

MESTIZAJE-INDIGENISMO AND RACISM IN THE MEXICAN STATE'S IDEOLOGY OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION.

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*“El espíritu mexicano está en el color que el agua latina,
tal como ella llegó hasta nosotros, adquirió aquí,
en nuestra casa, al correr durante tres siglos
lamiendo las arcillas rojas de nuestro suelo”*

Alfonso Reyes

For more than the last one hundred years, and especially after the Mexican 1910 revolution, anthropologists, historians interested in political and cultural history, politicians, writers and thinkers have abundantly written about the importance of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* in the postrevolutionary Mexican state's ideology or Mexican state's project of national integration. Among the politicians, thinkers and writers who have expressed their opinions about these two closely linked subjects, we find most of Mexican Presidents and Ministers of Education, and important names like José María Luis Mora, one of the pioneers of liberal Mexican thought towards the third decade of the XIX Century; Francisco Pimentel and Vicente Riva Palacio during the liberal era previous to porfiriato; Andrés Molina Enríquez and Justo Sierra during the porfiriato; José Vasconcelos the creator of the idea of the “*raza cósmica*”; Luis Cabrera the oppositionist and democrat *par excellence* of the twenties and thirties; Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the important stalinist intellectual and union leader; the poet and essay writer Octavio Paz, the philosopher Luis Villoro, and others.² Among the anthropologists we have mainly Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, the main representatives of postrevolutionary indigenismo, and Guillermo Bonfil, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Héctor Díaz Polanco, and Gilberto López y Rivas³, who have been since the seventies some the most important critics of the state's indigenismo. Among the historians we especially find those who have written about the 1900-1940 period, as, for example, Luis González, Fernando Benítez, Héctor Aguilar Camín, Alan Knight, Enrique Krauze, John Womack or Adolfo Gilly⁴.

This means that, regarding Mexico, where *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* have to be studied in a correlated way when considered a part of the state's ideology, the subject that occupies us in this panel has been widely treated and discussed. This is why it seemed to me that in this paper it would be more useful to treat it not only nor mainly as a historical route over the ideas and discussions of the state's representatives and critics regarding *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*, but to focus these ideas and discussions

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as seen from two particular angles, which are: 1) if the XX Century Mexican state's thought on this issue can be considered racist or at least stained with racism, and 2) what happens to our subject when transported –in a very brief way here- towards a regional level inside this country, in this case that of Chiapas, a land that has lived during the last five hundred years under a permanent interethnic war in which *mestizaje* –called over there “*ladinización*”-, seen as an ideological category, has not necessarily followed the paths of central Mexico and of the federal government's thought.

Mexico has been, for a long time already, a racial mix, mainly formed by many generations' of Indian and Spanish miscegenation, that has largely developed since the sixteenth century despite the careful racial or caste Crown's policies, and that has deeply erased the clear “racial” divisions of early colony. All along Mexican colonial and postcolonial history the ethnic status of a person or collectivity, formed by language, religion, social organization, culture and collective memory has been capable of change, which means that Indians have been able to become, rapidly or slowly, *mestizos*. They have been able to acculturate, by entering a different social and cultural group, the *mestizo* one, which is also seen in terms grounded in phenotype as a whiter social group.

Nevertheless, who is an Indian and who is a *mestizo* in Mexico is a very complex problem defined in different ways according to all kinds of indicators. Officially, in this country, Indians and *mestizos* are socially defined, that is ethnically defined. But this kind of definition carries an important amount of subjectivity, because, as Banks puts it after reading the work of many anthropologists, ethnicity is

a collection of rather simplistic [...] statements about boundaries, otherness, goals and achievements, being and identity, descent and classification, that has been constructed as much by the anthropologist as by the subject. (1996: 5)

In agreement with Banks, Peter Wade -who is here with us in this panel and whose very clear reasoning on the subject I would like to follow today- writes that ethnicity is “a social construction that is centrally about identifications of difference and sameness”. (Wade 1997: ?) And as a social construct it is then an idea whose specificity lies in several facts: a) that it refers to ‘cultural’ differences; b) that it “tends to use a language of *place* (rather than wealth, sex, or inherited phenotype), spreading cultural difference over geographical space by virtue of the fact that the social relations become concrete in spatialised form”, and c) that it thus creates a “cultural geography”, determined much more by the perception of the people involved, about the significance that difference in location has on their definition of difference and sameness *as a result of a particular history*, than on the objective differences in location in themselves.⁵ (*Ibidem*; also see Barth 1969)

⁵ The underlining is mine

The necessary and important question for the subject we are discussing here on *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* in Mexico, one that has very seldom been asked by our social scientists,⁶ is if in these many subjective ethnic definitions, the idea of race –as ungraspable as it may be and deprived of any sort of scientific or rational genetic basis- is also frequently present when defining Indians and *mestizos*, in Mexican history in general and in official Mexican thought in particular. If this question gets a positive answer, the one that follows has to be raised, that is: how important has this idea been in our national history? What has been its historical weight in our national integration ideologies? If we find this historical weight to be important, it is very likely that the official interpretation permeating the widely extended vision of Mexico not being a racist country, could fall off from its altar, dragging along the belief, carefully educated in us Mexicans generation after generation, in the fact that the state's *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* have basically been non racist national integration policies.

I will again follow here Peter Wade's work on the definition of race. Race, as well as ethnicity, is a subjective social construct that is also about identifications of difference and sameness. As a social construct, race is then also, like ethnicity, an idea. But even if it is just that, an idea, a social construct which is said to refer to *phenotypical, not to cultural, differences*, this does not mean that it is merely an idea, and in this sense an unimportant social factor. If ethnicity has proven to be very important during human history, race has not had less historical weight. "Clearly –as Wade puts it- people may behave as if races did exist and, as a result, races do exist as social categories of great tenacity and power." (Wade 1997: 13-14) Or, as Montagu would say, "unreal –that is untrue- beliefs can acquire great power". (Montagu 1965). "But –asks Wade- if races are social constructions, what kind of social constructions are they?" "Is there something that lets us know when we are dealing with a *racial* construction and not with an *ethnic* one?"

Races, racial categories and racial ideologies are not simply those that elaborate social constructions on the basis of phenotypical variation –or ideas about innate difference- but those that do so using the particular aspects of phenotypical variation *that were worked into vital signifiers of difference during colonial encounters with others. (Ibidem)*⁷

To apply the questions posed above to Mexican history let us start by the beginning: the conquest. When the Spanish conquerors discovered the American natives, they invented an ethnic and racial category that they named "Indian". In it they included all those who were not Spanish in the New World, and the use of this generic term was confined only to them, not to the natives. Towards them the Spanish showed generally two different attitudes. The first one was catechesis and evangelisation, which meant that the natives could be considered as a part of the same human species to which they belonged. This perception that was the desire and the intention of seeing the American peoples adopt the habits, the language and the religion of the Iberians,⁸ was

⁶ Note for the commentator: I will enumerate here the very few published articles and books that focus this problem in Mexico from the point of view of racism.

⁷ The underline is mine

⁸ Todorov, 1987, 9. 51

the germ of what a few centuries later would receive the name of 'integrationism' or 'assimilationism'. In other words, the fact that these aborigines were culturally different or inferior to the eyes of the Spanish did not discard the possibility of their absorption by the occidental civilization. The second attitude was to see the natives as inferior beings, which lead to deny that they were human beings of the same kind than the Spanish, who thus decided not to 'civilize' them but to enslave them.⁹ This vision of the Indians, which was closely related to the doctrine of 'blood purity' diffused by the Catholic Church after the Inquisition, lead to the declaration that sustained that the 'Indian race' was inferior, but not by its nature or by its religion. These two attitudes remained during several centuries as the basis of the different visions developed by the Spanish colonizers and the Creoles, in Latin America, in regard to the Indian peoples, all along the long colonial period, and in some of its regions, way ahead of it.

During the XIX century neither the independence nor the liberal period, the *porfiriato* included, transformed this colonial pattern of ethnic and racial definitions of the "Other" or these two basic attitudes facing the Indian question. The Mexican national movement for independence in 1810 marked the birth of a new state ideology. A new social discourse was born which reaffirmed to the external 'Other' the rights of national difference. Within the nation, however, ethnic specific differences were denied and everybody fell into the large and subjective ethnic and racial categories of *criollo*, *mestizo* or *indio*. From 1810 on, one strain in liberal Mexican discourse, that was founded by José María Luis Mora, proposed the assimilation of the Indian as a path towards the progress and development of the new nation. Mora wrote that the Indians were "short and degraded leftovers of the ancient Mexican population", which made necessary to lounge a project that would lead, in one century, to the complete fusion of the Whites and the Indians, and to the extinction of the Indian "race".¹⁰ At that time, assimilation meant the destruction of those considered racially inferior. At the middle of the century, the liberals took over power and promulgated a new Constitution. Despite proclaiming the need to dissolve differences in identity, this disclosure continued to treat the Indian as an inferior being. A large part of its practical application was in fact the suppression by law of community property (The Lerdo Law in 1856) and of the legal customs and practices of the indigenous communities, as well as the use of

⁹ *Ibidem*, p.

¹⁰ Mora, 1987, i

vernacular language in education. These were seen by liberals as the origin of all social and economic evils and contrary to progress (Aguirre Beltrán 1973 and 1982).

The conservatives on the other hand didn't agree with the cultural assimilation projects. They believed that "equality was not possible in a culturally heterogeneous nation" (Castellanos 1994). For them, as explained by Charles Hale who is also with us in this panel, what should be done was to go back to the colonial juridical practices that attributed to the Indian a condition of minor and kept him segregated, "protected", "for his own good". (Hale 1987:249-250)

So, as we can see, the Independence did not change the colonial pattern of unequal reciprocal ethnic and racial definition. Neither would the *porfiriato*, whose modernization project attacked even more violently community resources and political autonomy, and whose state building project considered the Indian as its main obstacle, one that could only be cleared through assimilation, whatever methods it required. In this sense, the porfirian disciples of Darwin and Spencer did nothing but display an oligarchic indigenism that never translated into an improvement of life conditions for the Indians. (Brading, 1985)

By the end of the last century, Don Emilio Rabasa, an important member of Porfirio Diaz' cabinet, governor of Chiapas and one of the main ideologists of the profirian regime, wrote:

The Indians are the greatest obstacle for the progress and the modernization of Chiapas, [...] [for] the respect of the liberal Constitution and for the construction of the national conscience. (Rabasa 1969: 114)

As a good liberal worried by the importance of education in the road toward progress, he stated:

Mexico's population is divided into two large groups: the capable and the incapable of receiving school instruction, and among these last ones the Indian will always be incapable of understanding what he reads, because reading is par excellence an intelligent type of work. Only that part of the population who is better prepared for rational life [...] will be able to give an impulse the indigenous race's education, a race that without its intelligent direction will be condemned to perpetual darkness. (Rabasa, cited by Héau Lambert, 1991: 31)

But which, according to Rabasa, was the reason why a native should be integrated?

Every backward human group suffers and decimates when it comes to have contact with another human group which is superior; nevertheless it is not humane to prevent that contact from being established, because there is no other way than common life with all its harshness, its many kinds of intolerance, injustice, abuse, violence and cruelties, for the inferior to become stronger and be able to survive, through the practice of fight and pain. To isolate him because of a real or a hypocritical commiseration, is equivalent to condemning him to death after a long agony. (Rabasa 1986: 245)

As we can see, the integration proposed by the porfirian elite displayed the traditional racist Creole feelings, and could not and was not translated into any kind of improvement of Indian life conditions. On the contrary, independently from any kind of discourse, what the *porfiriato* practiced was peasant and Indian oppression and overexploitation, and anti-Indian open racism

The parallel with formal colonialism, evident in the economic domain [for modernization attacked the essence of the collective land ownership and traditions of the communities], was thus repeated in the political and ideological. Not only were the natives lazy, they were also stubbornly refractory to civilized rule. Quasi colonial attitudes and methods became hallmarks of the *porfiriato*: the army resembled a colonial force (pale officers, dark troops) and resorted to the usual counterinsurgency excesses; state governors displayed a proconsular disdain for their subject populations. The logic of porfirian “development” thus conspired with imported ideology to create a climate of racism that was both official (that is, justified, albeit not uniformly, by elite intellectuals) and, more important, unofficial (practiced by the regime’s minions and by social élites more generally). (Knight 1997:80)

Despite this and despite the large Indian participation in the great 1910 revolution, except for the case of the Yaqui rebellion -which started during the *porfiriato* and was repressed up to the point of genocide-, the powerful and popular agrarian demands “were usually couched in class rather than race terms; they pitted peasants against landlords, not Indians against the whites or mestizos”. (*Ibidem*:96)

Postrevolutionary *indigenismo* was not thus born as an answer to Indian pressure, to the birth of an Indian consciousness transformed into a revolutionary national movement. Following the ideological tradition issued since the conquest around this particular subject, this new *indigenismo* was born and developed like another *mestizo*, another “non-Indian formulation of the Indian problem” (*Ibidem*: 77 , making reference to Aguirre Beltrán). Apart from the strength with which it was born, what made it different from its previous manifestations was mainly that now it was an important part of the official, of the state’s ideology. Another element that created this distinction was that this new *indigenismo* introduced *mestizaje* but in a different way, in a new way, as the reverse side of the same coin.

How can we explain the fact that *indigenismo* became part of the official postrevolutionary ideology and such a crucial part of it? The power of the revolutionary movement was such that, first, it gave a strong impulse to the difficult and agitated nation building process born in 1810. And modern nation building needed, as a *sine qua non* founding, structural and structurizing ingredient,

a national community, that is a historical unit formed by a common descent, the traditional occupation of a physical [geographical] space and a common language (through which the collective soul could express itself better than through landscapes, fine arts and institutions). (Krotz 1994:19)

Given the fact that this national community did not yet exist in Mexico in 1910 or 1920 -does it exist today?- the new state, issued not from this already consolidated material and symbolic common basis but from a powerful peasant and agrarian revolution, had to create it. “*Forjar Patria*” (“To Forge the Homeland”), as the famous *indigenista* anthropologist Manuel Gamio put it, (Gamio 1960) meant to achieve to the largest possible extent the construction of a national identity as a total identity. It implied the definition of an “us” (in-group) as opposed to “the others” (out-group), as opposed to other nations as

well as by opposition to social groups inside the national territory who would resist this process. It thus implied to face the complex problem of homogenizing the Mexican population, which was divided into many differences: regional, dialectal, religious, class, ethnic, educational, in origin, in status, in beliefs and values, etc. (*Ibidem*:27, and see Stavenhagen 1994).

All this was in fact one of the new state's institutions main –if not the main- challenges. Not that it was a new one, but after the crisis that 1910-1920 civil war had brought up, weakening the state and dividing Mexico into several rival fractions, the challenge was never more urgent. Defining an “us” as opposed to other nations was pressing, especially if we consider that during the revolution the United States had twice penetrated Mexican national territory, but this subject is not what concerns us directly in this paper. Defining an “us” in opposition to the internal dissidents of national integration was no less pressing, and in this sense the Indians were the more difficult group to deal with, especially if we consider its complex internal heterogeneity and the fact that the long colonial and independent history of this country had never created among the Indian populations a feeling of citizenship. (Caso, 1971: 110)

To be able to contribute to solve this problem, the state's new thinkers -some of whom became active and important state officials- had recourse to the ideas of Andrés Molina Enríquez, one of the main critics of *porfiriato*, whose book *Los grandes problemas nacionales* published in 1909, opened a clear path for many revolutionaries. According to Basave and his work on the history of the *mestizaje* ideology all through the history of Mexico since the conquest, Molina Enríquez was and still is the main Mexican representative of a long lasting way of thinking that Basave calls “*mestizofilia*”, and defines as

the idea that the *mestizaje* phenomenon –that is the miscegenation of races and/or cultures- is a desirable fact. (Basave 1992: 13)

Molina Enríquez' thesis, writes Basave,

is based on the premise that Mexico's *mestizos*, among which he fundamentally includes those who have a mixed Spanish and Indian lineage, are the Mexicans *par excellence*, the authentic depositaries of the *mexicanidad*, and he aims to prove that from a historical as well as from a “socioethnological” point of view Mexico cannot possibly become a developed and a prosperous nation, if it does not conclude its process toward *mestizaje* and does not manage to ethnically homogenize its population through the racial fusion of the Indian and the Creole into the *mestizo* majorities. (*Ibidem*)

For Molina Enríquez then, *mestizaje* was the only way in which the Mexican population could become a nationality. Thus, in his theory, *mestizaje* was an equivalent of nationhood.

José Vasconcelos, the bright, imaginative and dynamic philosopher, Minister of Education during the Obregón's government (1920-1924) and leader of the opposition in the important elections of 1929, went even further: by contradicting Spencer, who believed pure races to be superior, he proclaimed instead the superiority of mixed races. And by arguing that miscegenation was the key that would open up the future for humanity, he gave mestization in general the title of “*la Raza Cósmica*” –the “Cosmic Race”- and assured that Spanish American *mestizos* had in the world the mission of demonstrating this theory of his. (Vasconcelos 1966) On the front of the *Estadio Nacional*, he hung an Aztec red and yellow shield, with a legend: “Joyful, strong, healthy, shine, race” (Blanco 1977: 127)

In their work, Manuel Gamio and Alfonso Caso, the main *indigenistas* to whom the new state institutions entrusted the task of building a new method of solving the Indian question, that is, the national identity problem, closely followed Molina Enríquez on this subject. Gamio, for example, called the Indians “a virile race of bronze” and the white immigrants “a virile race of iron”. Their fusion, he sustained, made the *mestizo* emerge as the “national race”. (Gamio 1960: 5,6,98)

In concrete terms, *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* were nothing but the two sides of the same coin: a social and cultural institutional program planned and executed by the new paternalistic state, and built upon the development of cultural policies which first goal was to integrate the Indians into the *mestizo* universe, in a conscious and directed way. The objective of both sides of the coin was thus the same: a national ethnic and cultural fusion. Except that while traditionally the *mestizófilos* stressed the benefits that the nation would receive from this policy, the *indigenistas* stressed that the good of the nation could be achieved only by thinking on the good of the Indians as the number one priority. While during the XIX Century Francisco Pimentel proclaimed that the goal of *mestizaje* should be the elimination of the “red menace” –what he called a “humanitarian genocide”- and Molina Enríquez assured that, on the contrary, it was the only possible way to protect the country from the “treason of the Whites”, Gamio saw *mestizaje* as the only possible salvation of the Indians whose future as such was absolutely hopeless.

Careful in their way of referring to *mestizaje*, the *indigenistas* spoke in terms of the mestization of the Indians as well as of the indianization of the mestizos. (Aguirre Beltrán, 1973) This language translated an authentic concern for the Indian Mexican population, but also a hopeless one. No matter how strong and deep their “Indian ancestry”, as Gamio put it, it would not save them from their “secular load of misfortune”. Instead, adopting the *mestizo* mask would let the Indian “sneak into the modernity banquet of the urban and industrial Mexico born with the revolution”. (Gamio 1960: 18-39; Basave 1992: 126)

Lázaro Cárdenas was an heir and a very dignified representative of what some of the political historians have called the “Mexican revolution’s socialism” –a current of thought and politics to which belonged the regional socialist projects or governments of the twenties: Felipe Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán, Ursulo Galván in Veracruz, Carlos Vidal in Chiapas or Francisco Múgica in Michoacán.¹¹ As an important part of Cárdenas government’s popular front or ‘four classes front’ policy –the workers, the peasants, the progressive petite bourgeoisie and the ‘popular classes’- was developed a project towards the Indian population’s assimilation which we could qualify not as a new project, for basically it followed Gamio’s and Caso’s principles, but yes as a more determined one. The Cardenista *indigenistas* considered that the marginal and miserable conditions in which the Indians lived were a result neither of its ‘cultural inferiority’ nor of its ‘natural inferiority’. They didn’t subscribe the thesis according to which the Indian was the main obstacle towards modernization, and they explained the Indians’

¹¹ Cf. Daniela Spenser, *El Partido Socialista Chiapaneco, 1985*

misery as a result of the historical marginalization, oppression and exploitation the Whites had imposed on the Indians. To bring the Indians out of their backward condition, they agreed with Gamio, we have to 'integrate' them, we have to 'mexicanize' them, but if this assimilation will not be a synonym of making them a part of a nation-building project that will transform the relationships between the different social classes, among which those between the landlords and the peasants, it will be unsuccessful and the indigenous peoples will remain isolated, marginalized, oppressed and excluded. The Cardenistas' indigenismo could thus be defined as the achievement of mexicanizing the Indians, but as a part of the construction of a country, unified around nationalism, around a strong welfare state that would conduct the social policy of the popular front, and a development project based on the conquest of a greater equality between all Mexicans, in terms of justice, and of economical, social and political homogenization.

This is why the cardenista indigenista public officials sent to Chiapas –one of the country's states with a larger Indian population- saw in negative terms the exodus of the Indians from their communities in search for a job and a salary in the coffee plantations of the Soconusco region, but only in class terms, that is in terms of the exploitation they would be submitted to over there. They were never able to see it also in terms of ethnic dissolution or from the angle of racism: as a strong element of community disintegration and cultural uprooting. Erasto Urbina, an important cardenista official sent to Chiapas would thus report that

The departure of the heads of the families towards the coffee plantations zone in search of a job impels the incorporation of the Indians to *the*¹² civilized state of things, because apart from learning Spanish they change their uniform clothing, that they manufacture themselves by the shirt and pants or the overall; they get used to protect their feet, use a hat, a handkerchief a machete, etc. And when they take their families along with them they all experience that transformation. The children obtain the advantage of going to school. There is a school in each one of the coffee *fincas*, so even from this point of view it is convenient to encourage the departure of the Indians towards the coffee *fincas*. [Urbina ; 1944)

In this sense the cardenistas' ideological *indigenista* attitude was a combination of the postrevolutionary state's *indigenismo* and of the Marxist attitude toward the resolution of the ethnic problem, as having to pass through the resolution of the class inequality problem rather than through an Indian self determination project. At the beginning of the seventies, when thirty years of the PRI's absolute dominion had erased the deep welfare content of the cardenista indigenismo, Rabasa's principle which saw in

the Indians the “main obstacle” towards modernization was about to return to the first scene of the official indigenist speech, when the major agricultural crisis that even to this day has characterized Mexico broke out. It brought about the development of a strong social movement to fight for the land whose role was primary for the *mestizo* and indigenous peasants, as well as a parallel movement to vindicate the ethnic groups, largely made up of Indians.¹³

The state has since then seen itself forced to modify the ideological content of its indigenist discourse. What it has proposed is to reconsider the nation’s project, incorporating into its conception of national identity ethnic diversity, which today is referred to as “one of the founding elements of the Mexican nation”. That is to say, in its official discourse the state has been compelled to renounce the historical aspirations of homogeneity as fundamental to the nation (Warman, 1990, ‘Discurso del Director del INI, 1989:1, as cited by Castellanos 1994).

During the last 25 years there has thus been a transformation in the discourse of indigenist institutions (represented by public recognition that the indigenous have been subject to prejudice and discrimination and that biological and cultural *mestizaje* has brought about the dissolution of those conditions). Nevertheless, the state has not yet clearly identified the strategies that will be employed to articulate the collective identities with those that are differentiated, and above all, there has been no strategic modification of state action in the communities (Castellanos 1994)

A very clear example of this contradiction between discourse and political action is what happens on the juridical level –the elaboration of new laws- sometimes as opposed to and sometimes as related to the political level –the policy towards the Indian pueblos. To open up here in a very brief way this subject of the place of law in the political and ideological national scene, I think it is necessary to stress that when discussing the subject of racism or of race mixing ideologies, the juridical aspect is crucial, because if it “could be argued [...] that laws are the result of the political organization and conscience and that they thus occupy a secondary role, [...] it has been historically frequent that the existence of laws becomes the genesis of the of the political organization and conscience. [...] In fact, more than a hierarchy between these factors, there seems to be a mutual and active dependence between them.” (Roldán, 1996)

¹² The underlining is mine

¹³ The first Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress) took place in 1974

In this sense, in 1990, because of this change in the state's discourse, Mexico was the first Latin American country to ratify the 169 International Labor Organization (ILO) Agreement approved by the UN in 1989. Two years later, as a result of this ratification, Mexico reformed the Article 4 of the Constitution, thus including for the first time the Indian pueblos in its Magna Charta. In this Article's new version, which is but a minimal expression of the 169 Agreement's content: a) emphasis is made on the pluricultural nature of the Mexican nation, recognizing the Indian pueblos as its original matter; b) it is established that the law will promote and assure the development of the Indian languages and their different uses, and the access of the Indians to the state's jurisdiction; finally, c) it is stated that in the trials and agrarian procedures, the Indian juridical practices and habits will be taken into account in the terms established by the law. In short, the reform of the Article 4 implies that, at least with regard to the written law, the Mexican Constitution establishes that the Indians will be treated simultaneously as formally equal and as historically and culturally different from the *mestizo* majority of the population.

Nevertheless, if from the point of view of the written national and international laws, the Mexican state has placed itself once more in the of the contemporary arena of the international thought and legislation concerning the indigenous peoples' problem, the application of this important reform on the real access of these peoples to an equal legal treatment is far in practical terms from what the constitutional text establishes. Apart from the hundreds of cases that the democratic lawyers, the legal anthropologists and the Indians themselves could cite as an example of this last asseveration, there are two bruising facts that mark this distance in a clear way.

First, parallel to the Article 4 reform, the Senate approved another very important constitutional amendment, that of the Article 27. This reform constitutes a deep contradiction with the new contents of the Article 4, because it cancels the legal protection the state had been granting the collective ownership of the lands belonging to the Indian pueblos since 1917, on behalf of a much larger protection of the small propriety and, more generally, of private land propriety. This has been a strong blow against the Indian populations because, as we all know, the collective Indian land ownership has traditionally been the physical space that shelters their culture, their vision of the world, their beliefs, habits and traditions.

Secondly, the Mexican state has not respected the agreements it reached in 1996 with the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) in the peace talks in San

Andrés Larráinzar, whose Indian name is *San Andrés Sakam'chen de los Pobres*. Among other things contained in these agreements, the government has not respected to submit the text signed by both parts for its discussion in Congress, as it had promised to do under the eyes of a large number of witnesses, among which the national and the international press.

So, if it is true that this new position of the Mexican state toward the Indian population and toward *mestizaje* begins a recognition of the situation and needs of minority ethnic groups -by making itself manifest through two traditional vehicles of ideology as are political discourse and some of the reformed constitutional laws-practice emerges to show how Mexican state political and cultural policy is still finding ways to justify why the ones still seen as the 'Others' are excluded from the decisions that concern them.

I believe that the thread of this paper has been precisely the one expressed in the last sentence written here above: the fact that since the conquest Mexican Indians have been always excluded from the official decisions that concern their present and their future life. Whether these decisions were called segregation or evangelization; or whether they are called indigenism, assimilationism or *mestizaje*, the Indian question has never been in the hands of the Indians; the different formulations about the Indian problem have always been non Indian. This that could be resumed in not taking into consideration what the 'Other' is from his own point of view, what he thinks, feels and wants for himself, is precisely, I think, the essence of the racist character of the ideological basis of the two face Mexican State's policy called indigenismo or *mestizaje*.

As we know, there are almost as many definitions of racism as there are approaches to the problem. Rather than detain ourselves with a discussion of the history of the concept, I would like to propose a definition, built after analyzing several others (Larousse; Stavenhagen 1994: 15; Moreno Feliú 1994: 57; Levi-Strauss 1979; Casaús Arzú 1992, Wade 1997 and Taguieff 1987: 314) that try to demonstrate the strength of joining the group of phenomena with result in diverse heterophobic practices and representations:

Racism is the group of representations of norms and values expressed in practices which lead to the exclusion and inferiorisation of the distant or proximate 'Other' perceived as different by the hegemonic group, from either one or both of these two angles:

- the angle of his phenotypical attributes, worked into vital signifiers of difference during the European colonial encounters with others; and/or

- the angle of his cultural attributes, determined by the perception developed by the hegemonic group –a perception resulting of a particular history woven between the actors involved- about the significance that a distinct geographical origin has on what this group defines as different.

I believe that when talking about colonial processes it is valid to say that, in general, phenotypical and cultural discrimination, exclusion and heterophobia are intrinsic to the process of colonialism. In particular, “the consolidation of Latin American nations and the forging of their national identities are processes that have implied subordination and submission (of the) ethnic, racial and national diversity.” (Castellanos 1994:3)

If we look carefully at the Mexican history, throughout colonialism, ethnocentrism imposed difference on the Indian ‘Other’ from both the phenotypical and the cultural angle, thus placing him in a state of inferiority. In this sense we could include this racist manifestation as responding to a logic of inequality or segregation. In this logic we can include those phenomena resulting from the fact that the hegemonic group “considers the ‘Other’ to have his/her place in the society, the nation, or the empire, on the condition that she or he be made a minority, confined to the lowest level of relations of production, exploited or overexploited”. (Wieviorka 1994) At the same time, a crusade was organized to assimilate the conquered to the culture of the conqueror, basically from the religious and the linguistic point of view, but also under the condition that he be maintained in an inferior state in the economical and political levels and from the point of view of social organization. This exclusionary ideology and the practices associated to it did not tolerate the coexistence of distinct ways of collective life, nor their mere existence as distinct (Taguieff, 1987). It forcefully imposed to the ‘Other’ a life basically segregated from the dominant cultural model, viewed as “self-referential and self-preferred with respect to all other peoples”.(Ibidem) This is why in the New Spain the Indians were never really treated as normal, equilibrated human beings: either they were good, innocent, laboring, clean, valiant and pure, or they were bad, savage, bloodthirsty, primitive and threatening. But they could also be viewed as a combination of the two, as children with the respective qualities of honor, valor, cleanliness and skill, combined with the defects of naï veté, irresponsibility, savagery and danger.

Once Mexico started to try to make an entrance in the era of modernity, the image of the Indians changed into the one of beings who resisted assuming their proper subordinated place in the new concert of the capitalist relations of production. This is why Indians receive the epithets of dark, ugly, lazy, stupid and submissive, which were seen by the hegemonic groups as their definitive traits, the truth regarding their identity. It is therefore not a coincidence that the birth of the *mestizaje* ideology or mestizofilia took place precisely when this was the prevailing image of the Indian: if still a large part of the population was Indian and if Indians were afflicted by these negative characteristics, the only possible road towards modernization was their disappearance as the phenotypical and cultural group the hegemonic group perceived they were then. To achieve that the State had to encourage their dissolution in a group that was, and should continue to be phenotypically different -“whiter”, “less dark” and thus “less ugly”- as well as culturally different: as Rabasa would say, capable of developing “an intelligent type of work” and a “rational life”.

When looking through the eyes of the new millenium’s humanist approach at the ideology and the institutional practice of the postrevolutionary indigenistas, an inevitable question raises: how could

the revolutionary intellectuals who claimed to represent the Mexican Indians' interests, possibly defend *mestizaje-indigenismo* as a theory and as a policy, when what it really amounted to was the dissolution of the Indian identity, of the Indian population itself? In spite of how different and how honest the postrevolutionary *indigenistas'* concern for the Indians was, it clearly appears that the urgent national integration project had a considerable weight in their theory. On the long run what they were actually fighting for was sure enough not very far from what the *mestizófilos* wanted: the extinction of the Indians. Except that in their view, especially in Gamio's view, more than a disappearance what they were thinking of was in what Basave calls "the Indians' reincarnation in mestizos". (1992) Their assimilationist logic was in fact the result of an ideology of blood mixture in which progressive whitening is the goal and the dissolution of the differentiated identities the ideal. Like colonial heterophobia, this type of ideology and practice does not tolerate the existence of distinct models of collective life. Instead of simply imposing upon the 'Other' to live segregated from the dominant cultural model, it requires that the 'Other' insert him or herself in a subordinated fashion into the tapestry of new social and production relations ruled by the laws of the market, dissolving its differentiated identity via assimilation into the dominant phenotypical and cultural model, which continues to be viewed as self-referential and self-chosen with respect to all other peoples. (Gall 1998: 239, Castellanos 1994)

Cárdenas government's indigenism did not break up with this assimilationist principle or ideology. It nevertheless introduced in it an interesting approach that was clearly oriented towards the establishment of a much more just and equal national society, especially in economic and social terms. In this sense its view was very close to the Marxist traditional angle on the ethnic problem. As we know, the not totally incorrect although highly oversimplifying Marxist approach has argued that the origins of racism can be found in the class social relations inherent to colonialism and to capitalistic modernization, both of which create the conditions to better dominate a particular fraction of the work force, thus qualified as inferior and only good for manual labor. In this sense, by not taking into account to what an extent ideological categories can affect economic factors in the same way the latter can affect the former, it has ignored how much during the colonial and postcolonial Latin American history racial determinations have influenced the behavior of economic, political and social factors. (Wade, 1997) This is why the generous social *cardenista* policy was not able to thoroughly attack the Indian problem and to free itself from discriminative views.

In this paper we have approached our subject from the national official ideology angle. We have not discussed what happens to this Mexico City's centered point of view when seen from a regional level. I would like to present here, to conclude, four or five 'pictures' of the Indian-mestizo problem focused from the eyes of the Chiapanec élites in several moments of the period we have looked through here:

In 1869, shortly before the arrival of Porfirio Díaz to power, an important writer and ideologist of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, wrote:

Because the indigenous and the white race are sworn enemies, we should be ready for war against the Indian, since, to the contrary, the tender wife, the beloved sister, shall perish at the hands of those barbarians after having been corrupted; the sons shall be bloody mutilated victims and the head of the ancient father will roll beneath the rude Chamultecan Blow. (Flavio A. Paniagua, *La Brújula*, 1869)

Very recently, in 1998, Michel Chanteau, the former French priest of Tsotsil municipality of Chenalhó¹⁴, who after thirty five years of service in this community was expelled from the country by the federal government, declared to the French press:

I saw the apartheid between Indians and mestizos in the [Chiapas] highlands. There are still people in Chiapas who consider the Indians to be ‘reasonless people’, as in the time of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas. In my parish, the first day that I celebrated the mass [in Tsotsil], the mestizos left the church. And when I said ‘my Indian brothers or sisters’ the ladinos answered me: “you may well be their brother, not us”.¹⁵

Also in 1998, when interviewing some of the members of the middle class in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, I asked them what did they think about this Guatemalan *finquero*’s opinion on race mixing:

“The only solution for Guatemala is to better the race, to bring Arian studs to improve it. For many years I had in my *finca* a German administrator, and for every Indian woman he made pregnant, I gave him fifty extra dollars. (Casaús Arzú, 1992: 279)

Most of them –men and women- did nothing but keep silent and smile. But one of them, who despite his very obvious *mestizo* physical traits considers himself a descendent of the Spanish conquerors, openly answered: “It is the only way.”

As we can see, the official view on the *mestizaje* problem can very well vanish when transported to some of the Mexican provinces, especially those marked by an important percentage of Indian population and by a deep historical interethnic conflict. Today, the Mexican government has done nothing in relation to the Chiapas Zapatista rebellion but to prove once again that it is not interested in solving the Indian problem according to the Indian interests. It has furthermore agreed with the Chiapas élites and their government to postpone the deep historical conflicts there have been between them, for a much more urgent task: to face in a united way the Indian Other whom they have all historically considered an enemy despite their distinct ways of perceiving him, and about whom the *mestizo* powers ignore more than is known and build more racist stereotypes than realities.

¹⁴ In the heart of the Chiapas Highlands

¹⁵ *La Jornada*, Mexico D.F., Marzo 4 1998, reproducing an article of *l’Humanité Hebdo*

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