

Making the Nation: The Myth of *Mestizajes*

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Abstract

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 brought about a newfound sense of nationalism that consolidated the figure of the *mestizo*, the product of indigenous and Spanish mixture, as Mexico's national race. Intellectuals as diverse as Andrés Molina Enríquez and Manuel Gamio "denounced the sterile aping of European doctrines" that characterized the Liberal period of the 1850s Brading and endorsed *mestizaje*, or the fusion of races and cultures, as a crucial process in forging a strong sense of nationhood and nationality. In this paper, I examine the respective early works of Molina Enríquez and Gamio, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (The Great National Problems in 1908) and *Forjando patria* (Forging a Nation in 1916). How do the authors define the Mexican nation? How does the *mestizo* become the "true Mexican"? What role do the authors allocate to indigenous peoples and women in the making of Mexico?

Keywords: Mexico; Anthropology; Mestizaje; Nation-Building; Nationalism; Intellectuals

Introduction

Molina Enríquez [1] was a lawyer, writer, member of the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics in 1902, and professor of ethnology at the National Museum of History in 1907¹. His ambitious work, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, proposed general agrarian and socioeconomic reforms, and called for the dismantling of large haciendas and for the redistribution of land to the rural population, anticipating the revolutionary movement and Brading and endorsed *mestizaje*, or the fusion of races and cultures, as a crucial process in forging a strong sense of nationhood and nationality. [2]. He was further influential because of his contribution to drafting Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican constitution Basave Benítez [3] which stipulated the state's obligation to redistribute land in the form of *ejidos* (communal land holdings)². Moreover, Molina Enríquez [1] held many different bureaucratic posts, including the presidency of the National Agrarian Association in 1925 [4-6].

Gamio [7] for his part was an anthropologist who worked as a professor of archeology at Mexico City's National Museum, founded the Agriculture Ministry's Department of Anthropology in 1917, worked as the director of the Interamerican Indigenous Institute from its inception in 1940 until his death in 1960, and had a brief stint in the Ministry of Education in 1924. His main role was to conduct state-funded, large-scale archaeological excavations and reconstructions of pre-colonial sites. As historian David Brading [2] notes, the reconstruction of ancient monuments became "a distinctively Mexican industry...justified by the joint aim of recuperating national glory and attracting mass tourism" (p.78). Gamio [7] studied at Columbia University in 1909 with Franz Boas, who was a leading proponent of cultural relativism and one of the founders of the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico City. Gamio [7] was also renowned for his anthropological survey of the Teotihuacan region

and population (*The Population of the Teotihuacan Valley*, 1922), whose principal concern was to improve their living conditions. For example, he founded schools and medical clinics in Teotihuacan and petitioned for land reform on behalf of indigenous peoples González [5]. Gamio's work is influential because, as anthropologist Salomón Nahmad Sittón [6] points out, "it laid the foundations for an anthropology that would define itself as political, nationalist, and 'action oriented...'" that would not only work closely with the state, but also share the goal of assimilating Indians and *mestizos* into Mexico's modern, Spanish speaking nation" (p.129). In short, Gamio [7] helped define an anthropology of official *indigenismo* that was to last until the 1970s. Moreover, I am interested in the institutionalization of anthropology for its relation to Michel Foucault's in 2004 notion of biopolitics: how does the study, regulation and integration of the poor and indigenous into mainstream society produce, according to Gamio, a homogeneous and strong Mexican nation? I mention such biographical information to situate the works of Molina Enríquez [1] and Gamio [7] within the larger sociopolitical context. While *Los grandes problema nacionales* and *Forjando patria* may not have been read by other than like-minded individuals, their ideas circulated in the public arena of politics, education and popular culture. Both authors were early proponents of *mestizaje* as integral to nation-building, were active in the land reform movement, and were concerned with the excessive imitation of foreign culture and with developing an "authentic national art" [7], which was to take form in the images of Mexican muralism in the 1920s. The goal of this paper is to investigate how Mexico is defined as a nation and *mestizaje* as the foundational national ideology. I first explore the institutionalization of anthropology, drawing from Foucault's concept of biopolitics. I then proceed to discuss the development of *mestizofilia*³, or the exaltation of the *mestizo* as quintessentially Mexican, and how this contributes to the erasure of women from history.

¹I focus on Gamio [7] and Molina Enríquez [1] because they were among the first to imagine *mestizaje* as the basis of Mexican nationalism. According to anthropologist Ana María Alonso in 2005, these intellectuals are important because they "were 'founders of discursively' who produced 'the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts' key to the articulation of new post-revolutionary forms of governmentality" (p.40).

²Article 27, considered one of the greatest achievements of the Revolution, and was dismantled in 1992 by the neoliberal government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) as part of the larger project of privatization.

³This term was coined by the Mexican political scientist Agustín Basave Benítez [3].

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Social anthropologist Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima [8] notes that the term *indigenismo* is a product of Hispano-American literature dating from the nineteenth century, originally evoking a romanticized archetype of the indigenous. However, “it was in the Mexican political context following the 1910 revolution that the meaning of *indigenismo* became fixed, designating an [administrative] ideology of governmental action in relation to indigenous populations” (p.200).

Anthropology and the State

Mexican anthropology is often described as a national or nation-centered anthropology for the crucial role it has played in the projects of national consolidation: from the educated elite *científicos* (scientists) of the Porfirio Díaz era who were concerned with shaping a favorable image of Mexico to attract foreign investment to the revolutionary anthropologists who were committed to social and agrarian reforms and intervened directly in indigenous communities. Historian Claudio Lomnitz [9] notes that anthropology’s identification with official nationalism took shape from the 1940s to the late 1960s, when most of the state institutions dedicated to anthropology were built: the National School of Anthropology and History in 1939, which had a monopoly over the training of anthropologists, the National Institute of Anthropology and History in 1939, which was one of the country’s most important research institutions and sites for cultivating images of the nation, the Interamerican Indigenous Institute in 1940, the National Indigenous Institute in 1948 and the internationally renowned National Museum of Anthropology in 1964. Moreover, anthropology was directly linked with the diverse policies of *indigenismo* that included imparting bilingual education, building rural schools and devising development programs for indigenous communities. Most of these programs were concentrated in the National Indigenous Institute, which was also the main source of employment for anthropologists. The official role of anthropology, Lomnitz argues, was to forge “Mexican citizenship both by ‘indigenizing’ modernity and by modernizing the Indians, thus uniting all Mexicans in one *mestizo* community” (p.231).

One of the more prominent *Scientíficos* was the educator Justo Sierra whose publication, *Mexico, Its Social Evolution*, printed in English, countered point by point the negative comments that E.B. Tylor and other leading Anglo anthropologists offered in their travel books [10]. The main strategy of Sierra and other *Scientíficos*, whom Molina Enríquez [1] admires and cites in *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, was to make Mexico’s evolution and development comparable to “that of the nations that produce anthropologists who travel” (p.178).

The difference between a national and metropolitan anthropology is that the former is primarily focused on nation building and the latter extends its research across nations. Interestingly enough, L’Estoile et al. [11] observe that “the more a state has the capacity to project itself abroad (in colonial or hegemonic form), the more its anthropologists will tend to undertake fieldwork beyond national borders,” thereby revealing the asymmetries of power between nations (p.20).

According to anthropologists Benoit de L’Estoile, Federico Neiburg and Lygia Sigaud [12], Mexican anthropology illustrates the “mutual interdependence” that exists between scientific practice and the state, between knowledge production and policy implementation (p.10). Science operates in the field of state action in two main ways: instrumentalizing and legitimizing (p.11). In other words, science has the tools to identify the problems that need to be addressed by public policies at the same time that it provides the arguments that can legitimize “the aims and means of such policies and those who implement them” (p.11). The state for its part supports academic institutions to appear

rational and objective. L’Estoile et al. [11] further explain that the state and scientific practices reinforce each other in a circular process in so far as the very existence of a discipline like anthropology, designed for the study of human differences, offers “scientific confirmation of the need to design policies premised on such differences. Conversely, the need to develop specific policies in response to a population’s distinctive traits comprises a strong argument for developing scientific knowledge about this population” (p.14). In the Mexican case, state institutions recruited anthropologists in large numbers in order to develop, administer and implement governmental policies. The state relied on anthropological knowledge about indigenous groups to both inform and legitimize its policies regarding their integration.

This section focuses on Gamio [7] because he is generally considered the founder of modern Mexican anthropology. Much like the *científicos*, Gamio [7] believed in the degeneration of the indigenous races after the conquest and in the grandeur of pre-Columbian civilizations. However, he distinguished himself from his predecessors because of his revalorization of indigenous cultures and direct involvement in their communities. For Gamio [7], the role of anthropologists was “to intervene as the enlightened arm of government [and] the arm of science” in order to promote social harmony and development [9]. In short, Gamio [7] felt that “the actions of the anthropologists were the actions of the nation itself” (p.251). For example, in *Forjando patria* in 1916, Gamio [7] claims that it is necessary to “forge oneself – if only temporarily – an indigenous soul...to work for the advancement of the indigenous class” (p.25). He adds that this “task is exclusively destined for the anthropologist and the ethnologist in particular,” whose discipline requires him to be without prejudices (p.25). Such statements position Gamio [7] at the outset as the voice of authority and reason, as the spokesperson for the nation. They also underscore the temporal representations of indigenous peoples, who are imagined as being stuck in culture and waiting to be brought into modern civilization by *mestizo* intellectuals.

Anthropologist João Pacheco de Oliveira [13] notes that the tendency of the “indigenist” anthropologist to speak on behalf of indigenous interests is an inheritance from the colonial era and serves to, on the one hand, legitimize anthropologists as a professional group and, on the other, to exclude indigenous peoples from the decision-making processes (p.241-243).

Cultural anthropologist Johannes Fabian [14] and other scholars [15-17] have observed that anthropology as a discipline formed under the paradigm of evolutionism, which relied on a conception of time that was secularized, naturalized and spatialized. Anthropology’s construction of its relations with its “Other” then “implied affirmation of difference as *distance*,” a distance required so that it could be overcome in time (emphasis in original; p.16, 146). The conception of evolutionary Time as “natural,” Fabian points out, “promoted a scheme in terms of which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope, a stream of Time – some upstream, others downstream” (p.17). The terms civilization, evolution, progress, modernization, development, acculturation, primitive, savage and so on are all derived from the Western conception of evolutionary Time. The works of Gamio [7] and Molina Enríquez [1] prove illuminating here for how they reproduce what Fabian calls “denial of coevalness,” that is, “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (p.31). In other words, the “Indian” in Mexican intellectual discourse is imagined as an example of a traditional, primitive and archaic being who is stuck in the past

and is doomed to disappear if it were not for the efforts of the state and its agents, thus reinforcing the role of the anthropologist as the spokesperson for and protector of indigenous interests.

Gamio [7] conceives of anthropology as crucial for the performance of “good government” because it is the means by which to know the current population and improve its condition (p.15, 59). It is useful to relate Gamio’s [7] views on anthropology to Foucault’s in 2004 notion of biopolitics, which he defines as the right to “make” live, that is, to “administer” and “optimize” life. Foucault [16] explains that in the second half of the eighteenth century a new technology of power emerged that was not exclusively centered on the individual human body as the techniques of discipline had been; this was a “massifying” force directed at “man-as-species” rather than “man-as-body,” what he calls a “‘biopolitics’ of the human race” (p.243). Biopolitics involved knowing and controlling the birth rate, the mortality rate, life expectancy and longevity, the rate of reproduction and the fertility of a population, as well as the effects of the environment (p.243). As a politics for the optimization of life, biopolitics had to qualify measure, appraise and hierarchize. It was at this time that various technologies of representation and measurement, such as the census and statistics, emerged not to discipline but to regularize and manage the population (p.247). Statistics, for example, determined such concepts as “population,” “type” and “normal,” and were deemed necessary to govern [16]. Moreover, Benedict Anderson in the year 2006, points out that the census is in itself a fiction for imagining that “everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place” (p.166). Similarly, L’Estoile et al. [12] observe that statistics, census counts, ethnographic maps, museums, films, and so on are all part of the process of constructing and stabilizing categories of identity, “insofar as they contribute (or not) to providing scientific and legal backing of the existence of certain groups, which then may give rise to new collective identities while potentially denying such legitimacy to other groups” (p.16). In sum, the aim of biopolitics, according to Foucault [16], was “to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protect the security of the whole from internal dangers” (p.249).

In his analysis of Mexican statistics, social anthropologist Casey Walsh [17] comments that during the Porfirian era statistics were more enumerative and were concerned with measuring and tracking the changes in production, profit, currency exchange, and imports and exports, which were seen as numerical indicators of Mexico’s progress (p.358). Furthermore, the whiteness of Mexico was imagined in the statistical graphs and charts of improvements in hygiene, education, electricity and transportation (p.359). These statistics circulated and were displayed at international expositions, such as the Chicago’s World Fair, in the hope that they would inspire confidence among foreign investors. Walsh [17] argues that Gamio’s *Forjando patria* was a reaction against such quantitative knowledge, calling for the anthropological recognition of “the existence of ‘the Indian’ and ‘the mestizo’ as social types and actors” (p.362). For example, in a short chapter entitled “Some considerations about statistics,” Gamio [7] remarks that statistics in Mexico must proceed according to a “nationalist criteria” that takes into consideration the heterogeneity of the country. He continues, “the knowledge and ethnographic classification of the diverse social groups (is indispensable) so their activities and characteristics can converge and develop harmoniously, and to pave the ground for social cohesion, which is inherent in every defined nationality” (p.35). Gamio [7] here posits the standardized knowledge of the population as the means to achieve the desired homogeneity perceived to be essential for nation-building. A final point to make here is that Gamio [7] also conducted

census counts across the country, opting for the statistical analysis of material culture as the method by which to identify the racial composition of the nation and to identify the social groups in need of improvement.

The study Gamio [7] offers on the appendix of *Forjando patria* is a good example of the biopolitics endemic to the *indigenismo* movement. In the study, Gamio [7] classifies the material and cultural characteristics of various indigenous groups to determine which characteristics are “useful and beneficial,” which are lacking, and which are “harmful” and thus have to be “corrected” or “substituted,” all with the aim of “normalizing” the “deficient development” of these groups (p.192). All of this is neatly illustrated in a chart in which several items, such as corn grinding stone, phonograph, machete, sandals and corn tortillas are classified according to culture (indigenous, European, mixed), utility (efficient, deficient, harmful), type (diet, tools, clothing), origin (regional, national, foreign) and the frequency of use (p.186). Gamio [7] explains that his method consisted in making an inventory of all the objects owned by the various families he visited across different rural regions in Mexico (p.187).

Gamio [7] proposes three different criteria with which to determine the utility of such material characteristics: scientific, conventional (indigenous) and a mixture of the two. First, the scientific criteria must be exclusively applied to hygiene, medical services and agricultural tools to ensure the “improvement” of the population’s biological development and the reduction of mortality rates, which are *indigenismo*’s principal concerns (p.193-194). Second, conventional wisdom applies to indigenous artwork and music that should be left intact. Third, a mixture of scientific and conventional criteria applies to indigenous political organization and institutions. Gamio [7] observes that while it is “unfair” to impose a European-style democracy on indigenous peoples, they should not be allowed to become “absolutely autonomous nationalities” because this would further “condemn them to their deficient development and perhaps their rapid extinction...” (p.199). His statement here says more about the concern at large of heterogeneity and its supposed threat to the stability of the national whole than about the welfare of the indigenous. The *indigenismo* movement feared that if indigenous peoples had too much freedom to organize, they would continue to be loyal to their communities and territories, which was perceived as an obstacle to achieving modernity and a true sense of nationhood. Overall, the study links differences in material culture to racial evolution, explicitly stating that the percentage of objects from a mixed or European origin is larger among those indigenous groups with a “higher evolutionary development” (p.196). This study is indicative of anthropology’s denial of coevalness because the indigenous groups under scrutiny here are framed as belonging not so much to Gamio’s present as to previous stages of development.

The paradox of Gamio’s anthropology is that while he valorizes indigenous cultures, he positions indigenous peoples as redeemable through the process of *mestizaje*, or what he calls “the happy fusion” of races and cultures (p.13). The use of the word “happy” is interesting for it highlights the post-revolutionary utopic thinking that viewed the process of acculturation as a means to preserve the positive aspects of indigenous culture and eliminate the negative ones, ignoring the violence and loss implicit in this process. And of course, it was ultimately the intellectuals and elite who decided what was worth preserving and integrating into the national culture and what was not. Having explored the relation between anthropology and the state, I now turn my attention to discussing how the figure of the *mestizo* emerged as the “true Mexican” in the key works of Gamio [7] and Molina Enriquez [1].

The Cult of the Mestizo

From the colonial period and onwards, indigenous peoples have been considered inferior to Spaniards, but redeemable through marriage strategies and adoption of Spanish religion, language and culture. For example, the *casta* (caste) paintings of the eighteenth century, which depicted the child of a Spaniard and an Indian as a *mestizo*, the child of a *mestizo* and a Spaniard as a *castizo* and the child of a *castizo* and a Spaniard as a Spaniard, highlighted the possibility to transcend an individual's indigenous origins through intermarriage with Europeans and to achieve whiteness (or at least proximity to it). The manipulation of racial identity that characterized colonial Mexico is best illustrated in the tendency of parents to alter their children's birth certificates to classify them as creoles rather than *mestizos* or any other lower caste [9].

The Independence movement of 1810 abolished slavery and other forms of legal discrimination, including the *castas*, but racial manipulation continued, as Lomnitz [9] points out, "above all in the struggle for status" (p.51). The aspiration for whiteness remained prevalent after independence because whiteness was still "the only position where wealth, status and power could be in equilibrium" in 1992, (p.274). This preference for whiteness underscores the pervasive logic of whitening embedded in *mestizaje*, which dreams of improving the Mexican race (or *mejorar la raza*). Social anthropologist Peter Wade [18] observes that whiteness and social mobility are intimately intertwined: "there are structural links between vertical mobility and whitening which create a general association between being 'whiter' and having more money, education and power" (p.77).

During the Liberal period of the 1850s, Benito Juárez and his administration sought to redeem the indigenous by providing access to citizenship and all that it entailed: universal rights, equality under the law and free education [9]. But in practice, Juárez's laws, and later Díaz's, contributed to the exclusion and impoverishment of the indigenous by eroding the *calpulli* (similar to the *ejido*), exploiting their labor and devoting Mexico's scant resources to capitalist investments (p.52). At this time, the term "Indian" became conflated with class factors to designate other non-full citizens, including poor peasants. Moreover, Lomnitz [9-11] argues that the theories of Herbert Spencer, who believed in the importance of Social Darwinism and in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, became prominent because they allowed the elite to blame the poor and indigenous for the failure of Mexico to reach the level of economic and social development of the United States and Europe (p.52). Therefore, the "Indian" became a condition to be overcome in order to achieve progress and modernity.

A further popular idea to modernize and whiten the Mexican nation during Díaz's era was to attract European immigrants because, according to the aforementioned positivist thinker Sierra, "only European blood can keep the level of civilization... from sinking, which would mean regression, not evolution" (quoted in Knight, 1990, p.78)⁴. Interestingly enough, while Molina Enríquez [1] displays admiration for Sierra, he dismisses foreign immigration as "absurd" (p.239). He argues that the increase of the *mestizo* population is essential to establish the Mexican nationality and *patria* (or homeland) (p.265). He defines *patria* as a family that shares a common territory, origin, religion, language, customs, aspirations and evolutionary type. In short, *patria* is to have unity and to share a "common ideal" (p.278). Molina

⁴Such line of thinking was not uncommon among intellectuals and government officials of the time. For example, historian Francisco Pimentel commented in 1856, "I consider European immigration to be the only means to save this country" (quoted in Pérez Vejo, 2010, p.164). The governor of the northern state of Chihuahua, Enrique Creel, for his part affirmed, "A white immigrant is worth more than five Indians" (p.172).

Enríquez [1] worries throughout his book that there is no sense of communion in Mexico because of its heterogeneous racial composition that includes the indigenous, *mestizos* and *criollos* (Spaniards born in the Americas, or creoles) (p.286). He contends that the "dissolution and integration" of *criollos* and indigenous into the *mestizo* element is "indispensable for the creation of a strong nationality" (p.315). It is interesting to note that his concern to dissolve the *criollo* groups, which he considers the more "advanced" in terms of evolution and civilization (p.315), is not purely racial but political as well. A deep anxiety over foreign encroachment (particularly from the US) runs throughout *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, which is not surprising considering that the French intervention in 1861 and the war with the US during 1846-1848, in which Mexico lost half of its territory, were not such distant memories to Molina Enríquez [1]. In fact, he makes the claim that the "creation" and "consolidation" of the *patria* are crucial for the "salvation of nationality" and "to fight off foreign powers" (p.332).

The valorization of the *mestizo* as the beacon of Mexican-ness took on added force after the Revolution ended in 1917, when intellectuals such as Gamio [7] sought to distance themselves from the Eurocentric, racist doctrines that predominated at the time, adopting instead the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. This theory, developed by the French naturalist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck, posited that changes to an individual caused by environmental factors could be passed down to offspring and become part of its hereditary composition [18]. Historian Alexandra Stern [19] notes that neo-Lamarckism became popular in Mexico "because it implied that human actors were capable...of improving the national 'stock' through environmental intervention and, eventually, of generating a robust populace" (p.190), thereby legitimating the politics of *indigenismo* or assimilation that the likes of Gamio [7] endorsed. However, the works of Gamio [7] and Molina Enríquez [1] are inherently paradoxical for their celebration of *mestizaje* remains steeped in racist ideology.

Los grandes problemas nacionales is divided into two parts, each with five chapters. The first part provides a general overview of Mexico's territory, history and property laws, and ends with Molina Enríquez [1] declaring his alliance to president Díaz in the chapter entitled "The secret to Porfirian peace." The second part outlines the great national problems: property, land credit, irrigation, population and politics. Molina Enríquez's principal concerns are neatly summarized in a chart on the first chapter, in which notions of private property are correlated to evolutionary development, with the nomad indigenous framed as the "biggest obstacles" to the country's stability and progress (p.53). This chart reappears throughout the book and emphasizes one of his central arguments: the equitable distribution of land will transform the previously disadvantaged social groups (*mestizos* and Indians) into a propertied class and will in turn ensure the consolidation of the Mexican nation.

The correlation between race and class is made more explicit in the population chapter, where Molina Enríquez [1] explains in a chart that foreigners and creoles, divided by occupation as landowners, politicians and members of the upper clergy, and some *mestizos*, divided as members of the political directorate, bureaucracy and upper working class, all comprise the privileged classes in Mexico (p.223). The lower classes, on the other hand, are entirely made up of indigenous peoples and divided into soldiers, villagers, peons and the urban working class (p.223). Molina Enríquez [1] observes that under such hierarchical divisions, "our social body is a disproportionate and deformed body; from the thorax and above, [the body] is a giant, [and] from the thorax and below, it is a child... (the body) is in danger of falling. Its feet are weakening day by day" (p.224). This passage is interesting for it underscores the

unequal relations of power and ownership embedded in the idea of the social body that emerged, according to cultural historian Mary Poovey [20], as a technique for disciplining certain bodies by promising “full membership in a whole” (p.8). Molina Enríquez [1] here recognizes that the poor and indigenous have been exploited to the point of exhaustion as the supportive limbs of the wealthy few. He argues that it is urgent to distribute property among the lower-class *mestizos* and indigenous in order to create a middle class that can dismantle the concentration of power and capital among the privileged classes.

Molina Enríquez [1] begins his treatise by describing the conquest as Mexico’s formation period, in which the mixture of male Spaniards and indigenous women produced the hybrid element of the *mestizo*. He praises the republican government that emerged after independence for furthering the “contact and mixture between races, paving the way for the formation of one” (p.62). He then provides an overview of the characteristics of the three predominant racial elements. For example, the *criollos* are of “high blood,” blond, worldly and refined. In short, they are *gente decente* (or respectable people) (p.63). Second, the Indians are passive, submissive, resigned and evolutionary backward, but of great resistance and energy (p.64). And third, *mestizos* are poor, vulgar and rude and reflect “the defects and vices” of both Spaniards and indigenous peoples (p.65-66). This initial depiction of the *mestizo* is in line with the idea prevalent at the time that hybrids were fundamentally degenerate. However, Molina Enríquez [1] rescues the image of the *mestizo* in no time, observing that after the Mexican-American war that left the *criollos* politically weakened, *mestizos*, better suited to adaptation and integration, emerged as the leading class and race (p.68). Moreover, the *Reforma* (or Liberal) period that instituted the separation of church and state and nationalized the property of the church allowed *mestizos* to become a propertied class, thereby consolidating its political power and leadership. He argues that such consolidation of power “has meant the strengthening of nationality” (p.84). Here the conflation of race and class is as evident as in the term “Indian” for the *mestizo* first rises as a political class to then become the superior race – the strongest, the more patriotic, the more energetic, which represents the “true nationality” (p.85).

The epitome of the *mestizo* leader for Molina Enríquez [1] is Díaz whom he describes as a patriot and a friend of the people. He praises Díaz for granting political posts to *mestizos* and “kindness” to the indigenous who are “incapable of social action” (p. 68,95), thus framing the latter as dependent on the former. Furthermore, he attributes the tenuous unity of the country to Díaz’s concentration of power (his administration lasted for 35 years), to his ability to dominate all other classes and to punish “without mercy” those who disturb the peace (p.88). Molina Enríquez here justifies the massacre and violent repression of the indigenous from the North, particularly the Yaqui from the state of Sonora who actively fought Díaz to preserve their land.

Molina Enríquez’s [1] evolutionism is best exemplified in the penultimate chapter entitled *El problema de la población* (The population problem), in which he discusses, among other aspects, the “anthropological and ethnic nature” of the indigenous and *mestizos* (p.247). He presents what he calls “scientific notes”⁵ on Indians and their brain, teeth, face and diet to conclude that they have a superior

⁵These scientific notes, which discuss in a dry tone a variety of topics from “the nature of human life” (p.36) to “the social construction of the population” (p.216), are common throughout the book and serve an important purpose: to provide Molina Enríquez a semblance of objectivity and rationality. In this way, his depiction of indigenous peoples as subordinate to *mestizos* appears to be natural and normal.

⁶This section of the book borrows extensively from the work of writer and politician Vicente Riva Palacio, who in turn cites at length Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*.

muscular strength compared to that of animals and a superb ability to adapt to the environment (p.253)⁶. Note that Molina Enríquez [1] repeatedly emphasizes the physicality of indigenous peoples, but accords no intellect to them and thus legitimates the belief that they are in need of the guidance and leadership of the *mestizo*. Gamio [7] echoes this sentiment in *Forjando patria* in 1916 when he describes indigenous peoples as incapable of “reaching their liberation” on their own (p.94). Molina Enríquez [1] points out that while whites may be superior in terms of their ability to act because of their “advanced *evolution*,” indigenous peoples are superior because of their “resistance” and “more advanced *selection*” (emphasis in original; p.254). Overall, he contends that resistance is superior to action, which explains the decline of the Spanish empire and the *criollos*, and the inevitable victory of Mexico in the future ethnic struggle against other countries (revealing once again his anxiety over foreign invasion) (p.259). In his discussion of *mestizos*, Molina Enríquez [1] borrows from Riva Palacio, who argues that the *mestizo* is “the race of modern Mexicans...the true Mexican, the Mexican of the future, as different from the Spanish as from the indigenous...” but insists that the traits of the Spanish are likely to predominate in its offspring (p.254). Molina Enríquez [1] agrees that the *mestizo* is quintessentially Mexican, but views the indigenous element as more prevalent in the make-up of the *mestizo*. He thus explains that the *mestizo* is not a new race, but “the indigenous race *favorably* modified by Spanish blood” (emphasis mine; p.258). The *mestizo* as such is both a man of action and resistance and is better suited to absorb Indians and *criollos* into his element, thereby creating the “true national population” (p.259). According to the author, the *mestizo*, as the superior racial element and leading political class, is essential for Mexico’s “well-being” (p.265).

Despite the valorization of the *mestizo* as the embodiment of Mexican-ness, Molina Enríquez [1] reproduces many racist assumptions evident in his description of indigenous peoples as evolutionary backward, as well as in his admiration for the civilization and culture of *criollos*, which he sees as more advanced. It is worth noting that Molina Enríquez [1] considers the *mestizos* as neither beautiful nor cultured because of their previously miserable socioeconomic condition. However, he argues that if their well-being is increased, their “type will become more beautiful and refined” to reach the level of *criollos* (p.308). A further point to raise here is that if the *mestizo* is constantly aspiring for improvement or “perfection” (p.298), then perhaps to be *mestizo* is not an end in itself as *mestizaje* purports, but it is a means to achieve an elusive “more” (more status, more beauty, more whiteness).

The depiction of indigenous peoples in Gamio’s work is unsurprisingly more romanticized given that he was writing at the height of the Revolution, which brought about an upsurge in nationalism. *Forjando patria* is an ambitious book divided into 34 short chapters and an appendix that covers a wide range of topics, including history, art, politics, religion, language, national literature, national industry, education and indigenous groups, “The redemption of the indigenous class” and “Prejudices about the indigenous race and their history”). The book also devotes considerable space to the disciplines of anthropology, archeology and sociology, and their relation to government.

Gamio [7] states in the preface that his book is “collective” because it is “inspired” by his “observation of the different social classes” and because its pages are made of “the flesh and soul of the people” (p.3). However, because illiteracy rates at the time were high, it is unlikely that his intended audience were “the people.” Gamio [7] here is not so much speaking to but for “the people,” while addressing fellow *mestizo* intellectuals and leaders of the Revolution. Gamio [7] begins the first

chapter with the lofty statement that the task of Mexican revolutionaries is to create the “new *patria*” from the mixture of “iron and bronze” (p.6). In other words, unlike the independence movement that “abandoned” indigenous groups (p.9), the revolution will incorporate them into the nation. He laments that the lack of knowledge of the indigenous’ “soul, culture and ideals” is a hindrance to their integration and in turn, to forging a Mexican nationality (p.15). He then proposes an anthropological investigation as the “only way” to know and advance the condition of indigenous peoples (p.15). Gamio [7] is particularly fond of citing his own anthropological endeavors as an example that others should follow, helping to consolidate anthropology as a profession integral to the nation-building projects.

Gamio [7] shifts from the language of biology, although not disavowing it entirely, to one of culture in order to point out that indigenous peoples may be “culturally stuck,” but they have the capacity to “embrace contemporary culture” like any other race if only their “diet, apparel and education were to be improved” (p.24). It is interesting to contrast Gamio [7] and Molina Enríquez [1] here for while they both argue that a homogeneous race and a unified language and culture are the bases of nationalism, their approach to achieving this differs. For example, Molina Enríquez [1] dismisses education and other “sociological panaceas” as insignificant in the evolution of indigenous groups because it is ultimately a matter of nature (p.317). He adds that the indigenous’ evolution can be accelerated by making them into a propertied class, as well as by increasing their contact and mixture with *mestizos*, who will absorb and transform them by virtue of their superiority (p.317). Gamio [7] for his part is a strong proponent of education as a means to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples and to successfully assimilate them into the dominant culture⁷. For example, Gamio [7] explicitly frames education as an agent of civilization in a separate document: “(education will) lift them all to the same plane of civilization. And by civilization I do not mean merely teaching the Indian how to read. I mean teaching him that he walks on rich soil and that there is a world around him. Throughout four hundred years he has stagnated miserably and has not even realized it. He has not seen the failure of his efforts. He thinks he leads a normal existence; education will make him see that he can lead a better one and how he can do so” (p.154).

The inherent paradox in Gamio’s work is that while he exalts pre-Columbian indigenous societies as the seed and soul of Mexico, he treats contemporary Indians as stagnant and stuck in the past, as “dead worlds” [20] obstructing the road to modernity.

As anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla [21] points out, the indigenous continues to be commoditized today as something unique that “provides a touch of local color, an accent of the exotic to attract tourists” (p.55).

Such comments were part of a series of lectures Gamio [7] delivered in English at the University of Chicago in 1926, which were sponsored by the Norman Wait Harris Memorial Foundation and also featured the philosopher José Vasconcelos [22].

For example, he observes, “the Indian continues to cultivate pre-Hispanic culture and this will continue until we achieve his gradual, logical and sensible incorporation into contemporary civilization” (p.96). He thus positions his world, “our civilization” as he later calls it,

⁷Nahmad Sittón in 2008 remarks that Gamio [7] initially supported the teaching of Spanish as a unifying language, but reversed his position and began to promote indigenous languages as part of Mexican culture in the 1940s, after the Mexican post-revolutionary state had been consolidated and the threat of US invasion had been reduced (p.130).

as the superior foundation on which to build the Mexican nation. The one aspect of indigenous culture deemed valuable for the nation is their artwork. According to Gamio, indigenous art should be kept away from European influence in order to “flourish spontaneously” and maintain the “high values” that distinguish it (p.201). Both Gamio [7] and Molina Enríquez [1] exhibit a deep anxiety over the excessive imitation of foreign culture and conveniently resort to indigenous art to provide an element of uniqueness or folklore to the inchoate national culture.

The final aspect to discuss in this section is how the cult of the *mestizo* erases the agency of not only indigenous peoples (as shown above) but of women in the nation-building projects. Note how for Gamio [7] and Molina Enríquez [1] the product of an indigenous woman and a Spanish man is always a *mestizo* and not a *mestiza*, as if only a man is suited for the task of consolidating the nation. For example, in one of his many “scientific notes,” Molina Enríquez [1] biologically grounds men as providers of food and protection and women as reproductive beings, thus naturalizing gender roles. He then argues in Darwinian terms that feminism, which he narrowly defines as having women working outside the home, is “truly absurd” because women are weaker and incapable of competing or “struggling” against men in the workforce, which results in their “inevitable defeat” and in men having to provide for them anyway (p.271). Moreover, Molina Enríquez correlates the increase of women in the workforce with a decrease in the reproduction of the population, which he sees as “detrimental to society” (p.271). One of his principal concerns is to raise Mexico’s population to 50 million people, without recourse to immigration, in order to create a strong and sovereign nation that can defend itself against foreign powers. However, he does not seem too worried about feminism, which he considers an American ideal, because he argues that Mexican customs are “more in accordance with the nature (of women),” which lead to “forming better families” and in turn, a superior *patria* than that of the United States (p.312). Similarly, Gamio [7] dismisses feminism as foreign in his chapter entitled *Nuestras mujeres* (Our women), with the possessive pronoun positioning women as yet another object of knowledge and study of this anthropologist. Gamio [7] classifies women in three types: servant, feminine and feminist (p.119). The feminist woman exhibits a masculine behavior and is almost nonexistent in Mexico. The servant type is passive and devoted to others. Gamio [7] notes that while not all indigenous women are servants (the pre-colonial Aztecs are an example), contemporary indigenous women tend to be servants because of their social condition, as well as the “immorality” of their families (p.127). The first point to make here is that in line with the *mestizaje* ideology, Gamio [7] glorifies the indigenous past by depicting Aztec women as the paragon of femininity, but accords no value to the indigenous female present. Moreover, his mention of morality serves to shift the blame from the unequal social structures that account for the dire conditions of indigenous peoples to the individual so that this servile type becomes a matter of personal choice or responsibility. The third type is the feminine woman that Gamio [7] identifies as “ideal” and that which Mexican women embody (p.119). The main aspect that makes the feminine woman “exceptional” is her abnegation and sacrifice for others; that her primary want is the “welfare” of her children (p.130). Gamio [7] concludes with the lofty statement that Mexico will become a “great nation” because of the “strong, virile and resistant race” that the feminine woman has shaped (p.130). According to Gamio [7], the only role of Mexican women in the making of the nation is as biological reproducers and as transmitters of traditional values. Such reductive view of women effectively erases their historical agency and direct involvement in the movements of independence and the Revolution. Furthermore, this erasure of women reinforces the figure of the *mestizo* as the one “true” leader of the Mexican nation.

The over-valorized representation of the *mestizo* that absorbs indigenous peoples and cultures into its identity as a form of erasure in *Los grandes problemas nacionales* and *Forjando patria* is central to the larger myth of *mestizaje*. Sociologist Natividad Gutiérrez Chong [23] describes *mestizaje* as “a creation of a structure of domination” that inflicts material and symbolic violence on subaltern groups (p.540). The myth is “symbolically violent” because it has become “unnoticed,” “recognized as a legitimate product” and accepted as common sense – it is “just how things are” (p.539).

Conclusion

The myth of Mexico as a homogeneous *mestizo* nation first imagined by intellectuals as diverse as Molina Enríquez [1] and Gamio [7] is a powerful one for its persistence and widespread circulation across all realms of public culture, including official institutions, such as government and universities, and in particular the expansion of museums, archaeological excavations and anthropological studies. For example, reconstructed ancient monuments and museums displaying the grandeur of the Aztec civilization, juxtaposed with everyday poverty, serve to reinforce the temporal distancing and hierarchical relations between *mestizos* and indigenous peoples, framing the latter as no longer capable of reaching their ancestors’ greatness and thus in need of help and protection. Anderson [24] describes such technologies of representation as a “totalizing classificatory grid” that determines who and what “belong(s) here, not there” (p.184).

Historian Ilene O’Malley [25] suggests that such gendered language served to equate “political power with sexual potency and masculinity” in the post-revolutionary state, and “a corollary to the argument that women would lose their femininity if they acquired political power, equal rights, or suffrage” (p.133).

Moreover, this myth pervades everyday social practices to the extent that the term “Indian” is used as a racial epithet and *mejorar la raza* is a common saying, pointing to the aspiration to transcend both Indian-ness and *mestizo*-ness. The challenge remains how to destabilize *mestizaje* and to acknowledge that there are multiple ways of being Mexican.

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