

The Mestizo State: Colonization and Indianization in Liberal Mexico

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[I]

MEXICO HOLDS A CENTRAL PLACE IN OUR POSTMULTICULTURALIST moment of contemplating the theories, practices, and legacies of race, where hybrid identities (and their critique) reign. José Vasconcelos's 1925 *La raza cósmica*, still widely cited as a pioneering attempt at thinking beyond race, is only the most spectacular example. An important synthesis, Vasconcelos's stylized *mestizaje*—which promised the end of race through universal race mixing—along with Mexico's postrevolutionary turn to a discourse (if not always practice) of indigenous rights, helped consolidate the vocabulary of a delicate conversation around race that is still playing out, often in pantomime form, on Mexico's national stage.¹ Addressing the nation's indigenous communities in 2003, President Vicente Fox refers not to his fellow citizens but rather to his "indigenous brothers." And Mexico's most charismatic spokesman for indigenous rights, the former urban intellectual Subcomandante Marcos, is regularly attacked from across the political spectrum as suspiciously nonindigenous. This racialized morass, in which white presidents hail their indigenous siblings and in which activists for indigenous rights are subjected to a kind of genetic testing, hardens into a frustratingly impenetrable landscape at the site of a discursive formation that produces two contradictory truths. On the one hand, Mexico's indigenous inhabitants are the authentic source for a cultural patrimony that has coalesced into the nation; on the other hand, that same nation is founded on their abandonment. I call this discourse the mestizo state. Operating from it, President Fox's famously brash promise in 2000 to end the six-year-old Zapatista rebellion in a matter of hours collapsed in a matter of days. The stalemate grinds on.

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But Vasconcelos's cosmic idea was, even in 1925, already derivative, and it had its roots firmly embedded in the very historical milieu that it sought to forget. Indeed, the cornerstone identities of Mexican racial politics—*mestizo e indio*—were well worked out at the theoretical level during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.² This period, 1876–1910, is often summarized as Porfirian Mexico (or *el Porfiriato*) after the president, Porfirio Díaz, antagonist to the 1910 revolution that would, at least in theory, change everything.³

A widespread commitment to a certain liberalism, what Charles Hale usefully summarizes as Mexico's liberal establishment, is the red thread of Mexican political history, formalized with the Constitution of 1857, consolidated under the *Porfiriato*, surviving the revolution in a sometimes more progressive form, and maintaining its hegemony today.⁴ Under the rubric of this liberal state, a perennial challenge has had to do with race relations: addressing the place of indigenous communities in Mexico's heterogeneous cultural landscape. Thus the history of racialization in Mexico is particularly useful for thinking about the limits of the liberal critique of race and racism in general. These limits, I maintain, arise at the very formulation of liberalism's assumptions and are reached at the spot where the idea of race converts into racist practice: the joint-point that binds economic and social relations, what Karl Marx called modes of production. Liberalism, as an ideology of freedom and equality, cannot deliver what it teaches us to demand when confronted with the chauvinism of its own economic ground—that is, its commitment to a singular, hegemonic mode of production: capitalism.⁵ And modes of production, in the modern world, have a racialized analog.

In this essay I explore the limits of the liberal critique of racism by focusing on the dynamic interaction among race, space, and modes of production. My context is a national-historical moment when the confluence of

these themes was being debated with intensity: Mexico's 1880s project of colonization (*colonización*). Enabling my analysis is a critical reading—the first ever, to my knowledge—of a daring argument set forth by an advocate of the colonization policy, the newspaper editor and political activist Luis Alva. Beyond the historical interest in Alva, his nineteenth-century essays shed light on a process that is still unfolding. While there is much to be distinguished between the neoliberal state of today and the simply liberal state of the nineteenth century, an essential tie binds the *Porfiriato* to contemporary Mexico: if liberalism, whether neo or classical, relates to space, it does so through its tenacious drive to make space productive in the capitalist sense, enlisting the state (the government and its armed forces) in this task. People, of course, usually get in the way. This is Alva's concern, and it is a problem that has not diminished in the intervening century. His striking essays are at once exemplary of the ideological parameters of his moment and exceptional, insofar as Alva presses against those same parameters, reaching their limit and going well beyond his contemporaries. Indeed, his unusual consideration of the Indian in terms of production leads us right into today's familiar territory: the daily fight between maintaining locally plural ways of life and expanding a globally singular mode of production. At stake in this essay, then, is an aspect of the history of this struggle: the race-space relation and its articulation to liberal ideology.

[II]

After decades of conflict and open warfare between liberals and conservatives, the second half of Mexico's nineteenth century—despite significant bumps along the road, including the brief installation of an Austrian emperor on behalf of French imperial expansion—was largely defined by the effective national sovereignty of an explicitly liberal state.⁶

Conservatives settling in as a tamed opposition after 1867, the liberals turned their attention to the task of national consolidation. This project inspired a new and persistent line of conflict: the border marking the liberals' desire to forge an articulate nation-state and the resistance to that effort by communities and political formations that constituted vast sectors of the rural hinterlands.⁷

Out of this problem the old idea of "colonization" returned as a strategy for national consolidation, becoming a topic of much political debate, especially during the long presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910; Díaz's tenure was technically interrupted by his ally, Manuel González, from 1880 to 1884). Not to be confused with the overseas expansion of imperial sovereignty that constitutes traditional colonialism, *colonización* exerts its force domestically as a rigorously national project. The idea driving the colonization campaign was that rural Mexico represented a mass of bottled-up capital waiting to be liberated in the name of national progress. Colonization, then, referred to the recruitment of immigrants and nationals for settlement in and development of unoccupied lands, either purchased by the government or appropriated after being declared fallow.⁸ A major impediment to the plan was that these lands were not in fact unoccupied; many held the homes of rural communities, a significant proportion of which were understood to be indigenous, in the ethnocultural sense.⁹ The colonization program, then, named a conflict that, while not reducible to race, was based on a number of assumptions whose truth emerged from (and sometimes against) the influential racial discourses of the day. Colonization efforts became entangled with a national conundrum that, by the end of the century, would have a generic name and many illustrious commentators: *el problema del indio* 'the Indian problem.'¹⁰ If we see the not-so-unoccupied lands as the currently occupied if not always traditional lands of indigenous civilizations,

then *colonización* stands unveiled as a developmental scheme thinly draped over a project of conquest, a state-sponsored version of what, around the same time, Marx would call "primitive accumulation."¹¹ But the concern over the "problem," placed in its historical context, was sincere and not reducible to cynicism. From the perspective of an urban, liberal elite seeking desperately to anchor itself in capitalist modernity, the rural, communalist Indian could only be seen as a problem to be solved (or menace to be dealt with), whether by more or less terrifying means. In turn, the indigenous communities could only understand the modernization imposed by the terms of colonization, no matter how friendly its rhetorics, as a threat to their cultural existence.

This conflict between capitalist expansion and popular sovereignty created moral and philosophical dilemmas for the liberals, some of whom were attentive to the historical suffering of indigenous communities at the hands of various state formations, both colonial and national. Guillermo Prieto gingerly begins this sympathy campaign in 1857, and in 1864, in the first modern study of Mexico's prominent indigenous groups, Francisco Pimentel makes much of their abuse at the hands of the Spaniards.¹² By the late *Porfiriato* (c. 1900–10), the Indian-as-victim-of-history thesis is conventional. Thus emerges a second rhetorical device that stood alongside colonization, often in conflict with it but also at times buttressing its claims. I call this reaction Indianization. With Indianization, I attempt to put a finer point on traditional *indigenismo*. Broadly put, *indigenismo* indicates the various intellectual movements, government agencies, and aesthetic projects that advocate for the social and cultural condition of the Indian; it begins to coalesce as a discourse in the mid-1910s, reaching something of an ideological heyday in Mexico during the 1950s and 1960s.¹³ By *Indianization*, in turn, I mean to capture the promotion of the idea that the indigenous communities represented not an

irritating margin but rather the very center of Mexican national identity, a thesis that may or may not pertain to any particular *indigenista* work. So, when in 1883 the Mexican state erects a prominent monument to the Aztec warrior Cuauhtemoc in the name of national heritage, as a source of Mexico's nationhood, this would be a clear example of Indianization.¹⁴ Or when Luis Villoro, now in 1950, favorably cites Manuel Gamio's conclusion that a history of *mestizaje* has resulted in Mexico's "growing indigenization" (207), he invokes a variation of the term exactly as I mean it, with all of its rhetorical qualities intact: for how do we empirically measure "indigenization"?

These relations between colonization and the Indian problem can be identified and analyzed in a multitude of editorial debates, political documents, and literary texts from Porfirian Mexico. Nobody, however, treats the problem with the verve of Luis Alva and his surprising essays. Largely forgotten today, Alva was a curious figure on the Porfirian intellectual scene. Blessed with a certain eloquence, he never found himself quite at the center of things. In 1893—over ten years after his colonization essays—he and his brother would engage in a polemic from the pages of *El monitor republicano* against a group led by a powerful Justo Sierra. Here Alva's self-styled purism comes through: the Alvas claimed the banner of authentic liberalism against what they perceived as the machinations of a cabal aligned too closely with state power and conspiring to make liberalism official—that is, a state party. In the intervening decade he bounced around some of the key, metropolitan periodicals of the day—*La patria*, run by Ireneo Paz (grandfather of Octavio), *La voz de España*, and two turns at *El monitor*—always short stints that invariably ended with a terse announcement in the back pages to the effect that "Luis Alva doesn't work here anymore." He had a tendency to say too much. His ambition to run his own show failed, as two publication projects—one called *La policía*, dedicated to

the "defense and instruction of the gendarmerie" ("Gacetilla"); another called *El museo de la casa*, on home economics—never got off the ground. Yet one senses a general affection for Alva among the capital's fraternity of intellectual-statesmen: when he died of a sudden illness in early December of 1893, *El monitor* canceled its annual New Year's ball as an act of collective mourning. The motivating force behind his 1882 intervention into the colonization question remains a mystery.¹⁵

Whatever the provocation, his contribution was significant, even visionary. The essays appeared in the summer of 1882, in *La libertad*. The newspaper was founded and led by Sierra, and it quickly became a dynamic forum for the nascent elaboration of the positivist-guided "scientific politics" eventually associated with the Díaz administration (and that Alva would later write against). For its short and intense life (1878–84), *La libertad* was required reading of the political elite of the day. Alva's eloquently combative set of essays came out under the title "La colonización extranjera y la raza indígena" 'Foreign Colonization and the Indigenous Race.' The forthright tone of the essays, framed by the context of legislative debates over formal policies of colonization (see González Navarro; Powell 21; Hale 238), went well beyond the apprehensiveness of the capital's intelligentsia on these themes. For example, in the years before Alva's essays, *La libertad* published a number of frightening articles that linked the indigenous threat to the threat of socialism.¹⁶ And a year after Alva, three titans of the liberal intelligentsia—Ignacio Altamirano, Francisco Cosmes, and Sierra—would have a month-long debate in the same pages, arguing over whether or not the Indian could be educated at all, a self-evident point of departure for Alva. Indeed, the 1883 debate crystallizes the conventional wisdom on the Indian in an intellectual climate dominated by idiosyncratic applications of liberalism, positivism, and progressive evolutionism: the Indian

may exhibit a civilizational deficit, but this is merely the function of historical and environmental accidents; modernization will transform the Indian into a productive citizen; and good state planning can help achieve this goal. (Invoking a garden-variety biological racism, Cosmes dissented from this view.)¹⁷ These assumptions would survive the revolution, well into the twentieth century, largely intact (Stabb 422–23), even in the guises of socialist idealism or militant indigenism. But in 1882, nearly three decades before the inauguration of the immediately truncated *Sociedad Indigenista Mexicana* (Mexican Indigenist Society), which in 1910 took as its task the “social redemption” of the abused Indian in Mexico, Alva had already arrived at the horizon of this line of race thinking.

The contemporary canon of research on race in Porfirian Mexico revolves around the attitudes exhibited toward indigenous peoples by the intellectual elite (see Villoro; Stabb; Powell; Hale 205–44; Knight). This is a reasonable reflection of the epoch itself, dominated, as it was, by abstract and unfounded discussions about whether or not the Indian could be educated, that is, occidentalized. These conversations yield more about the prejudices of the participants than about any theoretical or empirical innovation. Alva, taking a different direction, goes right to the heart of the problem that confronted the state. On the one hand, in Humboldtian fashion, he grounds his concerns in geography (the science of the relations between people and land), political economy (the science of economic progress), and their intersection at demography. This allows him to make his case for the Indian in terms of economic development, eschewing the metaphysics of the educational debate. On the other hand, drawing rhetorical strength from Las Casas himself, he ferociously invokes juridical rights to make a legal and moral case for the “redemption” of the Indian as a responsibility of the state. It is here that his brand of Indianization goes

decades beyond that of his contemporaries. For his Indian as Mexican is not a monument but a historical actor, one endowed with all human faculties, including the capacity for organized violence in the face of exploitation. Alva’s Indianization, then, makes a striking move from the rhetorical to the real. Armed with his “doctrinaire” liberalism (as Hale calls it [115]), Alva does not flee from the threat of socialism embodied in indigenous rebellion; instead he appropriates the historical and moral force of the right to rebel. Yet, doctrinaire liberal that he is, he leaves his ideology’s ground untouched and is therefore led to the limit of the ideology’s critical possibilities. In thus framing his argument for colonization, he not only reframes the problem of the Indian’s place in national culture but also speaks to the thorny relations between liberalism and race in ways that point toward an indigenism to come.¹⁸ Between the precociousness and the forum of the essays, Alva’s is a notable intervention in the Mexican genealogy of indigenism that is worth consideration.

[III]

The concepts of colonization and Indianization stand at the center of Alva’s larger argument. In “La colonización extranjera y la raza indígena,” Alva’s concern, far beyond that of foreign immigration, is the question of indigenous communities and their place in the nation. How does he frame this place? Surprisingly, given the Eurocentrism often bluntly (and perhaps too blandly) ascribed to Porfirian Mexico, Alva situates the Indian at the very heart of the nation, as nothing less than the steward of the national spirit. Now, the modern reading strategies often categorized under the rubric of postcolonial criticism will always, and very quickly, expose the political limits of this move. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize how Alva makes a case for an inclusive national culture that went beyond his contemporaries in important ways.

In the first of thirteen essays of varying length, three broad questions emerge that define Alva's consideration of the problem of "foreign colonization and the indigenous race": (1) why to recruit immigrants and what kind to recruit, (2) why the carefully managed program of colonization is key for building a national race, and (3) why the Indian must be thought of in terms of a colonizing participant. The first question is quickly resolved and receives far less attention than one might expect, given the title of the essays: immigrants must be recruited in order to develop sparsely populated regions, and they should be of a culture that is disposed to absorption into the specifically Mexican project of nation. The Irish, Alva concludes, make the best candidates, for reasons of religious commonality (17 June 1882), their political motivations to emigrate (7 June), and a supposed proclivity to miscegenate (13 July).¹⁹ But the second and third points are the heart of his argument and receive my attention here. Let us begin with the question of a potentially national race.

Understanding the coherence of nations in terms of racial commonality was almost universal in the nineteenth century, although it should be emphasized that the nature of the relations between race and nation was nowhere near settled. In general, however, there was a certain conventional wisdom attached to the idea that at least a relative racial commonality, or a feeling of racefulness, was a necessary pillar for the stability of the nation form. The racial heterogeneity of Mexico, then, was an object of considerable concern to intellectuals in and around the consolidation efforts of the liberal state. Drawing on European philosophers and their own local realities, the liberal intelligentsia had begun to promote a theory of race mixing, *mestizaje*, as Mexico's particular route to an articulate, race-nation couplet. Invoked by the early positivists as a metaphor for historical progress (Barreda 78), by the time of Alva's writings, an increasingly loud rhetoric of *mestizaje* had

begun to point toward the possibility of an active, proto-eugenic, social program.²⁰ And if *mestizaje* sought to pacify racially marked social resistance by synthesizing the races and thus, in theory, diluting empirical cultural difference, then the object of its ideological force was the indigenous communities. Or, better, as the title of Alva's essay puts it, the object was the "indigenous race." Through biological and cultural mixing, so the story went, the Indians could be drawn into the national project and objectively "improved." For the leading positivist of the day, Sierra, the "properly Mexican family, that is, the mixed family," was understood as the "dynamic" engine of Mexican national identity and consolidation (301, 299). Thus it was clear that the Indian, for his own benefit, must be brought into the mix, "transformed," and the way to go about this would be through the inevitable cultural osmosis that would occur through state-sponsored colonization (297, 313). Vicente Riva Palacio, the prominent historian, military officer, and minister of development, concurred, naming *mestizaje* as the key ingredient in the birth of the nation. He went so far as to place the Indian ahead of the European on a purely evolutionary scale but was careful to distinguish physiological evolution from cultural civilization, an area in which he declared the Indian to be deficient (480).

Already ahead of both of his far more prominent contemporaries, Alva took a provocative rhetorical turn with these ideas on how to manage the problem of producing an integral nation vis-à-vis the uncomfortably autonomous "indigenous race," a social force that constituted a majority in some regions. He frames his case as the "redemption" of a race that has been unjustly discredited (21 June 1882), and his opening move is to temper the grim conclusions of race as biological essence in favor of an emphasis on context. If the Indian today appears degenerate, this is not due to any intrinsic factor: "The Indian suffers from some defects in his

manners, an effect of the poor treatment that he has received, and of the abjection in which he has been maintained" (7 June). The Indian, in short, has been historically abused, and his condition must be attributed to this fact. Alva continues: "but, at the same time, [the Indian] has congenital virtues that cannot be ignored" (7 June). Essentially—that is, congenitally—the Indian is hardworking, faithful to tradition, a "lover of the principle of association" (social in his decision making, implying a promoter of the public good) (7 June). The essence of race stays on as a potentially positive force, while context is put forth as a promoter of decadence. The trick, then, would be to change the context. So far, even while looking ahead toward the culturalism of Franz Boas and arriving at the same model that will provide the basis for Manuel Gamio's influential, postrevolutionary *indigenismo* (23), Alva's half turn away from biological essence in order to allow for the power of contextual contingency is still conventional, within the purview of his contemporaries such as Sierra, Altmirano, and—perhaps most prominently—the Jacobin liberal Ignacio Ramírez.

Alva's gambit is not to abandon race with a radical appropriation of culture; discursive formations are not so easily dissolved. Rather, he precisely reasserts race and, in the same gesture, apparently undermines the hierarchy that enables its violence. He posits that in America's mestizo race it is the Indian's spirit that triumphs. Reversing Hegel's dialectic, which could only make a "vanishing feeble race" (45) of the indigenous American, Alva argues that "the American race is younger and stronger than the European race. . . . [T]he Indian pertains to a newer, and thus more vigorous, race, stronger and more disposed to learn" (7 June 1882). *Mejorar la raza* 'improve the race,' then, is to Indianize the white, or whitish, man. Now, this gesture, on its own, is unimpressive. Hemmed in by the degradation of social relations that always accompanies discourses of race, Alva's revindi-

cation of the Indian itself emerges from a set of racist banalities: the Indian's vigor is demonstrated by his "prolonged youth" versus the European; the Indian's value as a sidekick for nation building stems from his assumed docility, reticence, tractability; and so on. Nevertheless, Alva's construction of the Indian as the essence of the nation's racial spirit is significant. It is significant because his Indian is in fact not merely "the Indian" of the standard, Porfirista rhetoric: a set of myths foundational to a national prehistory, a now-eclipsed grandeur, accessible only through ruins and monuments. Rather, Alva's Indian is the real, living, active, indigenous communities. If a historical Indian is invoked to make his contemporary case, it is done not in the name of mythmaking but precisely in the name of history: a history of violent appropriation and abject racism that has ostensibly left the indigenous communities scraping by at the margins of national society.²¹ Not something to be summoned from the past, Alva's Indian is something to be included as a participant now.

Alva's idea of colonization, and its relevance to the "indigenous race," is thus propped up by considerations both practical and moral. Practically, in keeping with the expressed opinions of his liberal contemporaries, Alva really did believe that Mexico could "improve the race." Not necessarily the "indigenous race," but the national race, the Mexican race. The colonization project, involving both Indians and immigrants, if well managed, will be central here. On this point he is explicit, and, in his opening turn from the colonizing immigrant to the native Indian, he notes the need to find "peoples" that "will produce a new race," one with "more virtues and fewer vices" (7 June 1882). Later, he concludes:

With the conditions of the Mexican [by which he means Indian, clarified in a later essay] colonist and foreign colonist being equal, good friendship will develop between them. The sons of the one will marry the daughters of the other, and, before half a century, we will have

a better race, since it is known that all races improve by crossing, *as long as this happens under good conditions*. (7 June; my emphasis)

Improving the race is a question of management; programs of colonization will be the context for that management; and the Indian must be included in this project.

This inclusive process is a moral imperative. In the seventh essay, adopting a more fervent tone, Alva invokes for the first time a real fear that occasionally raised alarm among the metropolitan bourgeoisie: indigenous insurrection. But instead of taking the well-worn path of presenting *mestizaje* as a way to dilute the frightening social rage often attributed to racial difference, he provokes his urban audience by speaking directly to the justice inherent in the indigenous cause. At once stating the obvious and the unsayable, he asserts that the indigenous communities, were they to take up arms (which in fact they did, and with some frequency throughout the second half of the nineteenth century [see Reina; Tutino]), would be justified in their violence: not only on the grounds of self-defense and indemnification but even on the grounds of simple vengeance. Effective indigenous uprising in this world would only hasten what is sure to come in the next, where “people of reason, [who] have never really had any, [and] don’t have it now,” will be called before “Divine Justice” for their “crimes of race” (1 July 1882). By the eighth essay, which Alva frames as a response to the Colombian evangelist Federico Aguilar’s call for “the destruction of the indigenous race,” “crimes of race” morph into accusations of what we would today call genocide: “we do not want to see claimed against us the crime of *lesa civilización* [crime against humanity], which today already confronts us, if we further tolerate the indigenous race in their contemporary, shocking state of abjection and servitude” (5 July). He concludes: “we come requesting on their behalf not grace but justice, not mercy but equity” (5 July).

How does a national elite make effective atonement for its “crimes of race” and promote “equity” for a marginalized sector of society? This question brings us to Alva’s primary concern, which has to do with why the Indian must not be excluded as the object of colonization but included as a colonizing participant. His case revolves around two answers, the one in tension with the other. First, it was widely assumed by the Mexican elite that the indigenous communities would need to take on certain cultural norms alien to their traditions in order to modernize along with the nation as a whole. Alva subscribes to this central tenet of liberal conventional wisdom. But he will also take a radical step and do much more. It works like this: the Indian, he argues, is a stalwart of “tradition.” And not simply of his own, eccentric cultural practices but also of the kind of autochthonous, local customs that provide the material substrate of Mexicanness: “he loves everything that defines the country” (21 June 1882). In this sense, “the Indian exceeds us,” *us* referring to the criollos and mestizos who suffer from “genomanía” ‘love of the foreign’ (21 June). Because the “genomaniac,” mestizo elite already corrupts the national culture down to the most basic level of language (21 June), it is the Indian who will become the bulwark of Mexican civilization and national singularity against any further cultural corruption on the part of new immigrants. In short, way before the anarchist and communist *indigenistas* of the Andes would execute the same move—Mariátegui, even González Prada—the liberal Alva points out that Eurocentric Mexico needs its Indians to recognize its national singularity. The Indian will “conserve the living, national spirit, institutions and customs, which are like the physiognomy that distinguishes the peoples [*pueblos*] that constitute what is called the *patria*” (14 June). The Indian is the authentic Mexican; and this authentic Mexican has been abused to the point of legitimate rebellion. This couplet went well beyond what mainstream, urban, literate Mexico was willing to hear.

But even if the Indian stands as the resentful guardian of national culture, a second line of argumentation for the inclusion of the Indian emerges, not easily squared with the first. This argument is legal in theory, economic in practice, and stems from the rights granted to all Mexicans by the liberal, republican constitution of 1857. Alva traces a historical trajectory from the following assumption: with the 1810 movement toward independence, the Indian actually became worse off. Considering that Alva has just spent much rhetorical energy invoking the Spanish colonial project and damning it to hell, this is a strong accusation. Indeed, making an important theoretical point that still resonates, Alva maintains that with the rise of the modern state, the Indian is literally abandoned, in what today would be Giorgio Agamben's sense, by the law. Alva writes, "The Indian, then, gained nothing with Independence; indeed, he lost the little that had been legally conceded to him by the colonial administration [*leyes de indios*]. . . . After Independence, he was stripped of his privileges; he was made a *citizen* through ridicule" (8 July 1882). With the law of the land in hand, Alva continues, "Is this not where the Constitution of 1857 should govern, stating expressly in one of its precepts that *nobody* is obligated to lend personal labor without FAIR COMPENSATION and *full consent*?" (8 July). Abandoned by the constitution itself, the Indian stands exposed as something like bare labor. The moral imperative, then, is to apply the law and turn him into active labor—that is, to keep the liberal promise and make the Indian a Mexican, a productive citizen with all his rights and responsibilities in place. Alva goes on to argue that the *paz porfiriana*—the long period of political consensus, if not social stability, associated with the Díaz regime—is the necessary condition for the Indian's redemption as an active citizen. But this activity rests first and foremost on work and compensation. The Indian problem, therefore, is social in nature and legal in theory, but ultimately its solution

will be an economic one. Moving the Indian from bare labor to active labor will be accomplished by the transformation of his mode of production. And it is here that apparent contradictions in Alva's case will transform into a productive aporia that marks the limits of critical possibilities around theories and practices of race in liberal Mexico.

[IV]

A productive aporia: The aporia is literal, because Alva has arrived at a contradiction that affords no passage. The aporia is productive, because it marks the stopping point on which the race-nation articulation of Mexican, state-sponsored identity will rest after Alva, perhaps to the present day. The terms of the contradiction are basic and can be summed up as the hoary problem that has inspired reams of cultural criticism and even textbook titles in the study of Latin American cultures and societies: the tension between *tradición* and *modernidad*. In short: how can the Indian be preserved as a bastion of tradition and yet simultaneously be transformed into a productive citizen—that is, a modern subject articulated to a capitalist mode of production and thereby effectively inscribed in the nation form? The short answer is that this formula is bunk, at least in regard to its potential realization: to become a modern citizen in Alva's terms is precisely to leave behind the traditional.²² But as Roberto Schwarz's theory of "misplaced ideas" makes clear, contradictions are usually in themselves productive and, taken seriously, can offer insight into some of the most profound cultural problems of an epoch. This is the case here. Alva's contradiction points to a logic surrounding the liberals' "Indian problem" deeper than anything directly revealed by the superficial dream of a happy mestizo state, deftly mediating cultural osmosis through its programs of colonization. We can begin to get at this logic, and at the limits of the liberal critique of racism, by

paying special attention to the play of modes of production in Alva's argument.

At the heart of Alva's vision for the formation of an articulate and productive nation, a modern Mexico, is what he calls "mixed agricultural colonies," a state-sponsored community formation to which he returns again and again (14 June 1882). The tag itself says a great deal about the product that Alva is trying to sell. As "colonies," they are the direct result of a state project of appropriation, accumulation, redistribution, and (re)settlement. We have seen that they will be "mixed" insofar as they are to be populated by relocated Indians and new immigrants. And perhaps the most bland of the three is in fact the crucial term: they are "agricultural" in that they are expressly proposed as nodes of national expansion and development, the consolidation of an export economy sustained by capitalist agriculture. The plan, then, is driven by a preoccupation, common throughout so much of the nineteenth-century Americas, with populating (it would perhaps be better to say repopulating) national territory. And this project of population revolves around the nation's potential as an agricultural producer: the mix between Indians and immigrants, while participating in the production of a national race, will also feed the nation's bottom line (7 June, 28 June, 13 July). Biopolitically, Mexico finds itself in a propitious place and time: "A territory capable of supporting, comfortably, one hundred million inhabitants . . . [and it] has the natural talent, today dormant, of its inhabitants that must be awakened to the progressive fiber of our century" (28 June).²³ The Indian, a "natural" agriculturalist (14 June), is an untapped resource in this regard. Thus redeeming the Indian—"perhaps the best element of our population" (7 June)—and developing the nation are the same project.

But what does it mean to redeem the Indian? And who is the Indian, anyway? Answering these questions confronts us with the centrality of modes of production in Alva's

vision of a modern Mexico. The Indian, inscribed within a logic of race ("the indigenous race"), is reduced to a series of not necessarily commensurable social relations. The basis of this division is, indeed, the mode of production. In the fourth essay, Alva proposes three kinds of Indians as producers: agriculturalist slaves, peddlers ("industriales"), and agriculturalist proprietors (17 June 1882). Clearly the first is the most abject, dispossessed of his land and forced to work through a cruel and illegal system of debt bondage. The second is not much better off, permanently itinerant and a victim of spirit-killing taxes and outright extortion. These two categories represent "the shameful fate of the most active and hard-working race that populates our territory" (17 June). Reduced to bare labor, both types find themselves abandoned before the law.

The dynamic category is the third. This "Indian, [as] proprietor or renter of a parcel of land" (17 June 1882), is at once stable and productive, consuming what he needs and selling the rest, a protocapitalist ready to be modernized. But you wouldn't know it to look at him: he hides his success, blending in with other, less productive, Indians, for fear of exploitation by the nonindigenous, capitalist elite (28 June). This condition represents a massive failure for Mexico, an opportunity missed that plagues the country: the Indian as miser gums up the wheels of capitalism, slowing down the circulation of capital and, with it, the development of the nation. Thus for Alva the redemption of the Indian is not merely a question of empowering a potential producer, or of modernizing a pool of labor, and thereby maximizing the productivity of natural resources—that is, land. The redemption of the Indian is also the conversion of the indigenous communities themselves, "liberating" them from a tradition of alleged communal isolationism and articulating them to the national project as not simply citizens, but, more importantly, consumers. He writes: "the Indian must be made to understand that nothing is

forbidden to him that is not forbidden to white people, as long as the means for acquiring it are licit and honest. Thus will consumption increase and public wealth grow" (17 June).

Here we have the core of the contradiction. The Indian is acquitted of any charges of racial (essential, biological, genetic) inferiority and made instead into a victim of history. Yet even in that degrading context, his natural tendency to preserve local tradition stands firm, which leads Alva to frame the indigenous communities as an asset to the consolidation of an authentic national identity. But now that the Indian is reessentialized as a particular kind of producer and consumer, the most basic and defining element of indigenous communities—their particular, non-capitalist, or eccentrically capitalist modes of production—comes under attack by Alva. Alva's "tradition" stands as an empty category, a set of vague references to a dubious patriotism, a love for "everything that defines the country" (21 June 1882). For the concrete, cultural practices that constitute living traditions emerge from a worldview, a mode of production, that must be abandoned.

Abandonment (*abandono*) is a key term for Alva, and it cuts in two directions, marking the spot where his Indianization folds into a politics of de-Indianization. The first kind of abandonment arises alongside his calls for redemption, in which he indicates that his project should be understood as a regeneration of the Indian. Speaking to the importance of learning indigenous languages for Mexico's educated classes, he notes that such a reaching out "would be the prologue to the regeneration of the Indians" (21 June 1882). This reference to regeneration, a favored political metaphor of the day, resonates with all the biopolitical implications of the term. To give new life to the Indian means to convert him into a productive citizen. This, in turn, will make the indigenous communities into a productive resource: once the Indian is made a citizen "hermano," the secrets of the "once

prosperous and rich dwellers [*pobladores*] of the New World" will be forthcoming, readily convertible into patents (21 June). Moreover, the essential virtue of the Indian will be made exploitable: his artistic talents; his gift for imitation; his moderation of passions; his patience, graciousness, work ethic, silence, and sweetness of character. Do not abandon the Indian: "How can we leave in this condition, abandoned, the most important element of our population?" (21 June).

But a second-order abandonment now emerges. The simultaneous appearance of "regeneration" and "abandonment" in Alva's text is significant. María del Pilar Melgarejo has analyzed how these two terms play off and through each other in a perverse logic of productive contradiction. She argues that in the nineteenth-century political discourse of Latin America, "the enthusiasm for regenerating the population . . . exhibits its true force through a gesture of abandonment"; she calls this relation "the basic structure of the force of [political] language in the nineteenth century" (189). Melgarejo suggests that if the purpose of the regeneration discourse was to draw margins into the center, it was not so that the marginals could adopt the social norms that would make them well politically, so that they could become active citizens in the Arendtian sense and thereby occupy the polis shoulder to shoulder with the elites. Regeneration was an inclusion in the name of exclusion, a mechanism necessary to make legal the expendability (or abandonment) of social actors whose agency could in any way threaten the stability of the state. What we have seen so far is Alva's sharp, if partial, recognition and critique of the Indian's abandonment before the law. Alva thereby identifies a scandal that is nothing less than a "crime of race" (1 July) and that must be redressed: abandoned by the executors of the law of the land, by the constitution itself, the Indian must now be "regenerated," incorporated into the national community. But the project of regeneration

will require mutual action on the part of the Indian. Instead of simply applying the justice of reparation to the Indian's "morbid" condition, Alva argues that the Indian's (and Mexico's) regeneration will require a second-order abandonment. That is, the Indian must learn to abandon himself: there is a need for "regulations that should be invoked in order to lift up the Indian, beginning with obliging him to abandon his habitual, miserable nudity, making him more productive, less vicious, and a greater master over himself" (5 July). The Indian, in other words, must become less Indian. The Indianization of Mexico slyly shifts into the de-Indianization of the Indian.

If the Indian must be redeemed as a citizen whose commitment to tradition is an asset to Mexican identity and yet must also be converted into a new kind of producer, then the object of redemption is not the indigenous communities per se but the indigenous communities insofar as they constitute a mass of bare labor that can be made into something else. What is the mechanism for this transformation? The "mixed agricultural colonies," while providing a necessary context, will not, Alva suggests, be enough. Enforcement of cultural mediation between foreign immigrant and local Indian will be required, and this will happen in the form of institutions: the school and the police. The task of provoking the transformation of the Indian into an active consumer "will have to be carried out through education," he says, invoking *the* pillar of liberal discourse. And this will require enforcement: "Thus the need for schools throughout the land; and thus the need for assiduous vigilance on the part of the authorities" (17 June 1882).

More than anything, for Alva, this vigilance on the part of the authorities seems to focus on one particular problem: the Indian is naked. Clearly, nudity itself here stands in for something else: the cultural difference, grounded on a mode of production that separates the indigenous communities from the

state's vision of the nation at large. The Indian's literal nudity becomes a metaphor for his condition as bare labor. As the argument winds down in the penultimate essay, the two problems—bare life and bare labor—play off each other, as Alva proposes something like a dialectic of "tyranny" (16 July 1882; his term) to usher in a new era of effectively universal citizenship, democracy, and the free exchange of goods. Alongside the problem of the Indian's nudity is the fact that the Indian is exploited by the hacienda. (It is significant that, at this decisive moment in Alva's argument, the question of mixed agricultural colonies disappears before the problem, perhaps more concrete, of *latifundista* exploitation.) Both problems must be confronted at once: "[We should] oblige the Indians to clothe themselves, and the proprietors of outdated [*rústicas*] farms to increase their salaries" (16 July).

Both solutions will require a meager sacrifice when compared with the potential gains. Once law forces the Indian to clothe (and shoe) himself, then law will eventually become custom, through which, tautologically, "custom will later acquire the force of law" (16 July 1882). A similar logic holds for obliging the latifundios to increase pay and improve conditions. Once they do, the Indian will become a consumer, and any expense they incur will be an investment, recouped when the Indian starts buying stuff. Indeed, as Alva's argument intensifies at these final points, the idea of the Indian as consumer comes to the fore, conflating his redemption and citizenship with his desire to buy: "When the Indian has needs, he will become a consumer; and his consumption will augment the yields of capital investment and industry . . . in turn augmenting the public wealth . . . and thus contributing to the greatness of his *patria*, to national prosperity, and to the redemption of his noble race" (16 July). Law, as Alva here emphasizes, is not merely juridical; it must also be thought in terms of the social and the economic. He reasserts that the Indian

is abandoned, “without rights and without pleasure,” a “stranger in his own land and not the citizen that the Constitution wanted to form.” Alva calls his solution a “tyranny” but necessary, better understood as a “correction.” And he concludes by reminding us that the redemption of the “indigenous race,” and the attendant regeneration of the national economy, will rest on the success of the indigenous communities in abandoning themselves in order to become what they are not: “hacemos consumidor al indio, ciudadano y hombre libre” ‘we will make a consumer of the Indian, a citizen and free man’ (16 July).

[V]

Alva’s polemical plea for the redemption of the Indian demonstrates the limits of the liberal critique of racism, limits that are not limited to the nineteenth-century Mexican scene. For race in the West has always been a way of speaking about economic exploitation. It rises alongside and within projects of colonial expansion, the enslavement of human beings, and the consolidation of the hegemony of bourgeois industrialism with the emergence of the modern nation form. Liberalism, a name for the fundamental worldview arising from the same Enlightenment tradition that spawned the modern idea of race, confronts its own aporia when attempting, like Alva, to attack the material effects of racial discourse. In its drive to mobilize the tolerance of universal freedom as a weapon against racism, the liberal critique of race reveals the end of its own tolerance. While liberal ideals are centered on preserving the security of property and the diversity of opinion, creed, and innocuous cultural practices in its basic communal form, the nation, they screech to a halt before the diversity of production. This is the point where the guiding ideology of industrial capitalism, Walter Benjamin’s “modern economy,” becomes “a beast that goes berserk as soon as its tamer turns his back” (246).

Alva’s generation of liberal statesmen, residing in a country where modes of production were still to some extent differentiated, stumbled against the aporia at its origin. Indeed, questions of production were at the very center of the indigenous and peasant uprisings that they sought to contain: these rebellions consistently made their demands in the terms of economic justice; they were, and still are, calls for freedom against productive coercion (see Marcos). The rural rebellions were implicit, and sometimes explicit (through manifestos, editorials, petitions, etc.), in the defense of their basic right to be the authors of their own existence, to be citizens precisely in the very act of making this case for freedom.²⁴ Alva’s plan of *colonización* and politics of *indianización*, however sincere, creative, or progressive they might be, simply cannot be reconciled with the demands of its object, the “traditional” communities whose modernization he sought. His colonization, while liberating the flow of capital, precisely recolonizes the indigenous communities by formally obliging them to abandon the right to practice modes of production that do not articulate the liberal assumptions of capitalist development. And his Indianization, while pressing the case for the Indian’s formal equality, ends with a de facto call for de-Indianization. His indigenous communities, then as today, are expected to recognize their citizenship by inscribing themselves in a new order of governance, transferring their popular sovereignty to that of a mestizo state that assumes their obsolescence.

NOTES

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1. Both halves of this discursive formation—Vascelos's *mestizaje* and indigenism's indigenous rights—continue to be exportable. See Pérez-Torres; Tarica.

2. In Mexican cultural politics, *mestizo* refers to an individual of mixed-race ancestry, generally assumed to be indigenous American and European. The presence of Africans in Mexico suffers from a profound historical erasure (see Martínez Montiel). *Mestizo* also indicates the long-standing, favored racialization of national identity—see Villoro; Basave-Benítez; and Tarica. The more important category for this essay is *indio*. By *el indio* 'the Indian,' I refer to the outcome of a historical trajectory of identification that depends on a colonial gaze backed by force, a gaze that dialectically homogenizes (the monolithic Indian) while producing difference (distinct indigenous communities). The Indian thus functions rhetorically as both emblem and social relation. Despite this complex history, I maintain the term *Indian*, however problematic, in order to resonate with the language of the historical context that forms my object of inquiry. In doing so I invoke the referential ambivalence of the Indian, at once indicating subjects and communities so defined and self-defined as well as the sociohistorical processes through which those subjects and communities enter into discourse.

3. It did not change everything. On the nineteenth-century origins of Mexico's postrevolutionary discourse on race, see Villoro 209–23; Stabb; and Powell.

4. During the late nineteenth century, Mexican liberalism, as Hale explains in his masterpiece study of the topic (23), became confused with a larger philosophical current of positivism and ossified into the ideological underpinning of a state party obsessed with the twin projects of pacification and modernization. In the specific context of Mexico, liberalism must always be understood as resonating with this history.

5. Capitalism is one of many modes of production. See Wolf 73–79; for the specifically Latin American context, see Laclau. The heterodoxy of Mexican liberalism is especially useful as a case study, because it so blatantly emphasizes, over all other ideological aspects of liberalism, its articulation to the development of a capitalist mode of production.

6. This process begins formally with the Constituent Assembly of 1856–57, the installation of the Constitution of 1857 and subsequent Laws of Reform, and the presidency of Benito Juárez (1858–63 and 1867–72).

7. This social, political, and historical dynamic was dramatized through the popular bandit novel, a literary form that, like the cultural elite to whom it corresponded, tended to flatten the heterogeneity of resistance to state domination into generic banditry. Inclán's *Astucia* (1865), Payno's *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (1889), and Altamirano's *El Zarco* (finished in 1888) are the classic texts of the

genre. But Frías's *Tomochic* (1893), in explicitly refusing the "banditry" of its local rebels, best captures the brutal edge of the pacification of rural Mexico.

8. Porfirian colonization was a return to an idea that had been promoted by statesmen since before the war of 1847 and the subsequent expropriation of Mexican territory by the United States in 1848. Hale lists the following dates as crucial in terms of state policy: the 1846 formation of a "government colonization bureau," an 1863 wartime decree authorizing "the occupation and alienation of unclaimed lands," and explicit colonization laws of 1875 and 1883 (235). See also González Navarro. For a discussion of *colonización* in a wider historical context that links it to Spanish imperial expansion, see Katz.

9. The breakup of indigenous communal lands—the *ejido* system—into private farms began in earnest in the 1850s, with the introduction of the liberal reforms and the Ley Lerdo of 1856, which formalized the privatization of indigenous communities. (New safeguards for the *ejidos* were put into place after the revolution, and their cancellation in the early 1990s has been a rallying cry in anti-NAFTA activism.) By 1900, the intensified expropriation of indigenous lands was a historiographical and critical commonplace, receiving comment in prominent places such as Sierra's *México, su evolución social* (1900–02); see Powell 29.

10. At its most primordial, the *problema del indio* has to do with the fear of violence and a certain anxiety about the threat, real or perceived, of leftist doctrines believed to be floating around the countryside. Separating the underdevelopment of indigenous communities as a social problem from their potential rebelliousness as a political problem is difficult. See Hale 222–23; Vanderwood.

11. "Primitive accumulation" was Marx's name for the appropriation of resources, potentially convertible into capital, by use of force (713–15).

12. For a good introduction to these works, see Stabb 407–12.

13. In literary studies, it is common to distinguish between social realist or surrealist *indigenismo* (1930s–60s) and Romantic *indianismo*, a literary treatment of an idealized Indian that is associated with the nineteenth century.

14. Cf. Leticia Reina and Cuauhtémoc Velasco's idea of "reindianización" 're-Indianization,' which refers to the tenacity of indigenous communities in resisting the liberal drive for "homogeneización de sus pobladores" 'homogenization of their populations' in nineteenth-century Latin America (15).

15. The above sketch of Alva comes from primary documents I examined at the Fondo Reservado of the Biblioteca Nacional (Mexico City). Hale makes the only significant mention of Alva that I have been able to find in the historiographical literature (113–15, 238).

16. Stabb lists these editorial titles appearing in *La libertad* from 1878 to 1879: "Los agitadores de los indios" "The Agitators of the Indians," "La guerra social" "Social

Warfare,' 'El comunismo en Morelos' 'Communism in Morelos,' 'El plan socialista de Querétaro' 'The Socialist Plan of Querétaro' (418–19).

17. On the 1883 debate among Altamirano, Cosmes, and Sierra, see Powell 23–24.

18. Alva's protoindigenist terms will not be fully met until well after the revolution, and they will resonate most harmoniously with Gregorio López y Fuentes's 1933 *El indio*.

19. Alva's essays appear in thirteen issues of *La libertad* during the summer of 1882, running from 7 June to 20 July.

20. As early as 1849, José María Luis Mora argues for actively encouraged *mestizaje* as a way of quelling social violence (277). Francisco Pimentel is the first to make the case in terms of national development (1864), and Vicente Riva Palacio attempts to craft state policy around proto-eugenic ends through new immigration policies in 1877 (see González Navarro).

21. I say "ostensibly," because Alva's production of an abject Indian is itself an effect of the discourse that guides his assumptions. Cf. Reina; Certeau.

22. Writers from Mariátegui (1928) to Ortiz (1940) to García Canclini (1989) have made a convention of the next logical step beyond Alva, exploring the ways in which traditional practices "persist" in and even give shape to an uneven Latin American modernity.

23. On biopolitics, see Agamben's revision (130–32) of Foucault's idea (252–58).

24. See Reina's collection of documents on the 1868 rebellion of Julio López, for one dramatic example. See also Anaya Pérez; Falcón.

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