask themselves, "¿Por qué el que construyó la carretera no la

puede aprovechar? ¿Por qué el sigue a pie y otros que nunca vinieron a trabajar gozan de comodidades . . . ¿Por qué el que produce, no goza de esa producción?" (17). Despite having been brutalized by the men who worked on the road they still feel solidarity to their cause. This is how the new socialist education brought to rural indigenous communities is challenging the reality of the evolving postrevolutionary economic program. The results of capitalist exploitation of the cheap labor provided by the impoverished workers is that they will never see the benefits of the progress they are working to create. By having the mountains, traditional protectors of the indigenous communities, voice their surprise this situation does not only seem unjust but unnatural. In a similar story from 1936, a pair of birds build their nest alongside a man and woman building a home.<sup>109</sup> The birds are stunned when they see a different very wealthy couple take possession of the house. These stories challenge what Carlos Fuentes describes as "La pesada tradición del poder centralista, la inveterada enajenación mental al paternalismo y la razón de ser burguesa pronto convirtieron a la Revolución en Institución; una Institución que rinde homenaje al pasado indígena y revolucionario con palabras y al presente 'progresista' y burgés con actos" (11). The teacher's who are tasked with paying homage to the Revolution and indigenous heritage are also in a privileged position to see the failings of the economic policies that are being put into effect to bring positive change to the communities where they work. These stories

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<sup>109</sup> Díaz Cardenas, Leon. "El pajaro y el albañil." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo IX. Número 6. 1 Nov 1936, 21

challenge the pupils to no accept the notions of progress imposed on them from the central government.

We looked at stories because they hold a singular space in the cultural life of the communities where the teachers reading *El Maestro Rural* worked. The authors of these stories understood the rich oral tradition of didactic storytelling within the home and the church and fought to replace both with the style of stories they condoned as a means of placing themselves at a hegemonic advantage. As the magazine entered the Cardenas era it shifted its focus to the future of its students, challenging them not to abandon their past because, like the legends they shared as a community, it held insights into how to combat the injustices of the present. If we recall Anselmo, the idealized teacher from the first story in *El Maestro Rural*, his mission was to prepare his students for “las exigencias del progreso del día” (18).<sup>110</sup> Progress, was defined for Anselmo and his pupils by the goals of national unification and economic growth, and Anselmo dutifully complied with his mission. What we see in the last story I have presented, “Carretera” is a more nuanced understanding of what this modern progress would mean for the community. The muleteers whose voices open the short story were put out of work by the new road, the men who built it suffered to no benefit of their own. What this story is proposing is that progress, when violently thrust upon an existing landscape without taking into account local needs is an injustice. Carlos Fuentes, looking back at the Zapatista movement argues that the *campesinos* are linked to a particular culture and therefore “eran conscientes de que tenían la oportunidad social y política para realizar, con toda

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<sup>110</sup> Velasco, Adolfo. "El maestro rural." *El Maestro Rural*. Tomo I. Número 14. 15 Apr 1932

concreción y actualidad, los valores latentes de su cultura local” (134). The time spent in the communities in which they worked by the *maestros rurales* allowed them to understand the values of their local cultural practices and how these conflicted with the official national narrative of progress thus producing a new counternarrative which emphasized the local over the national.

When Rafael Ramírez described the dangers of teaching students in their indigenous languages, he cautioned that it would lead the teachers to lose their position as “gente de razón” which was the only thing that distinguished them from the indigenous population where they worked. Here is what I wanhat I want to say is that the maestros could take or leave this advice and I believe that the final story I’ve analzed here is evidence that they have accepted, if not a bilingual style of education, a cultural bilingualism. What “Carretera” shows is the *maestros* familiarity and solidarity with the people of the community where he works. In his work on mental control of the bilingual lexico-semantic system”, David Green has developed an inhibitory control model which explains the ways bilinguals stop themselves from speaking in their primary language while speaking in their secondary one and visa versa. What his study shows is that when one language is being used the speaker must suppress the other. Counterintuitively, it will take a bilingual more time to switch from their secondary language back to their primary language because the mental act of suppressing the primary language is greater. It is as if the speaker needs to weigh down their primary language to keep it from bubbling up and interfering. I propose that the same thing happens in bi-cultural speech acts. When the maestro is attempting to speak in the style of the indigenous culture in

which he works he is suppressing the cultural heritage in favor of the indigenous culture with which he has come to know and a community that has become his own.

When Vasconcelos was developing his plan for teaching in indigenous communities his work was tainted by the fear he felt of the unknown. For Vasconcelos indigenous communities were a temporary impediment to the construction of a progressive and united Mexico. If, *El Maestro*, the magazine were to come to life he would set out and begin to pour knowledge into what he perceived as the empty vessels of indigenous minds. Watching this knowledge overflow and pour out onto the floor, the living version of *El Maestro Rural* would chuckle knowingly to himself. He has heard from his colleagues that the work in communities means understanding that the indigenous communities in which they work were already full of their own knowledge and if a teacher hoped to be successful he could not pour knowledge in but had to help the students to grow. Although the *maestro* is aware of the lessons that the SEP is dictating he is also able to have genuine love and respect for the community in which he or she works. Returning to Paulo Freire, he explains that a teacher can work, "in solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental and individualistic gestures and risks and act of love " (50). For Vasconcelos, the indigenous communities of Mexico were just that, a category, whereas for the *maestros rurales* they were individuals who they came to know and understand. I have proposed that the pedagogical essay instructing the teachers on how to best incorporate their students and

the communities into the nation were exercising the powers of coloniality in that they were imposing economic and political models unsuited to the realities of rural indigenous life. This internal colonialism is countered from within the communities by the work of the *maestros rurales* who have become fluent in the indigenous cultural practices and thus are able to speak with and for the communities and in so doing suppress the influence colonialism.

## **Conclusion: *El Maestro Rural* Tells a Story**

In the process of writing this dissertation I came to understand that the iconic Mexican Revolution that I had learned about, the one that Diego Rivera painted on the walls of the National Palace was created to teach the citizens who had fought that Revolution that their battles had been won and that they should trust in the government to defend the rights they had earned. However celebrated, this Revolution does not align with the reality of Mexico in the postrevolutionary era and beyond. In Emilio Fernández's *Río Escondido* (1947), Rivera's murals serve as a backdrop for the ascent of Rosaura, played by María Félix, on her way to receive her appointment as a *maestra rural* from the President. The voice-over describes the history of Mexico depicted by Diego Rivera beginning with the conquest of the indigenous civilizations, Mexico's independence, the battles against The United States and France and finally, "la sangrienta lucha de la Revolución Social por la dignidad humana, por la verdad que está en sus campos, en sus fábricas y en sus hijos, las ligas tiernas que siembran las manos de los maestros en los surcos fecundos de la escuela para germinar en hombres fuertes de mañana, almas limpias que han de forjar el futuro glorioso de la patria". The president explains to Rosaura that she must combat the immoral political leaders in the remote regions of Mexico because, "Nuestros campos, que deberían de producir lo que el país consume están improductivos". This is the narrative that Rosaura carries with her as she enters the isolated rural community where she is destined to work, it is the same narrative that we see in the pages of the SEP. What Rosaura finds is a community trapped by the intimidation and control of a violent caudillo. It seems Rosaura is tasked with supplanting the voice of this caudillo who has subjugated the community for his own economic gains with the voice of the narrator which represents the nation. Although veiled by the backdrop of patriotic history, the goal of the nation/narrator is sublimating

the communities in the same way the caudillo has done. In order to bring the community into the national work force they must accept a lifestyle designed to forge the nation's progress and not to help their own community. I open my conclusion with this initial scene from *Río Escondido* to show the way that one holdover of the colonial era, the patriarchal hierarchy led by local caudillos, is replaced by another, the official government narrative which reestablishes patriarchal control translating the colonial narrative to suit the needs of the modern nation-state.

All three of my chapters have looked at the ways the Revolutionary government's attempt to re-colonize the rural areas of Mexico was manifested in the national cultural project. Let us speculate about what the protagonists of each of my chapters would see as they gazed upon the murals that Rosaura walked past in the halls of the National Palace. Would José Vasconcelos feel as if his education project was a failure looking into the faces of the *campesinos* triumphantly struggling alongside industrial workers? He had hoped that his efforts at indigenous education would be temporary, that the indigenous population, in the not so distant future, would cease to need a separate department in the SEP because they would speak, look and act like the *mestizo* citizens of Mexico: well-versed in the Euro-centric cultural practices which he had sent out for them to read in his pedagogical magazine *El Maestro*. Would the SEP pedagogues who redrew the parameters for civil participation be satisfied with the performances of the indigenous people depicted in the mural? The goal of the SEP was to preserve the costumes of the indigenous communities so that they could dance and perform in the style of Mexicans, but they also wanted to ensure that the people wearing those costumes were not living in them. Traditions moved from the everyday onto the national stage. Instead of trying to preserve their cultural practices in the present they wanted to ensure that communities were better able to take part in the story of national progress. In my final chapter, I look

at storytellers from within the communities and the storytelling of the *maestros rurales* and argue that by the end of the magazine's run the teachers who had worked alongside indigenous communities had come to understand them, developing a cultural bilingualism that allowed them to switch between suppressing their primary language and culture, that of the SEP's internal colonial project, and speaking for the local struggles of the community. Would these teacher's see themselves in the mural guiding the community or would they instead see a narrative of progress that does not serve the needs of their adopted community.

I have shown that Vasconcelos embraced the colonial legacy of the Catholic church's vision of indigenous conversion. For Vasconcelos the work of the SEP would complete the unfinished transformation of the indigenous people of Mexico by supplanting traditional cultural practices with the Euro-centric cultural model that he outlined in his pedagogical treatise and distributed to schools with his collection of Western canonical works and *El Maestro*. I argue that this project, like the initial colonial efforts of the sixteenth century, is borne out of fear and the need to dominate the unknown. Vasconcelos admits in his writings that he has limited knowledge of the indigenous cultures of Mexico. He does not want to open a dialogue with the indigenous communities, instead he wants to fill what he perceives as empty vessels with the knowledge that he himself was instructed with so as to diminish what he sees as their threat to his ideal of Mexican culture.

By the time *El Maestro Rural* goes into publication, the SEP has come to understand that to teach the indigenous communities they must first understand them. Just as anthropologist Manuel Gamio had proposed in *Forjando Patria*, to transform Mexico the government first had to understand the particularities of the indigenous cultures which survived within its borders. Only after this, could the people in various

indigenous communities be assimilated into the nation. Looking at the dances that were drawn from indigenous traditions allows me to show the way the cultural knowledge of communities is coopted by the state and becomes a part of the performance of national culture. The main difference between *El Maestro* and *El Maestro Rural* is that a dialogue has begun to take place between the SEP and the communities in which they work. However, this conversation will not challenge the internal colonialism of the Revolutionary government when it comes to the content that describes how indigenous populations should represent themselves as citizens: the plays and dances in *El Maestro Rural*. I believe that we see the other side of this conversation in the indigenous stories compiled by the *maestros rurales* and in some of their own stories.

My final chapter evidences the ways in which the time spent in the communities where they worked changed how the teachers interpreted the mission of the SEP. Paulo Freire proposes that truly transformative education, the kind that allows the community to liberate itself from social injustice, necessitates an act of love. Love is defined by a deep respect, understanding and commitment to the community in which the educator works. The final story I analyze, “Carretera” shows how Florencio E. Usupa, the author, is able to write in a style that shows his ability to code-switch between the Spanish of the SEP and the regional Spanish of the community where he works. This ability to swap between language-styles reflects the teacher’s ability to live between two distinct cultural models. While the national cultural project of the SEP is attempting to colonize the community by having it accept the model of political and social progress that would enable capitalist productivity, the community is refuting the injustices that this model brings about in the community. I argue that through this cultural bilingualism *El Maestro Rural*’s content shows the way that autonomous political, social, and cultural practices within indigenous communities survived the efforts of internal colonization.

Internal colonization in the shape of capitalist expansion directly threatened indigenous communities in 1994 when, in preparation for the North American Free Trade Agreement, Article 27 of the Mexico's constitution which protected the communal landholdings of indigenous people from privatization or sale was annulled to facilitate investment opportunities. On the day NAFTA came into effect, January 1, 1994, capitalist models were yet again threatening indigenous communities with the ramifications of internal colonialism, and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) contested their rights by declaring war on the Mexican state. José Rabasa has looked at the way the communiqués of the EZLN and the words of the members of this group spoken during negotiations with the government highlight the inability of the government to understand their demands. Rabasa cites a line from Mayor Rolando in which he references the government's inability to understand the Zapatistas demands explaining, "The Zapatistas attribute the incapacity of the government—as well as of intellectuals—to address their demands to a mixture of moral ineptness (the government cannot understand what dignity means), racism (it cannot dialogue with Indians on an equal basis), and intellectual torpidity (it cannot understand the terms of a new communist revolution)" (41). What Rabasa suggests is that the importance of the ways the EZLN demand justice, liberty, and democracy is not in the act of making themselves understood through the use of what he calls folkloric speech. Instead, he argues that the EZLN is able to demand these things because they are unintelligible to the government from whom they demand them, "The point of departure is not that 'subalterns speak very well,'<sup>111</sup> but that they 'cannot speak' and 'choose not to learn how'—indeed, they demand that the discourse of power 'lean how to speak to them'" (*Without History* 61).

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<sup>111</sup> José Rabasa is referencing Gayatri Spivaks' criticism of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze from her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?".

According to his work in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Walter Mignolo developed his concept of decoloniality through his understanding of the Zapatista's movement and their demands for dignity. For Mignolo, decolonial options are ways in which you can break away from Eurocentric legacies and shift your epistemology to another point of origin which entails "an-other language, an-other way of being in the world" (217). What I am suggesting is not a shift in thinking but a temporary suppression, a way of code switching between the Eurocentric model's and the indigenous community's epistemologies. The EZLN is the creation of an autonomous local Revolution by a community which celebrates its indigenous culture and speaks from inside of it. In *El Maestro Rural* we saw the two cultures meeting, the local indigenous and the government, and forming a new type of civil participation marked by cultural bilingualism, instead of the assimilating into the nation-state.

As I explained in my analysis of storytelling in chapter three to speak with the community the *maestro rural* had to suppress the colonialist language that they had been sent to teach by the SEP. The SEP's education project brought with it classist and racist worldview in which the indigenous communities were not seen as viable member of the nation state until their assimilation. Meanwhile, the communities offered their own language and culture. Even if the *maestros* did not learn to speak the same language as their pupils, the SEP's directive to live alongside these communities and better understand their needs meant that the *maestros* were asked to teach in dialogue with these communities, which meant suppressing the language with which they initially arrived. Decades later, what the EZLN demands is that they be understood in the same way, that their interlocutors in the government suppress their primary culture and speak with the same cultural bilingualism that the indigenous communities are capable of doing after years of living in the interstices of a local community and the nation. What the EZLN is

proposing is a reversal of the model of the SEP and their colonialist efforts to bring modern economic and social structures to the communities they served, they want instead to transform the national government to meet the needs of the local communities.

When writing this dissertation, I drew whenever possible from *El Maestro Rural* to describe the goals of the SEP and the culture they hoped to share with the communities where they sent their teachers. Although I feel that this gave my research an outlook unavailable elsewhere in that it replicated what the SEP provided the *maestros* and the communities where they worked, I believe a deeper understanding of contemporary indigenous literary production would have allowed a richer interpretation of the cultural practices of storytelling in the different communities where the SEP had established schools. Further research would require me to narrow my focus to a particular region thereby allowing me to look at the representations of a particular indigenous culture from outside and from within the communities. Doing this would allow me to address certain thematic questions which have remained unexplored in this dissertation. For instance, what is the role of the animal in indigenous storytelling and how does its presence differ and resemble the use in western-tradition fables?

I have spent countless hours studying the pages of *El Maestro Rural*. I have scanned each page of the magazine from the first cover in 1932 to the very last page from December of 1940 in the hopes of preserving its crumbling pages. I have dug through dusty boxes in the SEP archive, looking for traces of correspondence between teachers and the editorial staff. I have done all this because I felt like I had found some insight into the way Mexico had created a unifying national culture in the wake of a divisive Revolutionary war. What I found was a conversation taking place between intellectuals, teachers and the communities they served. It was a conversation between a colonial power and the communities that it was attempting to transform which continues to this

day. The dialogue that one sees on the pages of *El Maestro Rural* brought about a bilingual conversation between rural communities and the colonialist powers of the Revolutionary government in which the communities learned to demand to be heard as equals.

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