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WRITING THE NATION: IGNACIO MANUEL ALTAMIRANO'S ROMANTIC
VISION AND PORFIRIAN DEVELOPMENT

by

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WRITING THE NATION: IGNACIO MANUEL ALTAMIRANO'S ROMANTIC
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As articulated in Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Romantic novel *El Zarco* (1888) and the accounts of contemporary travelers, various interpretations about the pace and course of the country's development abounded in Mexico during the late nineteenth-century. The current project evaluates *El Zarco* as a historical text and uses it as a window into the Porfirian nation-building project. By comparing the vision outlined in the novel with the published accounts of contemporary travelers this project demonstrates the contested nature of development among Mexico's national elites during the Díaz administration. This thesis argues that from the competing visions of national development specific categories for negotiating inclusion in the nation emerged. In this respect, the foremost category was the citizen and in a context of authoritarian liberalism and industrial modernization citizen violence held the potential to invest the country's "suspect" populations with the full rights of the authentic citizen. Citizenship equated with inclusion in the nation, making its definition a comment about what it meant to be Mexican.

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Introduction

In 1821 Mexico gained its independence from the Spanish Empire as a result of an agreement between royalist and insurgent leaders. Although the opposing forces agreed on political autonomy they failed to reach a consensus on anything else. The royalist commander Agustín de Iturbide became the new country's first leader, but his intransigence ended any potential for compromise and polarized Mexico's political factions. As a result, Mexico remained in a state of turmoil as politics became a contest between liberal and conservative interests. This conflict lasted until 1867 and although the liberal and conservative, federalist and centralist labels do much to obscure some of the raw economic considerations that to a large extent fueled the dispute, ideological disagreements played an important role as well. At issue was the idea of the nation and Mexico's liberal and conservative elites wrangled with one another in the effort to dictate what this meant for the country's population. This disagreement culminated in the War of the Reform (1857-1861) and the French Intervention (1862-1867) in which the liberals defeated the conservatives once and for all.

From a historical perspective the idea of the nation represents an important subject for scholars investigating the complex matrix that is the relationship between a territory, state, and the people. Moreover, the nation is significant due to its ability to explain the past, present, and future. Often taken for granted as a natural entity, the nation possesses immense power to include or exclude certain groups, making its definition a discussion of its core principals as well as a statement about who comprises

its authentic members.¹ The nation's power as an idea is reflected in the wealth of multi-discipline scholarship regarding the issue. In particular, scholars of history, art, and literature treat the subject most prevalently and their contributions can be divided into two dominant camps; that of process and that of meaning.

In 1982 Benedict Anderson provided the opening salvo to discussions of the nation in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Now regarded as a classic, Anderson concerned himself with the process of national formation, something he attributed to the parallel decline of Europe's monarchial and religious organizations and the rise of print capitalism. According to Anderson's formulation, the nation held the power to promote ideas of community among disparate groups of people, "to turn chance into destiny."² This led Anderson to argue for an understanding of the nation as imagined, something more than ideology. Print capitalism such as novels and journalism figure prominently in Anderson's account since these media comprised the first two "forms of imagining" the nation.³

Although subsequent scholars are quick to acknowledge their debt to Anderson, in the 1990s historians, particularly those of Latin America pointed out significant shortcomings in *Imagined Communities*. In specific, these scholars take issue with Anderson's emphasis on the importance and presence of distinct American national identities during the independence struggles with Spain. As demonstrated by the work of scholars such as John Charles Chasteen and Sara Castro-Klären, the mechanisms for

¹ For a discussion of the nation's implicit power to include or exclude certain groups see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 1991), especially 11-12. Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), especially xiii-xiv. and Charles A. Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 7.

² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12.

³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

imagined nation-hood did not exist in Latin America at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, these scholars do accept the importance of print capitalism to disseminating nationalist ideas and cite this process at work by the mid nineteenth century.⁴ Furthermore, Anderson's portrayal of religious decline does not agree with actual circumstance in places such as Mexico. According to Claudio Lomnitz, after achieving independence in 1821, Roman Catholicism remained important to that country's sense of national identity until the late 1850s. In addition through an examination of nationalist ideas from pre-Hispanic America and Medieval Spain, Lomnitz offers a refined understanding of the process at work in Anderson's rendition.⁵ Put simply, when compared with the historical meanings of the nation it becomes clear that *Imagined Communities* is a discussion of the liberal nation and not a monolithic treatment of all nationalist understandings.

At the same time historians reevaluated Anderson's ground breaking work, scholars of literature and art contributed to the debate by asking many of the same questions as their colleagues in history. Using novels and artistic representations of the nation scholars such as Doris Somner and Stacey G. Widdifield demonstrated that in addition to describing processes of national formation, the academy needed to address what the nation meant to its members.⁶ Historians echoed this idea and as put by Chasteen and Castro-Kláren, "[o]ur great problem is not how Brazil or Ecuador came to

⁴ Sara Castro-Kláren and John Charles Chasteen's eds., *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), x.

⁵ Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 14-15, 36-43.

⁶ For a work that uses novels to excavate the meaning of Latin American nations see Doris Somner, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991). and for artistic representations see Stacey G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).

be called nations, but just what *nation* meant to Brazilians and Ecuadorians of diverse social, regional, racial, and cultural descriptions.”⁷

In the Mexican context the idea of the liberal nation gained in importance for the country’s national elites after 1867. Specifically, the liberals did not believe Mexico contained the hallmark characteristics of the nation and so, moved to transform the country into one. A consequence of this meant that the idea of development emerged as a major theme in Mexico during the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the liberals did not constitute a monolithic movement and (they united together into a broad coalition only when forced to by the Franco-conservative alliance and with this threat gone the liberals quickly dissolved into the fractious groups that existed before the war) could not agree on the shape development should take. In outlining their visions of a correct Mexican future, the country’s liberal intelligentsia defined the nation and implicitly spoke to its inclusive and exclusive ideas. Like Latin America’s other national elites, Mexican elites espoused a certain vision for the country derived from their own unique experiences. This meant that reformers did not take popular culture into account and provided solutions that often failed to seriously entertain certain features of daily life. As a result, elite visions for the nation represented idealistic propositions at best, naïve and disconnected assumptions at worst. In essence, descriptions of the shape the future should take coupled with the people who belonged there amounted to a discussion of what it meant to be Mexican. Intellectuals voiced their ideas of this sort in a variety of formats, but the novel remained among the most significant. It is important to note that although intended for a mass audience the novel remained a format limited to the national

⁷ Castro-Klären and Chasteen eds., *Beyond Imagined Communities*, xxi.

elites. The authors of Mexico's novels were unanimously members of the elite and their readership was limited due to a dearth of literacy throughout the population.

Literary scholars have long understood the ability of the novel to express the seen and unseen aspects of reality. As a "cultural organism" the novel maintains a special relevance to the idea of the nation and represents an excellent method for exploring its deeper meaning and inherent emotionalism.⁸ In Latin America, the novel emerged as a major literary expression (the highest form of literary modernity) around the same time the modern liberal nation took hold, but the two maintain a deeper relevance to each other than temporal affiliation. The nation comprised the fundamental topic addressed by the nineteenth-century's novels and the format was one of the best genres available for "imagining" the nation.⁹ In addition to describing the nationalist aspects they perceived around them, authors channeled their aspirations for the nation into their novels and spread these ideas among the reading public. In essence, Romantic authors such as Altamirano and Guillermo Prieto—another celebrated Mexican author of the period—invented the founding ideas of their nations (ideas that endeavored to overcome the divisive legacy of the colonial past) in their texts and gave birth to the "guiding fictions" that might hold the country's disparate groups together.¹⁰

⁸ For the significance of the novel to the idea of the nation and its ability to capture elements of reality outside of other sources see John S. Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel: A Nation's Search for Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), ix.

⁹ Anderson cites the novel and the newspaper as the first two forms of "imagining" that provided the "technical means for representing the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation." Anderson's emphasis. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24-25.

¹⁰ For a discussion of this process in the Argentine context see Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991). Shumway defines guiding fiction as the national mythologies that were created "with the effect of building a sense of national belongingness and destiny." 1.

The fact that the authors of Mexico's romances created national unity along liberal lines within the texts of their works despite the fact that nothing of the sort existed in reality, demonstrates their desire for such a realization to occur. Due to their absence in reality, Romantic longing for ends of this sort linger in the "political imagination" of the readers, forming a "blueprint that guides the projects of national formation."¹¹

Although a novel's meaning cannot be fixed due to the fact that reading involves the reader in the process of creating meaning, the idea that dominant readings are capable is not without merit. Authors of Mexico's national romances included within their texts guidelines for interpretation and these point to a conscious effort on the part of the author to impart specific ideas about the nation to the reader. From this it is apparent that utilizing the nineteenth-century Romantic novel as a historical text represents a sound approach to discerning the inner reality of the liberal nation-building effort.¹²

A complement to this involves the traveler's account. First pioneered by scholars such as Rhys Isaac in *The Transformation of Virginia: Community, Religion, and Authority, 1740-1790*, his 1982 study of Baptist evangelism, the use of travelers' accounts was introduced into the Mexican school by William H. Beezley.¹³ Drawing on the methods introduced by historians such as Carlo Ginzburg and Robert Darnton, Beezley demonstrated the value of this type of source in his 1987 *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*.¹⁴ Beezley found the travelers' pithy

¹¹ Fernando Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading: Imagining Nations/Romancing History in Spanish America," in Castro-Klären and Chasteen's eds., *Beyond Imagined Communities*, 134.

¹² Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 121.

¹³ Isaac, Rhys, *The Transformation of Virginia: Community, Religion, and Authority, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

¹⁴ For two works regarded as pioneering in the field of cultural history and their novel use of sources, including travelers' accounts to extract the echoes of the popular classes see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and The Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York:

anecdotes to be of special value for the insight they imparted about Porfirian attitudes toward traditional Mexico and modernity.¹⁵ The period Beezley considered offered no shortage of source material. Although the genre of the traveler most famously began in Latin America with Alexander von Humboldt, Mexico's great travel boom did not commence until the Díaz regime.¹⁶ During the Porfiriato—the period between 1876 and 1911 characterized by the authoritarian rule of Porfirio Díaz—foreign travelers flocked to Mexico at the express invitation of the government. Thanks to the country's rapidly expanding railroad lines, travelers gained greater access to Mexico, some even left the lines and ventured in deeper via horse and mule back.

The travelers arrived in Mexico for numerous reasons. While some were there as industrial developers and investors eager to turn a profit, others traversed the country in search of the bonanzas that the independence-era mines were certain to hold. Journalists made up the largest contingent and they contributed to national and local papers back home. The smallest group included scientists and Protestant missionaries, both on a moral crusade in their own right. From their published accounts the travelers appear as little more than observers, but their reasons for touring Mexico demonstrate their desire to change the country in some way. Like Humboldt before, these travelers maintained an imperial perception and served as agents of modernity. Although Europeans did make their presence felt, the overwhelming majority of visitors were Americans, a direct

Penguin Books, 1982). and Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

¹⁵ In his introduction Beezley noted that travelers' accounts were useful as they "did not take for granted Mexico's everyday activities, food, clothing, work habits, family arrangements, and housing." in William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), x.

¹⁶ Humboldt, Alexander von, *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*, trans. Jason Wilson (London: Penguin Books, 1995).

reflection of that country's geographical proximity, dominant financial position vis-à-vis Britain, and the lingering distaste over the French Intervention. While some travelers hoped to find an environment devoid of progress and reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, others described a wealthy land in immediate need of American exploitation.¹⁷ Writing for the general public back home, the observers described opportunities for business, Anglo-Saxon superiority, the difficulties of Protestant incursions into a Catholic country, essential information for tourists, and the political and social progress of the Mexican people. Either way, travelers to Mexico described social customs too mundane for native authors to mention, making the foreign account of special importance to the historian.¹⁸ Moreover, travelers described many of the same things as did the authors of Mexico's national romances, making their accounts an excellent source for converging evidence and drawing conclusions about the Porfiriato.

This thesis draws upon the rich tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship previously mentioned with the aim of shedding light on the liberal nation-building project in late nineteenth-century Mexico. Like today's scholars of literature, art, and history, Altamirano and the travelers asked many of the same questions about development and the nation. As the lines drawn between the disciplines are artificial, it is appropriate to consider novels as historical texts with the same merit as the published accounts of first-hand observers. In specific, this thesis considers the ideas presented in Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's—an indigenous intellectual and writer of the Reform and Porfirian

¹⁷ For a concise discussion of American attitudes toward Mexico see John Charles Chasteen and James A. Wood eds., *Problems in Modern Latin American History: Sources and Interpretations* (Lanham: SR Books, 2005), 163, 165, 171.

¹⁸ For the importance of the influence of culture and environment on perception as well as the significance of the outsiders' observations see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), especially 59-92.

periods—1888 Romantic novel *El Zarco: Episodios de la Vida Mexicana en 1861-1863*, and juxtaposes them with the published observations of contemporary American travelers to Mexico. As the main source for this study, *El Zarco* provides a transcript of nationalism and an alternative means for looking at the Porfirian nation-building project. The ideas Altamirano included in the novel constitute a vision that never came to pass, but does much to clarify the impact positivist ideas exerted on the liberal effort to construct a nation and modernize Mexico.

The travelers' accounts serve as the proverbial historical ground to this. Although no less Romantic than Altamirano in their world-view, the published accounts provide a glimpse of the Porfirian project as it occurred in addition to as it was imagined. In describing their vision for Mexico, travelers such as Charles Fletcher Lummis, W.E. Carson, John Frederick Finnerty, Wallace Gillpatrick, and others provide an account of what Altamirano was reacting against. Moreover, the travelers, who were selected due to their discussions of themes relevant to Altamirano, previous standing as celebrated authors, or the unique reason for their presence in Mexico, lack much of the sympathy for the traditional Mexico celebrated by Altamirano. As a result, their observations are all the more revealing given their declared personal biases. Taken together, the view these sources provide demonstrates the contested nature of development among Mexico's liberal elites during the late nineteenth-century; that defining the nation was a creative process involving ideas about the past, present, and future. The work of Altamirano and the contemporary travelers make this much clear: in outlining the future shape Mexico should take in light of the past and present, intellectuals, both native and foreign wrote the nation into their texts with the intent of making their respective audiences aware of

Mexico's potential, as well as helping their visions come to pass. Finally, this thesis argues that from the competing visions of the nation and its development emerged specific categories for contesting development and inclusion in the nation. In this respect, the foremost category was the citizen.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the liberals in Mexico agreed that the country lacked the attributes that comprised the modern liberal nation-state. This perception prompted intellectuals in Mexico to craft a cultural approach to fostering nationalist sentiments among the popular classes, an aspect that speaks to their emphasis on the individual. Nevertheless, divisions among the liberals increased as foreign ideas took root among the ruling elites. The influx of these new ideas, compounded with the difficult lessons Mexico's liberal leadership drew from the painful experiences of the past, encouraged a realignment of the government's efforts in regards to the nation-building project. Instead of focusing on reforming the individual and working to create individual citizens, the government poured its resources into industrial development and social control initiatives that contradicted the constitutional principals the government swore to uphold. This produced a feud among Mexico's liberal factions that often assumed the dimensions of a generational divide as the older Reform liberals took issue with the younger cohort's approach to government and national development.

A quick survey of the relationship between Ignacio Manuel Altamirano and Justo Sierra—the Porfirian Minister of Education and a fellow author—demonstrates the point. Both men were widely acknowledged for their intellectual prowess and standing among the liberals in general. Furthermore, both men expressed the need for Mexico to become a nation in the liberal sense and worked to create an educational system to accomplish

this goal. Finally, as the younger member, Justo Sierra received his training from none other than Altamirano. The two were well acquainted and cooperated on several projects during the Porfiriato. Nevertheless, Altamirano and Sierra became vocal opponents as their interpretations of development varied. While Sierra adopted the new scientific approach and advocated European immigration to help create a “national soul” Altamirano rejected such notions and advocated indigenous inclusion in the nation.¹⁹ In addition, Altamirano actively experimented with methods for building the nation and honestly appraised the country’s excluded elements. When examining the rural countryside, Altamirano reached the conclusion that Mexico contained a large Indian population that reveled in their popular Catholic celebrations. Although a liberal who retained a certain amount of scorn for the Catholic Church, Altamirano highlighted the celebrations as something authentic to Mexico. As such, Altamirano took issue with those who sought to exclude the country’s indigenous populations from the nation.

Altamirano expressed these ideas in his (1888) Romantic novel *El Zarco*. Chapter 2 argues that *El Zarco* represents his vision for Mexico and a critique of its development. Written at the exact time the Díaz administration entered into a full-fledged dictatorship guided by the scientific approach to government, *El Zarco* served as a warning from the older generation to contemporary events. In addition to describing his vision for Mexico and outlining where the country went wrong, Altamirano provided a guide for national salvation that ascribed the critical role to the citizen. As a core component of the modern, liberal nation-state, Mexico’s intellectuals understood the need to create a homogenous

¹⁹ Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People* quoted from E. Bradford Burns and Julie A. Charlip eds., *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History*, seventh edition (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002), 166.

body of citizens in their drive to overcome the divisions left by the colonial era. The cultural project that took shape after 1867 was a primary expression of this understanding. In theory, the citizen constituted an equalizing force in society, but in reality, ideas about the citizen reinforced the colonial legacy of strict racial and class hierarchies. As a Romantic novel, *El Zarco* dealt with idealized types and argued for Altamirano's vision of Mexico as a rural and inherently liberal nation comprised of duty-conscious citizens who professed a strong indigenous identity. Nothing was farther from the Porfirian version of development expressed by men such as Justo Sierra, making *El Zarco* a discussion and indictment of the Díaz administration's approach to national development.

In the novel, Altamirano proposed the citizen as the source of the nation's salvation. Although the citizen was many things, including thrifty and hardworking, Altamirano demonstrated that a critical role of the citizen involved community defense. Put simply, it remained the duty of Mexico's citizens to defend the nation from its enemies, with violence if necessary. In *El Zarco*, Altamirano is concerned primarily with domestic enemies who represented obstacles to the realization of his utopian vision, such as bandits and corrupt government officials. Although his employment of citizen violence in the novel demonstrates the correlation between the two, the overarching racial agenda of *El Zarco* obscures the presence of citizenship violence. The significance of this becomes clear once juxtaposed with contemporary ideas about the citizen's relationship to the state and the comments left by foreign travelers to Mexico.

During the Porfiriato, the authoritarian liberal state erected by the Juárez and Tejada administrations reached maturity and brought about a greater degree of domestic

stability than previously possible. By establishing order the government aspired to create the conditions necessary to promoting industrial development. As such, social control remained an important emphasis for the Díaz regime. Freed from the desperation of the previous administrations that saw impending doom around every corner, the Porfirian government prioritized industrialization over the immediate creation of a homogenous body of citizens. Instead, the government adhered to ideas that posited popular-class evolution into citizens in no less than two generations. Participation in the nation's industrial progress and education in capitalist mores offered the possibility for speeding this process along. In the meantime, the government aggressively pursued its modernization program and often times, this was done at the cost of the country's rural peasantry. Driven by a vision of Mexico that entailed a nation crisscrossed by the railroad, the Porfirians did not hesitate to label the country's more stubborn groups as obstacles to progress and remove them from their land. In a context such as this the government had no room for ideas about citizenship that spoke to his duty to defend the community and nation from outside or internal aggression. Instead, the government equated citizenship with those who furthered its own modernization agenda. In the words of Justo Sierra "[w]hosoever helps to attain this goal is a patriot; whosoever places obstacles in the path is an enemy."²⁰

As discussed in Chapter 3, travelers to Mexico evaluated and commented upon many of the same things Altamirano discussed in *El Zarco*. Although they expressed many of the same ideas that Altamirano did in regards to the unlimited potential of the landscape, foreign observers did not share his vision of the nation. The accounts reveal

²⁰ Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, 166.

that the travelers invested the future of the nation in Porfirian-style urban development. If anything, the travelers lamented the passing of the quaint, old, picturesque Mexico and while one observer recorded some hesitation regarding the “selling of the heritage of Montezuma on the installment plan” he concluded that in the end, progress of this sort, “in responsible hands,” might not be that bad.²¹ Despite the fact that travelers to Mexico did not agree with or see much evidence of Altamirano’s national vision, their comments do reveal a strong correlation between citizenship and violence, something he alluded to in *El Zarco*. For them this relationship contained the potential to transcend Porfirian racial and class boundaries. In specific, the travelers reveal that in a context of authoritarian liberalism, modernization, and social theories that placed Mexico’s indigenous and “lower class” groups outside of the nation, violence represented a method for these groups to negotiate their position in the nation and claim ownership of their status as authentic Mexican citizens. This conclusion highlights the significance of the national vision outlined in Romantic novels in general and speaks to *El Zarco*’s importance to understanding the Porfiriato.

The goal of the cultural project that intellectuals such as Altamirano participated in was to promote nationalist sentiments among the popular classes and help develop the liberal nation. In outlining his vision for the Mexican nation, a vision that contrasted starkly with the official Porfirian interpretation, Altamirano demonstrated the contested nature of the nation among the liberal elites. Furthermore, the prevalence of developmentalist ideas indicates that the meaning of the nation was negotiated through the language of development. For Altamirano, national salvation resided with the

²¹ William Henry Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona: Being a New and Revised Edition of Old Mexico and Her Lost Provinces* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 64.

citizen—an idealized type who would do whatever it took to bring his rural vision to fruition. This idealized vision transcended the Romantic novel and was in evidence on the ground as the travelers' accounts reveal. Therefore, from the language of development emerges a clearer picture of the citizen's relationship to the nation and his importance to demonstrating inclusion. At a time when the government sought to downplay such ideas, the citizen remained an important concept to arguing about development, national vision, and what it meant to be Mexican

The Quest for a Liberal Nation: Positivism, Altamirano, and the Cultural Project

In the aftermath of the French Intervention, the Mexican elite set aside their previous differences and came together in the effort to transform their country and its people into a liberal nation-state. Now reconciled, the elite approached Mexico from the top-down and erected a state apparatus capable of imposing the liberal vision of progress upon the popular classes.²² The authoritarian liberal state that reached maturity during the Porfiriato pacified most of the country and incorporated it into Mexico City's orbit.²³ With domestic and political stability achieved, the elite worked to set in place the necessary economic and cultural prerequisites for creating their vision of a modern Mexico.²⁴ To this end, the elite enlisted a variety of intellectual disciplines to serve their national quest, including the sciences and liberal arts.

The national elites targeted much of this activity toward the popular classes as their liberal faith promoted an interpretation of plebian culture that viewed it as an obstacle to be overcome for the good of the people and that of the nation.²⁵ When matched with new scientific understandings of society and the state's partnership with the

²² For an example of scholarship that understands elite reconciliation as an integral feature of building and imposing an authoritarian apparatus upon the popular classes with the ultimate aim of creating a high degree of social control see, Christopher Brent Frazer, "Imagining Bandits: Cultural Struggle in Mexico, From Independence to Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2003).

²³ For a discussion of the extension of Mexico City's power outward and its subjection of the periphery to its authority as well as the consolidation of the Díaz regime see Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2001).

²⁴ For the development of the national and international arena in "Western" thought and its correlation to war and market expansion see Nicholas Onuf and Peter Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). For a study that broadly discusses liberal ascendancy and its conflict with traditional institutions in Latin America see Robert H. Jackson ed., *Liberals, the Church and Indian Peasants: Corporate lands and the Challenge of Reform in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

²⁵ Colin M. MacLachlan and William H. Beezley eds., *El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999), 77.

middle classes—their heightened sense of morality intact—the elite denied popular Mexico’s status as a culture altogether.²⁶ As a consequence of this view, the elite arrived at the conclusion that only through the eradication of a traditional culture considered backward and retrograde could a modern national culture be created. In the drive to habilitate the popular classes and transform them into productive citizens of the nation, the elite made education their weapon of choice. While the state designed its system of national education to inculcate productive values into the popular classes, the country’s intelligentsia produced artistic works designed to do the same, and after 1867 Mexico experienced a cultural renaissance in the realm of the visual and literary arts; the most pervasive theme of this flowering was the nation.²⁷ Understanding the importance of a unified national culture to the liberal nation, Mexico’s intellectual elite worked to unite the population through culture and transform a “bickering and seething mass into an orderly and homogenous political body.”²⁸

Cultural pursuits comprised a major facet of the national project that preoccupied the liberal elite during the periods of the Restored Republic and the Porfiriato, representing an important corollary to the state’s economic agenda. The elite reconciliation that allowed for much of the national consolidation occurred as a direct

²⁶ For a discussion of scientific criminology in Mexico and its negative influence on elite perceptions of popular culture see Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1913* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). For a description of the state’s partnership with the middle classes and the importance of morality in class conflict see William E. French, *A Peaceful and Working People: Manners, Morals, and Class Formation in Northern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). For insight into the process by which Mexico’s elite came to scorn traditional Mexican culture and deny its status as a culture altogether see Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, especially 6-8.

²⁷ For a discussion of the government’s system of national education and its goals during the Restored Republic and Porfiriato see Mary Kay Vaughn, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982). For the importance of cultural production to liberal national agendas in the postwar era see Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National*,

²⁸ Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 3.

result of the cultural renaissance, granting it political significance outside the intellectual realm.²⁹ Yet this reconciliation was not total and it responded to the vicissitudes of the country's political and intellectual life.³⁰ As demonstrated by the peacetime breakup of the *Juárista* coalition—the alliance of liberal factions that defeated Maximilian's Empire—Mexican liberalism was far from monolithic.³¹ With the end of the French Intervention the impact of the country's chronic instability upon the thinking of many of Mexico's liberals became apparent in the heavy-handed tactics of the Juárez administration.³² Perceiving many of Mexico's problems as emanating from a lack of order and stability, the liberals of this stripe advocated repressive tactics and attempted to amend the Constitution of 1857 to legitimate the use of force.³³ Although initially unsuccessful, the efforts of the Juárez administration in this regard paved the way for the full-fledged dictatorship of the later Porfirian era.³⁴

In contrast to this group, stood the *puros* (pure liberals) who espoused a radical faith in attributes now understood as classically republican.³⁵ To a large extent the *puros*

²⁹ For a discussion of the interplay between literature and politics and their role in promoting the elite reconciliation after the French Intervention see two works by John S. Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, especially 93-93 and *Narrative Innovation and Political Change in Mexico* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), especially 102-104. See also Frazer, "Imagining Bandits," 79 and Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 43, 40.

³⁰ For a study of the issues that contributed to the divisive political landscape of the Restored Republic through the Porfiriato see Laurens Ballard Perry, *Juárez and Díaz: Machine Politics in Mexico* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978), especially 9-32.

³¹ For a discussion of Mexican liberalism's varied nature from independence through the Porfiriato see two works by Charles A. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1823-1853* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) and *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

³² Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 3-4. See also Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, eds., *The Oxford History of Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 275-276.

³³ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 72-73. Frazer, "Imagining Bandits," 21, 38-39, 67-68, 72-73. and Perry, *Juárez and Díaz*, 40.

³⁴ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 75, 94.

³⁵ For *puro* agendas and their status as classical republicans as well as their nature vis-à-vis official liberalism see D.A. Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 20, no. 1 (1988).

represented the older generation of liberals in Mexico and they rejected material and scientific solutions in favor of an approach that emphasized the importance of reforming the individual and creating citizens of the republic.³⁶ Guided by this extreme faith the *puros* stood against the Juárez administration's efforts to concentrate executive authority.³⁷ Nevertheless, with the influx of positivist thought in the late 1860s and its maturation during the 1880s Mexico's *puro* liberals found themselves increasingly isolated from their intellectual colleagues; ideological conflict resulted. Despite their initial support for Porfirio Díaz against Benito Juárez, the *puros* faded from the scene as the younger and more scientifically prone generation came of age.³⁸

In their conflict with the Juárez and Díaz administrations the *puros* demonstrated that the stakes were much higher than political power and influence. Although the political quarrels of the postwar era encompassed numerous issues such as government employment and amnesty for Maximilian's former supporters, much of the dispute involved deeper, more fundamental questions. In a context of development and state consolidation the liberals of the Restored Republic wrangled amongst themselves over which themes were most important and deserving of emphasis.³⁹ Mexico's intellectuals agreed that the country was in dire need of development, but the nature of that development served to divide them. In short, the liberal elite maintained similar, but different visions as to the proper course national development should take. During the

³⁶ For liberalism's change after 1867, its incorporation into an official liberal tradition with positivist influences, and the generational dispute that resulted see Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, especially 3-4, 25, 27-29, and 187-190.

³⁷ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 72-73. Perry, *Juárez and Díaz*, 40-44.

³⁸ Perry, *Juárez and Díaz*, 33. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 25, 28. and Edward N. Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Landscapes and Legends," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 20, no. 1 (2004), 54.

³⁹ Perry, *Juárez and Díaz*, 12-22.

Porfiriato, the *puro* vision of the individual citizen succumbed to scientific notions of modernity and industrial development.

No figure better represents the tension created by this ideological shift than Ignacio Manuel Altamirano. A fervent nationalist, Altamirano rose to prominence with the country's second generation of liberals during the Revolution of Ayutla (1855)—the struggle that ousted once and for all, Mexico's national *caudillo* Antonio López de Santa Anna—and was one of the key participants in the cultural revival that commenced in the aftermath of the French Intervention. During the Restored Republic (1867-1876) and Porfirian (1876-1911) periods Altamirano made a significant contribution to the liberal state and nation-building project, but as a result of his *puro* inclinations the intellectual found himself increasingly isolated by the positivist invasion. Nevertheless, Altamirano's work remains significant for several reasons. Beyond the usual contributions Altamirano is credited with, his work, and the conflicts it created for him, demonstrates the partisan nature of the elite struggle to define the nation. While he operated in numerous capacities for the authoritarian liberal state, Altamirano is also responsible for producing numerous works that challenged official interpretations of the nation and the foundations upon which it claimed to rest. Finally, Altamirano's written legacy not only sheds light on the cultural nation-building project undertaken by the liberals of 1867-1911, but provides insight into the uneven and changing nature of the developmental landscape. The questions that Altamirano and his contemporaries wrestled with, incorporated into their work, and fought over comprised and are indicative of a severely contested debate to define the citizen and his relationship to the broader nation. At a time when Porfirian development represented the culmination of the

modernist ideal Altamirano's conception stood as an alternative vision for the nation; as progress of a different sort. Altamirano's cultural contributions to the liberal nation-building project and his conflict with the newer interpretation of modernity are the subjects of this chapter.

Early Life and Career

Born to indigenous-speaking parents in Tixtla, Guerrero on November 13, 1834, Altamirano spent his early years assisting local artisans, but boredom with village life prompted him to choose school instead of selecting a trade.⁴⁰ In 1849 Altamirano received a scholarship to the *Instituto Literario de Toluca*, where he came under the guidance of Ignacio Ramírez, a radical liberal and the school's founder.⁴¹ Ramírez introduced him to liberal ideas and as a result, Altamirano remained faithful to the philosophy for the rest of his life. When the political climate changed, Altamirano left Toluca and eeked out a living by accepting small-time teaching jobs at various schools and made his way through the Mexican interior. At this time Altamirano became familiar with the people; their needs, problems, and possible solutions.⁴² In 1854 Altamirano "studied, wrote, and fought his way to Mexico City" where he enrolled in the *Colegio de Letrán* to finish his philosophy degree but his participation in the 1855 cause of Ayutla interrupted his studies.⁴³ It would not be the last time Altamirano set aside his pen and picked up a gun to advance the liberal cause. Altamirano also served during the War of the Reform (1857-1861)—the first round of two struggles launched by Mexico's

⁴⁰ Chris N. Nacci, *Ignacio Manuel Altamirano* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1970), 22.

⁴¹ Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 29.

⁴² Nacci, *Altamirano*, 26.

⁴³ Mamie Goen, "Altamirano's Interpretation of Nature in His Native Mexico" (M.A. Thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1939), 11. and Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 53.

conservatives in protest of the liberal's *La Reforma* program—and the French Intervention, experiences that introduced him to Mexico's most powerful liberal leaders.⁴⁴ With the war's end Altamirano participated in the country's cultural life and played a direct role in facilitating the postwar literary revival.

In November of 1867 a friend of Altamirano's invited him to attend a gathering for a reading of local compositions with the intent of receiving criticism from the audience. The party was such a success that the participants decided to make the gathering a weekly affair.⁴⁵ At what eventually became known as the *veladas*, Mexico City's literary elite gathered to recite their own work and comment with the others so that everyone might grow artistically. Mexico's most talented literary figures attended the *veladas* and Altamirano stood above them all. Indeed, the most celebrated figures of late nineteenth-century Mexico were there, including Ignacio Ramírez, Justo Sierra, and Porfirio Díaz. At the *veladas* Altamirano established himself as the “guiding spirit” and “*maestro*” of his generation, assuming the role of elder teacher.⁴⁶ In the end there were only seven *veladas* but they were important all the same as they brought a generation of writers together and provided the opportunity to launch future projects; one such project to emerge from the *veladas* was the short-lived but important periodical *El Renacimiento*.⁴⁷

Conceived of as a-political, *El Renacimiento* was created from the inclusive spirit of the *veladas* and was edited by Altamirano with the help of those from the opposite persuasion such as Roa Bárcena, a man whose conservative sympathies and service to

⁴⁴ Nacci, *Altamirano*, 31. and Wright-Rios, “Indian Saints and Nation-States,” 53.

⁴⁵ Nacci, *Altamirano*, 33.

⁴⁶ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 94.

⁴⁷ Nacci, *Altamirano*, 38, 44-45.

Maximilian's Empire were broadly acknowledged. Indeed, historians cite the formation of *El Renacimiento* as one of the most significant steps toward healing Mexico of its fratricidal legacy. Furthermore, historians attribute the birth of authentic Mexican literature to Altamirano and *El Renacimiento*.⁴⁸ The periodical was the institutionalized expression of these ideas and although short-lived, it was enormously influential in advancing the cultural project and promoting national awareness among the liberal elites. *El Renacimiento* brought the country's foremost intellectuals together in the effort to use culture to transform Mexico into a liberal nation and directly revived the country's literary tradition from the catharsis imposed by the necessities of fighting the war. The cost of paper provides a good measure for evaluating the level of revival produced by the journal. Due to the activity *El Renacimiento* created, Mexico ran out of printing paper, forcing the cost to soar.⁴⁹

Altamirano the Nation-Builder

Intellectual in nature the elite nation-building project involved many new disciplines that emerged to suit the needs of the liberal nation-state. While cartography and geography scientifically proved the nation's existence in addition to denoting its physical location and demonstrating what resided within its boundaries, history invested the difficult past with meaning and linked the country's liberal struggle with that of the nation, rendering an official liberal tradition in the process.⁵⁰ Working in tandem with

⁴⁸ Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 41. Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 34-36, 43, 93-94. and *Narrative Innovation and Political Change*, 102-104. Frazer, "Imagining Bandits," 79. Goen, "Altamirano's Interpretation of Nature," 7. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 8-9. Nacci, *Altamirano*, 43-45. Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 40. Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 54.

⁴⁹ Nacci, *Altamirano*, 47.

⁵⁰ For the Mexican state and its use of cartographic conventions to scientifically justify the nation's existence independent of its exploration see Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State*

this, literature charted and explained the way forward, providing a roadmap for progress. After 1867, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano was involved in all of these activities. In the early 1880s Altamirano headed *La Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, the agency that directed the government's surveying activities and took extraordinary steps to define Mexico's territorial boundaries. This agency employed cartographers such as Antonio García Cubas who utilized mathematic conventions such as the graticule to scientifically justify Mexico's discovery, not creation. Using the map to represent Mexico visually, Cubas argued that "the nation-state appeared as an objective reality, existing in advance of its own exploration."⁵¹ Maps allowed the government a normalized, "readable stage" from which it could regulate space. But maps represented only a part of such "*state fixations*."⁵² Understanding what existed in the space those maps contained served as the corollary to this project.⁵³ As head of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, Altamirano worked to fill in the gaps, compiling detailed cartographic lists of Mexican villages, their territorial expanse, and their linguistic and ethnic makeup.⁵⁴

Fixations and Fugitive landscapes (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), especially 34. For myth and the creation of the liberal tradition during the Porfiriato see Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico*. For history's link to the nation-building process and the official liberal tradition see Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism*. and for the cooption of Mexican history with liberal history see Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and The Mexican Reforma."

⁵¹ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 34. Antonio García Cubas was Mexico's most able cartographer whose efforts during the 1850s and after provided widely-cited and acknowledged maps of the country. Cubas serves as a primary example of intellectuals who helped imagine the nation through their work.

⁵² Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 8.

⁵³ For an example of state mentality and its emphasis on collecting information in contexts of development among other things see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *Memoria Presentada A La Sociedad Mexicana De Geografía Y Estadística* (México: Imprenta De Francisco Diaz De Leon, 1887). His descriptions of maps and their contents figure prominently throughout.

Altamirano made further contributions to the national project through his work as an historian. During the nineteenth century a new historical sense emerged in Mexico. Specifically, this pertained to Mexico's pre-Hispanic civilizations and their relationship to the broader nation. Moreover, Mexicans employed history to make sense of and give meaning to the traumas of the recent past as demonstrated by Gabino Barreda's *Oración cívica* (1867), in which he applied Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy to Mexican history, leading him to interpret the dawning of a new scientific age in that year.⁵⁵ Altamirano shared in this endeavor, though with different results. Understanding the correlation between history and identity, he sought to produce national histories that instructed Mexicans in the glorious deeds of the past. Altamirano believed that by documenting the acts of those he considered Mexico's heroes, the popular classes might be made to understand the proper role and duty of the citizen. Moreover, with his former mentor Ignacio Ramírez, Altamirano sought to make liberal history synonymous with Mexican history. To this end, Altamirano co-opted figures such as Father Miguel Hidalgo and Vicente Guerrero as heroes of the liberal struggle that commenced with the 1810 *Grito de Dolores*—Father Miguel Hidalgo's midnight call to rebellion that ignited the eleven-year independence war—and continued in the liberal state that emerged after Maximilian's defeat.⁵⁶

Cooperating with Mexico's other prominent literary figures (some of whom he personally trained) Altamirano contributed to the decade-long project that resulted in the 1888-1889 publication of *México a través de los siglos* (Mexico Across the Centuries), a five volume history of the nation. Commissioned by the government, *México a través de*

⁵⁵ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 73-77, Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism*, 8.

⁵⁶ Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 28, 35-37.

los siglos was the first history to formally express the country's liberal tradition. Of as much importance, the series devoted the first two volumes to the pre-Hispanic and colonial eras respectively, making *México a través de los siglos* the first work to grant equal credit to Mexico's indigenous and Spanish origins. The three other volumes documented the liberal struggle against the colonial legacy and conservative reaction, linking the Mexican nation with liberal progress. *México a través de los siglos* represented a major step toward fulfilling Altamirano's dream of a national literature and his connection with the work is far from small. Born out of the spirit of the *veladas*, four out of six of its authors contributed to *El Renacimiento*; it was something Altamirano was well acquainted with.⁵⁷

The marriage of Mexican history with liberal ideals, especially those of individual liberty, equality, and service to the *patria*—an old Creole term loosely meaning “the country”—linked Mexico's founding not only to Hidalgo but to the core values of the French Revolution, the very genesis of the liberal struggle against conservative monarchism and its Catholic bedfellow.⁵⁸ Altamirano's demonstration through historical analysis of Mexico's close proximity to the French Revolution underpinned his country's equal claim to modern civilization in its highest incarnation. Furthermore, Altamirano's historical template allowed him a venue to discuss the role of the citizen, what constituted the citizen, and the proper ideals he should strive for. In practice, this amounted to a *puro* criticism of the Juárez administration's heavy-handed tactics and emphasis on economic prosperity at the expense of individual liberty. Nevertheless, education and fostering nationalist sentiments remained a priority for Altamirano in his use of history.

⁵⁷Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism*, 9-10.

⁵⁸Brading, “Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma,” 28.

Complementing his work to frame a liberal historical tradition, Altamirano dealt with Mexico's indigenous population in his approach to fostering national sentiments. During the nineteenth century the intelligentsia confronted Mexico's dual racial heritage as never before.⁵⁹ In the broad scheme of things, Mexico's pre-Hispanic past was "resurrected dead" by the intelligentsia, allowing them to recognize the accomplishments of the ancient civilizations from a safe temporal distance.⁶⁰ In practice, this served to fit the indigenous past into the broader nation without extending the same recognition to Mexico's contemporary indigenous cultures still considered backward and retrograde by much of the elite.⁶¹ In contrast to this Altamirano did not feel threatened by Mexico's contemporary Indians and he took a different approach in his evaluation of them. Moreover, Altamirano's liberalism drove him to consider them in new ways.

Composed individually in the early 1880s and published together in 1884, *Paisajes y leyendas: Costumbres y tradiciones de México* stands as Altamirano's honest appraisal of indigenous culture and its position in the broader nation. From the safety provided by the *costumbrista* format—a literary genre, containing elements of history, fiction, satire, and journalism that scholars note provides the author with a safe avenue to make claims about larger power relations through nuanced analysis of seemingly trivial daily practices in Latin American societies lacking basic freedoms of expression—Altamirano evaluated urban and rural society against modernity and Catholicism.⁶²

⁵⁹ Castro-Klären and Chasteen eds., *Beyond Imagined Communities*, xvi-xvii. Fernando Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading" in *Beyond Imagined Communities*, 134-135. Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 4-8.

⁶⁰ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 37.

⁶¹ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 38..

⁶² Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 55, 48-54.

While scornful of Catholic expression and what he considered backward elements in close proximity to Mexico City, Altamirano adjusted his attitude as his proximity to the capital decreased. In Mexico's remote villages Altamirano portrayed the Indians as naturally inclined toward liberty and admired their popular Catholic celebrations as authentic Mexican traditions. Furthermore, he understood the indigenous love of freedom and drive to preserve local autonomy as evidence of their inherent liberalism. Altamirano believed that popular Catholic expressions might transcend regional boundaries and provide a means for promoting the national project.⁶³ Overall, Altamirano believed that religion should take the earthly needs of the population into consideration and make the issue of social justice a priority.⁶⁴ Often critical of the clergy and its approach to a "miracle-obsessed" population, Altamirano's attitude toward Catholicism appears more favorable in the rural context of popular celebration.⁶⁵ Essentially, *Paisajes y leyendas* constitutes Altamirano's experiment with the possibility of "Indian-centered nationalism"—certainly not a popular prospect at the time.⁶⁶ This search for a "cultural cornerstone" is striking for it reveals Altamirano attempting to assemble a "modern Mexican nationalism" from Indians and popular Catholicism, two aspects many liberals considered "unmodern ingredients."⁶⁷ While the broad intellectual

⁶³ Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 52-52.

⁶⁴ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 103. and *Narrative Innovation and Political Change*, 104-105.

⁶⁵ Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 57.

⁶⁶ Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 47.

⁶⁷ Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 48-49, 51, 61. Due to this *Paisajes y Leyendas* exhibits characteristics common to the *indigenismo* movement that emerged out of the 1910 Revolution, making Altamirano a potential architect of this Indian-centered movement. *Indigenismo* is the term commonly used to describe the Revolutionary nationalist expression that achieved prominence in the 1920s-1940s as a result of the state-building initiatives of the revolutionary governments. Although not monolithic, *indigenismo* celebrated Mexico's indigenous past and recognized the equality of the nation's Indians with its mestizos. It has been argued that *indigenismo* represented an attempt by the intelligentsia to remove the indigenous identity from the Indians and transform them into mestizo Mexicans. Ibid, 54, 64-65.

impact of *Paisajes y leyendas* remains unclear, Altamirano's promotion of the novel and nationalist themes in literature remains much more certain.

The novel came of age as a literary medium during the nineteenth century. In Mexico as elsewhere after the 1860s, the novel remained primarily the domain of the liberals in general, and Romantics in specific.⁶⁸ From its eighteenth-century beginning in Europe the Romantic Movement traveled to Latin America where local conditions proved fertile for its spread. The independence wars (Romantic in their own right) fueled the genre's growth and in their wake Romanticism became the life-style of the nascent political class. Working to promote a national culture or reacting to political tyrants, the Romantics made an effort to overcome the forces of barbarism in the Americas.⁶⁹ In its Spanish American manifestation the Romantic novel constituted a love story of idealized conventions and polarized characters. National romances worked as a "rhetorical strategy of inclusion and exclusion" that mirrored the reality of the contemporary hierarchical social structure.⁷⁰ The genre actively participated in the "cultural configurations" of Latin American nations and demonstrated a desire, not the existence of, a homogenous citizenry and a united nation.⁷¹ The new sense of history was important to the development of the romantic novel as demonstrated by the presence of a teleological view and liberal inspiration. The Romantic novel rose to prominence in

⁶⁸ Originating in England, the Romantic format emerged among certain poetic communities as a protest against the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution. In France, the end of the Revolution and Napoleonic military glory that the Bourbon restoration signaled, disheartened intellectuals there who experimented with the Romantic melancholy tone. The movement was withdrawn and represented a shift away from conformity among the European intelligentsia, but was also a reaction against the neoclassic style of the eighteenth century. From Seymour Menton, *The Spanish American Short Story: A Critical Anthology* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 1.

⁶⁹ Menton, *The Spanish American Short Story*, 1.

⁷⁰ Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 131-132.

⁷¹ Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 132.

Latin America after 1850 and in Mexico this was due in large part to the work of Altamirano.⁷² While not the first Mexican to utilize the novel, Altamirano contributed to the way in which it was used, added Romanticism to Mexico's literary tradition, and aided Mexican authors in understanding the importance of focusing on their own country.⁷³ For Altamirano, the most obvious means of representing authentic Mexico involved the landscape.

In the 1830s Argentina's Esteban Echeverría began experimenting with local imagery in his poems. His use of the native landscape caught on and historians note this development as indicative of the emergence of nationalist sensibilities in Latin America. Altamirano applied the ideas of his favorite poet to Mexico; he was the first to do so.⁷⁴ The national qualities inherently contained in the landscape appealed to Altamirano and he expanded this to include quotidian aspects such as food preparation and local dialects.⁷⁵ Altamirano's inclusion of colloquial speech and popular cuisine speaks to his embrace of aspects authentic to Mexico despite the fact that much of the elite held such 'low brow' themes in contempt.⁷⁶ Altamirano made use of the landscape and local themes in his poetry, but believed the novel held out the most potential for fulfilling the goals of the liberal project. In Altamirano's day the novel represented the highest form of literary modernity and during the Reform era the historical novel constituted the most popular genre.⁷⁷ As the "modernizer's Catechism" the novel was the innovation of

⁷² Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 131.

⁷³ Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 54.

⁷⁴ Goen, "Altamirano's Interpretation of Nature," 2-7.

⁷⁵ Andrés Henestrosa and Ángel Aguirre Rivero eds., *Proverbios Mexicanos: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano*, Altamirano's use of local themes figure prominently throughout.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of Mexican food and its social implications see Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Qué vivan los tamales: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998)

⁷⁷ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 100.

liberals such as Altamirano since Mexico's conservatives preferred the neoclassical format and religious themes in their literature, leaving the novel to the liberals.⁷⁸ In the historical novel Altamirano saw the best medium for educating the people in the role of the citizen and civic duty while simultaneously spreading national awareness. To him, the primary function of the novel was instruction.⁷⁹ He encouraged Mexico's writers to include a view of the entire society, accurate in detail (no doubt an effort to pierce the regional attachment of the popular classes in favor of spreading a broader view) but his own style was Romantic, not realist as Altamirano applied his own social theories about how people should act to his characters.⁸⁰ Although he recognized the potentially negative implications romantic novels might contain, that they could possibly "seduce" their readers with the wrong message, Altamirano differed with some of his contemporaries who focused exclusively on the bad. Altamirano acknowledged the romantic novel's seductive potential, but proposed that Mexico's authors "seduce" the people in a good way; with moralizing tales of national romance. Altamirano focused on the good that might come from the novel, believing that it could play a positive role in republican society as the novel mediated and built bridges between social classes, creating national unity in the process. Altamirano understood the novel's function as positive, claiming that "novels, like folk songs, like journalism, like oratory, will be a uniting link...and perhaps the strongest one."⁸¹ As such he thought it should be a constructive force, a personal prejudice which may have informed his decision to leave Luis G. Inclán's 1865 novel *Astucia* out of his history of Mexican literature. In *Astucia*

⁷⁸ Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 49.

⁷⁹ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*. and Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 147.

⁸⁰ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 94.

⁸¹ Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 141, 160.

Inclán dealt with the bandit, a ubiquitous contemporary theme, but his was a celebration of this anti-hero. Since the elite at this time almost unanimously believed that banditry represented the worst sort of activity and understood it in terms of criminality and popular degeneracy, it is likely that Altamirano did not consider *Astucia* a positive influence and thus not worthy of mention.⁸² Perceiving a “thirst for literature among the public,” Altamirano sought to “quench” it with moralizing tales that could uplift the people and help transform them into virtuous citizens and thus, help build a better and more productive nation.⁸³

The Ideological Component for Elite Domination

The authoritarian liberal state that matured during the 1880s and with which Altamirano came into conflict had its beginnings in the early years of the Restored Republic as the *Juáristas* applied the hard lessons of the previous disasters to the government. As a result of this, the liberal state that emerged in the aftermath of the war was characterized by a level of authoritarianism not seen since the colonial era. Combining new methods of repression with a strengthened colonial penal code, the liberal state forced its authority on the states, ended their semi-independent status, and subdued the “unruly” popular classes.⁸⁴ For the first time in Mexico’s history the federal government’s power did not end at the outskirts of Mexico City. Of most importance, the Mexican government could prove to the world that the state and nation existed in places

⁸² Brushwood, *Narrative Innovation and Political Change*, 102-103.

⁸³ Unzueta, “Scenes of Reading,” 141.

⁸⁴ Frazer, *Imagining Bandits*, 21, 72-73.

other than the minds of Mexico City officials; a “modern bureaucratic state appeared...where once there had existed a mestizo China.”⁸⁵

In addition to the modern bureaucratic state the Juárez administration laid the infrastructure that, in the coming years, produced an educational renaissance in Mexico and supplied the ideological component for elite domination. Although limited by scarce monetary resources the Juárez educational system succeeded in reaching enough people to make a difference. Still limited to the middle and elite sectors, in the early years, Mexico’s school system churned out the very individuals that presided over the rapid expansion of the coming decades. The curriculum set in place by the government emphasized the virtues of cleanliness, punctuality, industriousness, and the inherent morality of an honest wage, all the attributes capitalist employers hoped to see in their workforce.⁸⁶ Mexico’s educational system was influenced by positivist thought, a European ideology that emphasized progress and a scientific approach to government.

In many respects, positivism was a direct result of the French Revolution, the great upheaval of the eighteenth century that exploded in the world of European monarchism. Born in 1789, the same year as the Revolution, Auguste Comte, the father of positivist theory, became obsessed with the problem of order throughout the 1820s. Influenced by the tumultuous atmosphere of his youth, Comte devoted his entire life to devising a system that would guard against another mass disturbance akin to the revolution of his childhood. At its core, positivism was a philosophy guided overall by a faith in science. Dividing history into evolutionary stages, Comte believed that in the final stage of human development government would be directed by technocratic elites

⁸⁵ Beezley, *Judas At the Jockey Club*, 8.

⁸⁶ Vaughn, *The State, Education, and Social Class*, 14, 26, 28, 30, 36-38, 50-52, 74-76.

who, grounded in a firm understanding of scientific law, would direct the affairs of state. These elites, in turn, could then apply the scientific method to society and thus guide the people to Comte's utopian society. The bare essentials of positivism extended the laws of science derived from the natural world and applied them to human society. Positivism was Comte's answer to the problems of disorder unleashed by the twin forces of revolution and industrialization. Positivism contained inherent developmentalist ideas as well, but the prerequisite to progress and the final human stage rested first in the establishment of order. In this respect, Comte's positivist motto of "Love, Order, and Progress" is revealing.

Positivism most likely arrived in Mexico in 1855 when Pedro Contreras Elizalde returned from France where he studied medicine. As a founding member of Comte's *Société Positiviste*, formed in 1848, Elizalde knew Comte well. Once in Mexico, Elizalde married one of Juárez's daughters and served in his government. Although Elizalde did not spread positivism in Mexico he knew the man who did. While in France Elizalde became acquainted with Gabino Barreda, another Mexican national studying medicine there as well and through Elizalde he was introduced to positivism and Comte. In addition to his medical lessons Barreda studied Comte's philosophy and attended many of his lectures. The significance of Barreda's work lies in what he did with Comte's teachings. With the goal of explaining his country's turbulent past in mind, Barreda applied Comte's ideas to Mexican history and produced an interpretation of recent events that fit within the positivist framework. In his understanding, Barreda described Mexican history as one epic struggle between the forces of enlightenment against the retrograde representatives of darkness. While the struggle had been long and

hard, in the final analysis, the champions of progress reigned triumphant. For Barreda, Juárez's victory over the French and conservatives represented the climax of this perennial conflict. Thus, in 1867 Barreda believed that Mexico stood at the edge of the final era of human development; the positivist stage. As such, it remained for the elite to make Comte's utopian dream a reality in Mexico.

Barreda's interpretation invested Mexico's difficult past with meaning and explained that the enormous sacrifices made by the Mexican people had not been in vain. Moreover, Barreda's work demonstrated to the world that Mexico was the guardian of republican virtues against the forces of reaction. Had not Mexico and the United States defeated retrograde tradition and a renascent European monarchism in their coterminous civil wars? Such was the significance Barreda drew from the recently concluded American wars. Safe from reactionary elements the job of republican order was now to recognize the quickest road to development and material prosperity. Barreda's positive history was consistent with liberal thought and through his work positivism was incorporated into Mexico's liberal tradition. That said, although the positive influence on liberalism became apparent in areas such as government where the scientific persuasion informed certain policy decisions, it ultimately remained in a state of tension with the liberalism of the older generation. Barreda's positivism supplied the philosophical underpinning to Mexico's quest for economic progress.⁸⁷

As the perfect template for the liberal state, positivism appealed to both liberals and conservatives as it justified elite domination and espoused an authoritarian state. For the elite, positivism provided a scientific justification for their control of the popular

⁸⁷ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 73-77.

classes. And, like other ideologies that divided history into developmentalist stages, positivism fostered certain sensibilities that might be considered undemocratic. If the directive elite grasped the road to progress, subverting the will of the people, who were ignorant anyway, was acceptable. In this regard positivism fostered attitudes described as permissive of a certain “moral laziness” in dealing with the general population; it helped to justify their relocation to the periphery of the government’s concerns.⁸⁸

The significance of Barreda’s work was not lost on Juárez who in 1867, directed the philosopher to combine positivism with liberalism and make the two more responsive to the Mexican situation. In Mexico, Comte’s “Love, Order, and Progress” became “Liberty, Order, and Progress.” In the coming years when liberty’s importance to the state appeared to diminish, the government’s motto for development was shortened to “Order and Progress.” Juárez additionally asked Barreda to reorganize Mexico’s educational system, which he did, creating the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* in 1868. Opening its doors that same year, the *Escuela Nacional* boasted 900 students.⁸⁹ Among them were some of the most influential figures of the Porfirian age. Positivism’s reach extended to certain groups of people especially the middle and upwardly mobile urban classes but it contained a generational dynamic as well.⁹⁰ The students of the 1870s introduced positivism into the government in the 1880s and the philosophy matured alongside them. The Reform generation did not reject positivism outright; Altamirano is said to have “flirted with its materialism.”⁹¹ Yet positivist ideas did stand at odds with

⁸⁸ William H. Beezley and Colin M. MacLachlan, *Latin America: The Peoples and Their History* (Fort Worth: Horcourt Brace College Publishers, 2000), 22.

⁸⁹ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 75.

⁹⁰ Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 28, 190.

⁹¹ Nacci, *Altamirano*, 38.

certain core liberal values and eventually lost its appeal to the *puros* of the Reform generation. While the *puros* emphasized the role of the citizen in service to the government and the nation, positivists held a different view as to the proper role of the government.

Believing in the utility of scientific governance the positivists felt that society should be “administered” by a technocratic elite, “not governed;” the *puros* found this unfortunate.⁹² After their initial flirtation with positivist thought the *puros* remained faithful to their belief in the importance of citizen duty and patriotic service to the *patria*. *Puros* such as Altamirano believed that through reforming the individual, redeeming him as a citizen in the process, Mexico could best put its disordered past to rest and move toward a progressive future. The positivists held out similar goals but advocated an approach that could theoretically help the largest number of people. Like the liberals the positivists hoped to bring order to Mexico and provide for progress yet their ideas attacked liberalism as a metaphysical and outmoded interpretation.

The positivists advocated approaching the country’s problems and formulating answers in a scientific fashion. These ideas were set forth in *La Libertad*, a daily periodical that ran from 1878 to 1884. Comprised of young intellectuals *La Libertad* became the venue for Mexico’s positivists to advocate their doctrine of social regeneration.⁹³ They acknowledged the contributions made by Mexico’s Reform generation of liberals but claimed that their age had passed. The members of *La Libertad* were self-described liberals, but they spoke of a “new liberalism” and worked to demonstrate that they represented the latest stage of liberal evolution in their scientific

⁹² Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 31.

⁹³ Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 25-29.

philosophy.⁹⁴ Altamirano personally trained many of *La Libertad's* young contributors, including the organ's chief editor Justo Sierra, and they all paid their respects to Mexico's literary giant. Although *La Libertad* was a youth-driven periodical dedicated to the positive philosophy, Altamirano served as one of its editors and vigorously defended the ideals of the Reform against the "broadside" of the young positivists.⁹⁵ Eventually Altamirano resigned from the journal due to the personal attacks Leopold Zamora launched against him and the Reform generation. Altamirano's best student, Justo Sierra, recognized his instructor's importance to the younger generation of intellectuals but Sierra also deemed his mentor the "spoiled child of the generation that is now passing."⁹⁶ Altamirano's distancing from his pupils was indicative of a larger trend taking place in Porfirian Mexico; that of the *puro* decline.

After 1867, Mexico experienced profound changes due to the liberal nation-building project. This project contained economic and cultural components that were geared to develop the country and its population into a homogenous and modern nation. Nevertheless, the quick dissolution of the *Juárista* coalition after the French Intervention demonstrates the existence of profound disagreement among the liberals as to how this was to be achieved. Both the authoritarian and *puro* liberals espoused a cultural approach, but increasingly economic solutions in the form of industrialization received priority from the governments of the Restored Republic and Porfirian periods. Much of this can be attributed to the influx of positivism into Mexico's intellectual arena. Furthermore, positivism's incorporation into the country's liberal tradition provided the

⁹⁴ Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 62-63.

⁹⁵ Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 84, 187, 189.

⁹⁶ Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism*, 190.

ideological underpinning for the Porfiriato. Porfirian progress came at a rapid pace and although men such as Altamirano did not reject outright innovations such as the railroad (they were not, after all rabid, anti-modernist radicals) they were suspicious of government abuse in the name of liberal progress. In truth, both groups were developmentalists, but *puros* such as Altamirano, the fervent nationalist, believed in the value of an authentic Mexico. As Altamirano did not believe in foppish imitations of European forms in the artistic sphere, he also did not accept ideas that denigrated popular Mexico. He did not view Indians as obstacles to progress; rather he saw them as authentic to Mexico and something worthy of inclusion, even fundamental to any project that aspired to build the nation. As a result, the debates that took center stage in publications such as *La Libertad* were much more than generational disputes regarding differences of opinion. Instead, these debates were indicative of the larger but related struggles that pertained to questions of identity, nation, and the citizen. Altamirano discussed these ideas in the Romantic novel *El Zarco*, his most important work.

Progress of a Different Sort: Altamirano's *El Zarco*

During the Porfiriato (1876-1911) the citizen discourse considered important by *puros* such as Altamirano faded from public view.⁹⁷ In its stead emerged a discourse that posited directed democracy—the idea that the road to progress is best served by authoritarian leadership until the people are sufficiently prepared to receive the full responsibilities of democratic participation—as the answer to Mexico's problems and lauded the grand achievements signaled by the railroad, revived mining, a new consumer culture, the *rurales* (the country's rural police force charged with combating banditry), and the foreign investment that made all of this possible.⁹⁸ As a revamped Mexico City proved, progress had arrived and a grateful nation owed its prosperity to Porfirio Díaz, the benevolent ruler who came to power in 1876, the champion of “effective suffrage and no reelection.”⁹⁹ That said, not everyone shared in the enthusiasm for Porfirian progress.

⁹⁷ For the fluid nature of citizenship in Mexico and its rise and fall in nineteenth-century political discourse see Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, especially 70-75. For a discussion of subaltern response to and manipulation of citizenship identities and their involvement in this discourse see Michael T. Ducey, *A Nation of Villages: Riot and Rebellion in the Mexican Huasteca, 1750-1850* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004).

⁹⁸ For a concise discussion of directed democracy in the Porfirian context and its relationship to Latin America's export boom see John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), especially 190-194. For the significance of Mexico's Porfirian railroad boom see John H. Coatsworth, *Growth Against Development: The Economic Impact of Railroads in Porfirian Mexico* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981). For an excellent discussion of the rise of a new consumer culture in Porfirian Mexico and its significance see Steven B. Bunker, “Consumers of Good Taste: Marketing Modernity in Northern Mexico, 1890-1910,” *Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 1 (1997). For a revealing account of the Rurales see Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development*, revised and enlarged ed. (Wilmington: SR Books, 1992). For the revival of Mexico's mining industry and the class and moral confrontations this included see William E. French, “Progreso Forzado: Workers and the Inculcation of the Capitalist Work Ethic in the Parral Mining District,” in William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1994), 191-213. For the influx and importance of foreign investment into Porfirian Mexico see William Schell Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876-1911* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

⁹⁹ Donald M. Coerver, *The Porfirian Interregnum: The Presidency of Manuel Gonzalez of Mexico, 1880-1884* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1979), 5. For a discussion of Mexico City's cosmetic remodel and its implications for modernity and the arrival of the nation see Mauricio Tenorio

Ignacio Manuel Altamirano was one such individual and in 1888 he voiced his concern in *El Zarco: Episodios de la Vida Mexicana en 1861-1863*, his last complete novel (published posthumously in 1903). Altamirano (cloaked in the guise of the period's stock Romantic conventions), crafted a "hidden transcript" of resistance to the Porfirian version of modernity.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to official interpretations of development, Altamirano employed descriptions of the landscape, ideas concerning race and class, and the events of the country's recent past to illustrate what he thought comprised the proper vision for Mexico. In *El Zarco*, Altamirano points out where he felt Mexico went wrong while providing a roadmap for reaching his national vision. As a novel of national redemption *El Zarco* is also a condemnation of the Porfirian regime and within its pages Altamirano included a scathing indictment of the Díaz administration and its developmental plan. Nevertheless, Altamirano never received the level of scrutiny the government reserved for dissidents such as the Magón brothers, although his conclusions

Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the 'Centenario'," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no 1 (1996).

¹⁰⁰ James C. Scott defines the hidden transcript as a tool of resistance used by subordinate groups to critique the power of the dominant group. The hidden transcript can occur "offstage" or in the open in albeit, disguised form. It is "thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript." Through analysis of the hidden transcript against that of the public transcript "we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse." *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4-5. In his discussion of Romantic features John S. Brushwood includes a melancholy tone and theories about how people should act as opposed to how they do act in the stories' characters. *Mexico in its Novel*, 94, 102. Fernando Unzueta cites citizen duties, the historical novel, and negative perceptions of the Spanish colonial legacy as stock Romantic features. Moreover, Unzueta defines "Spanish American national romances by establishing a dialogue between a historicized critical tradition, meta-textual discourses of the period, and the romances themselves. In the broadest of terms, the romance is a love story full of idealized literary conventions such as the polarized characterization of its protagonists. It contains a teleological vision of history associated with "liberalism," the ideology of the ascendant class, and it actively participates in the cultural configurations of Spanish American nations... They work as a rhetorical strategy of inclusion and exclusion that resembles the hierarchical social practices and realities of the period, and they also signal a desire for (and not the reality of) national unity and a homogenous citizenry." "Scenes of Reading," 125-132.

were no less radical.¹⁰¹ As such, *El Zarco* stands as an alternative vision of the nation and demonstrates the contested nature of the liberal nation-building project.

The central component of Altamirano's utopian vision—the indigenous and inclusive republic—around which all else revolves is the citizen, and in *El Zarco* rests his conception of what constitutes the authentic Mexican citizen. The textual evidence imbues the citizen with an appreciation for the sanctity of work, respect for justice, individual initiative, honor, integrity, thrift, a belief in the rule of law, and a staunch sense of courage when faced with danger. Furthermore, the citizen is an intelligent, educated male who will always contribute and never hamper the greater nation. As he fashions his own citizenship, Altamirano places utilitarianism before frivolous ventures, identifies himself as a member of the middle classes and claims an indigenous heritage. Altamirano's espousal of these qualities attests to his aspiration to form a cohesive national identity in a country he felt lacked such attributes but possessed to an immense degree the necessary raw materials for such a society.

Scholars do not grant much significance to *El Zarco* on its own although it is a straightforward and simplistic story often cited for the structural lessons it imparted to Mexico's writers.¹⁰² It is not noted for its originality as the novel contains nearly all of the stock features and clichés offered by the Romantic frame.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the novel's simplicity did not prevent Altamirano from including his national and moralistic agenda in *El Zarco*. Rather, the novel is bursting with liberal proselytizing and

¹⁰¹ The Magón brothers promoted a brand of anarcho-communism that drove them to repeated attempts to overthrow the Porfirian government. Due to this the brothers came into constant conflict with Mexican and U.S. authorities. For a good discussion of their activities on both sides of the border see Dirk W. Raat, *Revoltosos: Mexico's Rebels in the United States, 1903-1923* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981).

¹⁰² Brushwood, *Narrative Innovation and Political Change*, 104.

¹⁰³ Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 44. Unzueta, "Scenes of Reading," 131-132.

nationalist sentiment. In this respect, *El Zarco* constitutes a written transcript of Altamirano's personal values and hopes for Mexico; the presence of his voice throughout the story is extensive. At times the novel does not appear to be a novel at all but a sermon wrapped in the pretensions of a story, but relating a good, complex story was never one of his goals for *El Zarco*. Most of all, *El Zarco* contains what can only be described as the sincere worries of a mature individual who was shocked by contemporary events despite the preparation of a long and experienced life. Altamirano's hope for a bright Mexican future contrasts sharply with the presence of a deep sense of foreboding. In this respect the novel is a warning to the younger generation by a man truly disturbed by the events of his final years.

To give a synopsis, *El Zarco*, set in the immediate aftermath of the War of the Reform (1857-1861), revolves around the village of Yautepec. Nestled in the southern slopes of Mexico's *tierra caliente*, or hot land, the village maintains an active trade with Mexico City and its neighboring communities. Packed with natural resources and hardworking residents, Yautepec has the potential to be something great, but unfortunate circumstances dictate otherwise. Perennial war siphoned away Yautepec's resources as one faction after another requisitioned what it needed without proper remuneration. In times of peace the villagers are made to suffer even more at the hands of bandits and highwaymen who hold the region locked in a constant state of terror. At the time *El Zarco* takes place Yautepec faces the worst bandit scourge in recent memory. From their mountain hideout in the pre-Hispanic ruin of Xochimancas, the *plateados*—an enormous army of bandits numbering over 500 men so named for the ornate silver patterns that embroider their *charro* suites—kill villagers at will, extort money in exchange for

protection, kidnap wealthy travelers, and destroy all government forces sent to dispatch them. Led by the light-skinned El Zarco, a name given to him for his icy blue eyes, the *plateados* have successfully transformed Yautepec and the surrounding haciendas into their personal wasteland, inhibiting any sort of progress along the way. In its weakened state the government is unable to do anything beyond token measures to protect the village.¹⁰⁴

El Zarco's plot revolves around one of the small families in Yautepec that have seen better days. In the village Manuela, a light-skinned and beautiful girl of twenty, lives with her mother Doña Antonia and mestiza god-sister Pilar. Despite her outward beauty, Manuela is possessed by a vanity that leads her to covet wealth and power; she is attracted to the flashy aspects of life, lacking in substance. Misguided by greed and her vain sensibilities, Manuela involves herself in a secret and illicit romance with El Zarco. During the day Manuela is visited on a regular basis by Nicolas, a mestizo blacksmith who works at the nearby Atlihuayan hacienda. Infatuated by her beauty Nicolas courts Manuela in vain for she regards him unworthy due to his indigenous heritage, calling him a "horrible Indian."¹⁰⁵ For all her efforts Doña Antonia cannot prevail upon her daughter to marry Nicolas, a man she holds in high esteem and regards as a more than worthy suitor. Through all of this the shy mestiza Pilar quietly looks on, consumed by her secret love for Nicolas but resigned to the fact that he barely notices, speaking to her only when he wishes to pass a message to Manuela.

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of historic *plateado* activities see Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 7-10, 28, 54, 56, 60, 88, 90.

¹⁰⁵ Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit* (London: Folio Society, 1957), 31.

The novel's drama begins when Manuela runs away with El Zarco one night to live with him in his mountain fortress. Upon learning of this unfortunate event from some villagers who witnessed Manuela's escape, Doña Antonia is horrified and implores Nicolas to help return her daughter. Nicolas accepts, but is unable to do much more before he is imprisoned by a detachment of soldiers. Charged with the duty of killing the *plateados*, the commanding officer has no interest in fighting the bandits and comes up with every conceivable excuse not to do so. When Nicolas confronts the captain about this dereliction of duty he so angers the officer that Nicolas is arrested and condemned.

In Xochimancas Manuela is quickly availed of any romantic notions she held about the bandit life. Instead of the valiant commander she imagined, El Zarco is a ruthless tyrant who vents his frustrations by beating her. Moreover, the other bandits do not submit to their "noble" leader and repeatedly challenge El Zarco, demanding that he not be so greedy with his new prize. To her horror Manuela hears from the other women there, a motley collection of fast and debauched harlots, that El Zarco often tires of his women and that she would be well-advised not to make him angry. At any time he might withdraw his protection from her and hand Manuela over to his men in an effort to boost their moral. Realizing the gravity of her mistake, Manuela weeps for her home and comes to the conclusion that she should never have rejected Nicolas.

In Yautepec, news of Nicolas' arrest enrages the villagers who all hold the blacksmith in high regard. While the villager's highest authorities confront the captain and make it clear that they intend to petition the highest authority in Mexico to secure his release (they ultimately succeed in having the captain recalled to Mexico City to face the unnamed wrath of his superiors), Pilar refuses to sit by and watch her love rot in prison or

die. Faced with this dreadful scenario, Pilar abandons her natural shyness and becomes a woman of action, breaking Nicolas from prison on her own.¹⁰⁶ This prompts Nicolas to fall in love with Pilar and the two are married, but their wedding is a melancholy affair for Doña Antonia is absent, having died while Nicolas was in prison.

Following his escape and subsequent wedding, Nicolas combines forces with Martín Sánchez, a ranchero landowner near Yauatepec who lost much of his family to the *plateados*. As a result of their murder, Sánchez and his surviving sons declare a personal war of revenge against the *plateados*. After joining with Nicolas, Sánchez meets President Benito Juárez in Mexico City. Juárez, who has just been made aware of the fiasco in Yauatepec, listens intently to Sánchez's description of the bandit troubles there. In a scene that demonstrates Altamirano's Romantic vision, the Indian and mestizo speak man to man as citizens of the nation, inherently aware of their equality. In a frank admission of the difficult situation facing Mexico, Juárez informs Sánchez that war with the French is looming and that the government cannot spare any of its own military forces to deal with the *plateados*. To the president's relief Sánchez is not disturbed by this, asking instead for the government's help in his war of revenge against El Zarco. Happy to comply with this request Juárez offers Sánchez anything he needs, including money. Refusing any financial support, Sánchez requests only weapons and the authority to kill every last bandit in the *plateado* gang. Juárez grants everything Sánchez requests but warns him not to abuse his new-found power. Sánchez reassures the president of his honorable intentions and Juárez admits his relief that this can be resolved in a fashion that will allow the government to focus squarely on preserving Mexico's independence.

¹⁰⁶ For a description of the mestizo as a gendered race of resistance and action see Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 53-54.

Together, Sánchez and Nicolas lead the fight against the *plateados* and with the help of an informer, capture El Zarco and Manuela. Despite her disillusionment with her love, after witnessing El Zarco's execution, Manuela commits suicide, concluding the novel.

Themes in the Novel

All of the themes present in *El Zarco* relate to the *puro* agenda in general and to Altamirano's idealized vision for Mexico in specific. Broadly speaking, liberalism, citizenship, and the nation figure most prominently in the novel (as well as the antithesis of these ideals), but *El Zarco* also constitutes a commentary on the state of things in contemporary Mexico; thus, Altamirano allows himself to speak rather directly about the Mexican situation in asides thinly disguised as dialogue.¹⁰⁷ Consistent with his emphasis on the landscape for which he is well-known, Altamirano includes vivid descriptions of the settings in *El Zarco*. That said, Altamirano's use of the landscape is far from a realist description of observable features. Instead, the landscape afforded Altamirano the opportunity to advance his particular agenda. This is most clearly evident in his descriptions of Yautepec and the people who live there.

As a "picturesque village—part Spanish and part South American" Yautepec is rife with orange and lemon trees "laden with fruit and blossom." Fruit grows everywhere in "riotous profusion" and in the many orchards the "air is heavy with intoxicating scents." Although the produce is naturally abundant, Yautepec's residents do not wildly exist in some organic state of leisure. Yautepec is a "honest, hard-working, peaceful village, simple and hospitable" where "Every villager has his orchard, large or small, and the branches with their shiny dark leaves, weighed down with golden fruit, graze the

¹⁰⁷ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 103.

roof-tops of the houses.” The villagers make their living through trade with the capital and the *tierra caliente*’s other communities, living “almost entirely on their precious fruit; and until the Veracruz Railway was opened, they were the only suppliers of oranges and lemons to the City of Mexico.” The village itself is a scene of modest homes and a people with immense potential for happiness. Although their homes are nothing special, inside “they are spacious and comfortable though lacking in modern amenities.” Moreover, the village’s abundance is renewable as Yautepec’s “[w]ealth lies in its orchards and its river; so that although the rebels and bandits have often been able to deprive the people of their income, they have never succeeded in diminishing or destroying their capital.”¹⁰⁸

Altamirano’s description of Yautepec and the surrounding landscape serves as an example of his model community.¹⁰⁹ With its natural abundance of oranges and lemons the village remains wealthy, if fiscally poor. Woven into the very fabric of the landscape, Yautepec’s inhabitants are peaceful and hardworking. They demonstrate good taste in the modest yet functional homes they live in, and their individually-owned orchards are significant. Although communitarian in spirit the villagers do not own property communally, a statement that clearly separates them from Mexico’s more traditional indigenous communities. All of this combines to present Yautepec as the paragon of the good pueblo.¹¹⁰ From its abundant resources to the orchards, individually-owned by the industrious and modest villagers, Yautepec is liberal in all its aspects. Moreover,

¹⁰⁸ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 17-19.

¹⁰⁹ For the significance of the “model community” in Romantic literature see Brushwood, *Narrative Innovation and Political Change*, 98-99 and *Mexico in its Novel*, 86.

¹¹⁰ For the significance of the “good pueblo” versus the “bad pueblo” in Mexico’s citizen discourse see Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 70-71.

Altamirano's focus on the local level speaks to his *puro* faith in the local municipal government as the bedrock upon which the nation should be built.¹¹¹ The fact that Altamirano extends features of the liberal way of life into the supposedly organic landscape itself is important for it imbues Mexico with an inherent liberalism down to the soil. As such, Yautepec is Altamirano's vision of Mexico as a whole, a land wealthy in resources and inhabited by a people with the right qualities to make the country great.¹¹² Although Altamirano does mention the fact that the railroad ended the village's orange and lemon monopoly over Mexico City, it is unclear if he judged this to be good or bad. It remains Altamirano's only reference to the railroad in the entire novel and more than likely constitutes a simple observation of real events. This is even more probable when considered against the fact that the Veracruz-Mexico City Railway was not completed until 1873, ten years after *El Zarco* is set.¹¹³ As such, the railroad serves as a benchmark, denoting the time period Altamirano is describing.

Despite Yautepec's promising situation the village is prevented from realizing its full potential by the opportunism of the degenerate *plateados*. Operating in the secure "knowledge that the government, harassed by civil war, could not hunt them down, the bandits had formed themselves into groups a hundred and sometimes even five hundred strong. They overran the province with impunity, living off the land, levying heavy

¹¹¹ For the significance of the *municipio* as the building block upon which the nation should be built in *puro* thought see Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 32. For the significance of the *municipio* to liberal nation builders and their contested nature in general see Ducey, *A Nation of Villages*, especially 10. and Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹¹² Altamirano's portrayal of Yautepec (and by extension Mexico) as possessing characteristics intrinsically liberal corresponds well to ideas in his other works, especially *Paisajes y leyendas*. In this set of costumbrista sketches from the 1870s the natural love of liberty Altamirano observes among the rural Indians is cited as evidence of their inherent liberalism. Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 48, 64.

¹¹³ Coatsworth, *Growth Against Development*, 35.

tribute from the estates and villages, exacting tolls on the roads, and kidnapping those they could hold to ransom. Sometimes they set up a headquarters from which one or more of the leaders planned their attacks and sent demands for money to landowners and the wealthier villagers. The penalty for refusal was death. In these hideouts they kept their prisoners, inflicting on them the most savage tortures.”¹¹⁴ In describing the sentiments of Yautepec’s villagers toward the dangerous situation Altamirano uses a conversation between Doña Antonia and Manuela to reveal his perception of contemporary Mexico. When Manuela mentions how bored she is with the village and that she would rather go to dances Doña Antonia angrily replies with “A fine time this is to be going to dances or flirting at windows,” the older woman said bitterly. “What do we want with *fiestas*! Lord save us! When we are doing our best to keep hidden, so that those accursed *plateados* don’t hear of our existence! Goodness knows when my brother will be able to get here from Mexico City and take us back with him. I wouldn’t even mind if we had to walk. We can’t live here any longer. One of these days I shall surely die of fright. It’s no life at all, the miserable existence buried in Yautepec...It is impossible to live like this.”¹¹⁵ To her mother’s response Manuel is dismissive and laughs, but Doña Antonia persists. “No, Manuela, you can laugh because you’re young and see things differently. I am older and more experienced and I see things happening today which I’ve never seen in my whole life before. These men are capable of anything. If I thought that there were government troops here or that the villagers had sufficient weapons to defend themselves, I should be less worried. But you know how the mayor and the prefect run away whenever the *plateados* appear, leaving the villagers helpless.

¹¹⁴ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 20-21.

¹¹⁵ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 24.

The only reason the bandits have not attacked the village so far is because we've sent them the money they demanded—even I have given what little I have.”¹¹⁶

Speaking through Doña Antonia, Altamirano reveals much more than his loathsome attitude toward banditry. In this exchange Doña Antonia's brother represents the federal government, and the fact that he cannot be counted upon is indicative of Altamirano's perception of the government in the late 1880s. Doña Antonia's position as the mother reveals the generational dynamic at work in this sequence. As an elder member of Mexican society in 1888 Altamirano could weigh the Porfiriato against the experiences of a long life full of experience. Doña Antonia's comments make it clear that Altamirano was increasingly disillusioned with the Porfirian regime by the late 1880s and that he could not think of anything in his life to compare it to. If the people were in a better position to resist, things might not be so bad but his observations did not support such a conclusion. It is clear that by including this sentiment in *El Zarco* through Doña Antonia, Altamirano was voicing his own position on the Díaz regime; it is properly understood as a *puro* warning against the abuses perpetrated by an authoritarian government no longer concerned with preserving individual liberties and constitutional guarantees. Nevertheless, Altamirano did not believe Mexico's situation so desperate to be without hope.

Mexico's *puro* generation attached great significance to the idea of the citizen as the savior of the Mexican nation. In the 1850s the *puro* liberals rejected conservative ideas that embraced a multi-national and pluriracial framework united by the common religion of Roman Catholicism. Concordantly, the *puros* did not accept ideas that

¹¹⁶ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 29.

interpreted the nation as the exclusive province of the indigenous. Instead the *puros* understood the nation as a homogenous body of citizens united in the pursuit of their own best interest. Loyal to the secular nation-state first, the *puros* worked to engineer a republic that guaranteed citizen equality under the law and protected it constitutionally. In this liberal framework the nation received its right to exist from republican laws and the institutions they protected. This point sheds light in part on the Reform generation's willingness to sever Mexico's link with the Catholic Church in the 1857 Constitution. While every government to that time, including those strongly inclined to liberal sympathies, regarded the country's official link with Catholicism as essential to legitimating the nation's existence, the *puros* of the Reform deemed this unnecessary due to the legally defined republic they intended to create. Citizens were crucial to this arrangement and the *puros* imbued the citizen with particular characteristics and duties. Moreover, since the *puro* view understood the nation as comprised of citizens there existed no place for a racialized component within this framework. As such, the *puros* worked to eradicate older ideas about the nation that included racial connotations. As the Reform's two most exalted figures Benito Juárez and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano proved (both men were "pure" Indian), Mexico's Indians were wholly capable of assimilating all the characteristics that made up the citizen. Therefore, the task for the *puros* of the Reform generation as they understood it involved extending "access to the goods of citizenship" to Mexico's indigenous population.¹¹⁷

In keeping with the *puro* solution to Mexico's problems, Altamirano provides for Yautepec's (read, Mexico's) salvation in the form of the citizen. Several of Altamirano's

¹¹⁷ Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 48-51.

characters exhibit qualities typical of the citizen but none more than Nicolas, the novel's protagonist. That said, Altamirano uses Nicolas to do more than simply act out conventional citizen traits. Nicolas is not a radical redefinition of the nineteenth-century citizen but he does demonstrate a change in emphasis; the addition of new aspects Altamirano thought important. In the beginning of the story Doña Antonia pressures Manuela to marry Nicolas as a means to escape the constant dangers present in Yautepec. When Manuela defiantly inquires why she should marry Nicolas, Antonia argues that Manuela would gain "An assured position and protection of an honest man...If you marry him he'll protect you," she continues, claiming that "Nicolas has great courage...the *plateados* have never dared attack him...they don't risk attacking anyone who will stand up to them." And if Manuela desired to leave Yautepec, Doña Antonia informs her that Nicolas "has enough money with his savings to live in Mexico City until things quiet down."¹¹⁸

Nicolas's honesty, courage, and thrift are characteristics found in the ideal citizen. As the conversation progresses Doña Antonia provides more evidence of this in revealing that Nicolas "started as an orphan in Tepoztlán, learnt to read and write and then began to work at the forge. Now he is master of the smithy...What little else he has, he's earned by the sweat of his brow." As revealed by this passage Nicolas' driven personality and hard work allowed him to overcome substantial obstacles. Thanks to his perseverance and belief in the sanctity of work Nicolas may now boast of an education and an honest trade. When Doña Antonia turns to discuss the matter with Pilar she continues to reveal traits of the citizen as well as what the citizen is not when she proclaims "Of course he's

¹¹⁸ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 30.

not horrible! He may not be pure Spanish, and he doesn't strut around with gold jingling in his pockets like the overseers or the *plateados*, interested only in dances and *fiestas*." Nicolas refrains from flaunting his wealth and does not concern himself with matters lacking substance. Only the elite and rabble bandits preoccupy themselves with money and idol frivolities, which contribute nothing to the development of the nation. Into the discussion walks Nicolas himself who "although clearly of Indian descent, was tall and well-proportioned. His eyes were gentle but a straight nose and a firm, generous mouth indicated strength of character. He was clearly no common Indian, but an educated man, hard working and confident in his own worth and ability." Not only does he exude confidence without arrogance but he also physically looks the part.¹¹⁹

Another of Altamirano's characteristics of the citizen is that he is a member of the middle-classes. In a conversation between Nicolas and Doña Antonia regarding the bandits Nicolas reveals that he understands the *plateados* "Know I'd not let them kidnap me. We all know the way they treat their prisoners, and it is far better to fight it out to the death. Then at least they pay dearly for their success and a man keeps his self-respect.' 'If only everyone thought so', said the señora, 'if everyone agreed to resist them there would be no bandits.' 'You're right Doña Antonia, that's how it should be. All that is needed is a little courage. In my own village everyone was terrified when the *plateados* first began their raids and no one knew which side to take. But before they could attack us, the overseers and workmen on the estate got together and agreed to buy

¹¹⁹ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 31-33. This passage also raises the question of Altamirano's judgment of the Indians (one himself). As an educated man, Nicolas is not the archetypal Indian. Whether Altamirano meant that most Indians were not educated due to the way in which the educational system denied them access (believable due to his own experience as a student) or that Indians were not educated since they were in most cases not ready for, or unable to digest an education is not certain. What seems clear is that education is prerequisite for citizenship.

horses and weapons so that we could defend ourselves in a body, however small. When they heard of our decision, the owner of the estate and the servants soon joined us. As the bandits have always relied on having spies among the estate hands and the villagers, we began by turning out anyone we suspected of being in league with them. Now, all our people are loyal and the estate is armed.”¹²⁰ Nicolas’ commitment to fight to the death in defense of his honor and because the alternative is even less attractive is what the individual citizen should aspire toward. In addition, the story of his community’s resistance to the *plateados* can be viewed as a microcosm for how, according to Altamirano, Mexico should engage its enemies. The fact that the overseers and the workmen organized first only to be followed by the estate owner and his servants is significant. The overseers and workmen (probably skilled) are members of the middle-class. The estate owner, too aristocratic and idle to be of any use and the servants, members of the “lower-class” lacking the moral fiber to stand up alone must follow the estate’s middle-class in defending themselves. As this applies to Mexico as a whole, in this passage Altamirano is laying out the roadmap for national consolidation. It is the idealized middle-class with its superior morality, courage, and fortitude that must organize first and lead the idle, afraid, and morally devoid classes to the defense of the nation.¹²¹ Moreover, it is the duty of the citizens to denounce sympathizers with the enemy and eliminate them, for deviance from the nation and the greater good is unacceptable. In doing this, the middle classes, serving as the vanguard, will form and lead a coalition of all, expunge those who resist, and create a homogenous nation capable of repelling any

¹²⁰ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 35-36.

¹²¹ In *A Peaceful and Working People*, William E. French argues that the Porfirian middle classes did believe in their superior morality, and thus felt it was their job to lead the development of the nation. Moreover, the middle classes saw themselves as the true citizens of Mexico.

incursion onto its sovereignty. While the Mexican middle classes were in a formative state during the 1860s, in 1888 when Altamirano wrote *El Zarco*, a middle class did exist, and though the story remained set in the past, the novel itself was a criticism of the present.

As the novel progresses an incident involving the army simultaneously demonstrates the importance of the respect for the rule of law and civic duty. After the *plateados* attacked a convoy of visiting English gentry, the government ordered in the army to crush the bandits. After a token effort, the outnumbered and under-equipped detachment led by a corrupt, aristocratic, and haughty captain, hanged three innocent *campesinos*, declaring them to have been associates of the *plateados*. In the company of the village prefect Nicolas proposes to the captain that they combine forces to attack the bandits in the hope of recovering Manuela. When the captain asks why all the trouble over one girl Nicolas becomes angry. “It wouldn’t be just for a girl. We’d destroy their headquarters; we’d kill or capture the murderers you pursued yesterday; we’d take their booty from them; we’d free the hostages they’ve been holding so long; and the señor comandante would be fulfilling his duty by re-establishing peace and order.”¹²²

Enraged by Nicolas’ remarks the captain demands to know why Nicolas thinks he is entitled to treat his social betters in such a contemptuous manner. “‘Señor,’ said Nicolas with dignity, ‘I am an honest citizen of the district. I look after the forge on the Atlahuayan estate, and the prefect knows that I have often given my services to the village when they were needed. I know perfectly well that you are responsible for public safety and that the troop you bring with you is paid to protect the village. I’m offering you a

¹²² Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 84.

chance to carry out your duties.”” This provokes the captain even further who threatens to shoot Nicolas. In response, “Nicolas folded his hand impassively. ‘Do as you please, señor captain. You have your troop: I am alone and unarmed. You can shoot me, I’m not afraid. It’s perfectly clear—you don’t want to fight the bandits, that would be too dangerous. Instead it’s easier for you to murder an honest man who reminds you of your duties.’”

Taken back by this display of courage the Captain responds in kind. “‘I don’t need to use my troops to punish those who insult me. I can deal with them man to man.’” “We’ll see,” said Nicolas with a derisive laugh...Leave your troop here and the two of us will ride together and choose a suitable place.’ ‘Are you challenging me?’ Asked the soldier, livid with rage. ‘I’m accepting, señor captain. You said you would deal with me man to man. I accept, and I’m ready to meet you on the same terms.’”¹²³

In this lengthy confrontation Nicolas, acting on the power vested in him as a duty conscious citizen of the republic, challenges a government official to do what he is paid to do. Since sovereignty flows from the people, citizens maintain the right to challenge their government in the open without fear. Conversely, the portrait drawn of the captain by Altamirano is one of an aloof aristocrat, angry that his status alone does not compel Nicolas to submit to him. The captain represents the conservative monarchists so enthralled with their anachronistic privilege. Their blatant abuse of power undermines the stability and unity of the nation making them a barrier to progress. Enthralled with an antiquated model of society the captain represents the old conservatives whose time had

¹²³ Altamirano, *El Zarco*,84-86.

come and gone, but who refused to admit change. Nicolas stands as the personification of the future: citizens instead of subjects.¹²⁴

The actions of the prefect and villagers of Yautepec after Nicolas' arrest reinforce the idea of the citizen's respect for the rule of law. After gathering a contingent of citizens from the village the prefect leads them and intercepts the captain. The prefect informs the captain that they are there to escort him to Cuautla "To vouch for the conduct of [Nicolas] before the tribunal there." When the captain questions the prefect regarding his authorization for meddling in the army's affairs the village official explains that he "is the highest civil authority in the district...In carrying out my duties I take orders from no one. The chief magistrate is here too—he holds the highest judicial authority, and he is also the mayor. If you take prisoner a villager who should be under our jurisdiction, it must be because you are taking him to some authority higher than ours, and we wish to give evidence at the proceedings." Bluffing, the captain states that he has the authority to do what he is doing. To this the prefect replies "You haven't shown me your warrant saying so, nor have I received any communication from the government. If you have the warrant, show it to me."¹²⁵ Now on the defensive the captain's rebuttal is a hollow restatement of his previous attitude of not having to pay attention to civil authorities. "It is not for me to show you any warrant. I take orders only from my superiors and I am responsible only to them for my conduct." "Then we shall go and see these superiors of

¹²⁴ In this instance the army captain represents the bad citizen who obstructs the way for others to citizenship while Nicolas is the good citizen who opens the way for others to citizenship. For a discussion of the importance of the good citizen and the obstructive citizen to Mexico's citizen discourse see Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 70-71. . For Altamirano's classically republican emphasis on male service to the *patria* through a patriotic death as important to citizenship see Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 28-29.

¹²⁵ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 93.

yours,' said the prefect firmly."¹²⁶ In this circumstance the option for violence is certain. Amidst the constant warfare and banditry the use of violence to achieve political ends was certainly familiar in Mexico.¹²⁷ In turning to the judicial system instead of violence the citizens of the district indicate their status as authentic citizens. The barbaric *plateados* would have attacked the troop, but such is not the recourse of authentic citizens. They utilize the civil institutions in place and defeat the rogue captain and his rural despotism; here the rule of law brings order to a chaotic situation.

Another key aspect to Altamirano's authentic citizen lies in its connection to its indigenous roots. After being freed from jail, Nicolas embraces Pilar, finally realizing that they are meant to be together. With a trace of doubt Pilar questions Nicolas as to whether he still maintains feelings for Manuela. Nicolas assures her that his "forebears may have been poor Indians, but they lived according to a strict code, which has been passed down from father to son. To us, love without honor is impossible. How could I continue to love a girl who allowed herself to be carried off by a thief and murderer?"¹²⁸ The ideas set forth in this passage demonstrate that Altamirano's vision for Mexico included the idea of "autochthonous democracy."¹²⁹ The heirloom Nicolas inherited from his ancestors—the strict honor code—deems the Indians a group morally sound enough to act as responsible citizens. Furthermore, the fact that Nicolas' ancestors were poor, but lived according to a code of honor leads to the conclusion that in Altamirano's ideal republic status and citizenship did not revolve around money or birth, but around one's

¹²⁶ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 93.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of the impact endemic war wrought upon Mexico, resulting in a "new culture of violence" see Ducey, *A Nation of Villages*, 7.

¹²⁸ Altamirano, *El Zarco*, 98-99.

¹²⁹ Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 224. Derived from the sciences, autochthonous implies populations that have been transported and assumed their own characteristics, becoming indigenous over time.

own personal honor and integrity. For Altamirano, authentic Mexican citizenship was, above all else, tied to individual morality.

On one level *El Zarco* is the story of Mexico's disparate elements coming together to build a better nation as well as defend the country. With her light-skin, revulsion to everything indigenous and infatuation with vain subjects, Manuela represents Mexico's conservatives in search of a European prince. As such, the bandit El Zarco symbolizes Maximilian, making the illicit romance representative of the conservative support for the Habsburg monarch. The fact that Manuela becomes disenchanted with El Zarco once the true nature of his hideout is revealed mirrors the real-life falling out that occurred between Maximilian and his conservative supporters. In his constant wooing of Manuela, Nicolas embodies the popular classes who repeatedly allied with and bowed to Mexico's conservative elite. While some have claimed that Doña Antonia stands for the liberal intelligentsia as a whole, she may in fact be the characterized form of Altamirano himself. Either way, Doña Antonia's insistence that Manuela marry Nicolas is the liberal desire for reconciliation after the War of the Reform. Manuela's refusal to marry Nicolas represents conservative contempt for Mexico's popular classes. When she realizes her mistake in Xochimancas, it is the conservatives' awakening to their folly in choosing Maximilian and the French over their countrymen. In their marriage to one another, Nicolas and Pilar, "Mexico's new mestizo ideal" stand for the nation's coming together against the French and conservatives.¹³⁰ This scenario of characterization, rather transparent, becomes all the more interesting when circumstances contemporary to 1888 are inserted instead of the 1860s.

¹³⁰ Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 223-227.

In this scenario Manuela and El Zarco assume characteristics indicative of Porfirio Díaz, selling out the country to foreign businessmen over the interests of his own people. Doña Antonia likewise represents *puro* nationalists such as Altamirano, vigorously protesting this turn of events, but ultimately falling on deaf ears. Does Doña Antonia's death at the moment she is most needed allude to the imminent passing of the *puro* generation? Finally, in this scenario, the marriage of Nicolas and Pilar represents the union of Mexico's authentic citizens, the liberal mestizos against the Porfirians and their foreign partners. Nicolas, the man of action and Pilar the woman of resistance come together to lead the way for Mexico's elite and popular classes against foreign exploitation and domestic oppression. In short, Nicolas and Pilar are the personification of a unified Mexican nation.

In the final years of his life Altamirano possessed a wealth of experience through which to view Porfirian Mexico. As a participant in the original struggle that brought the *puro* cause to the forefront of Mexican politics, Altamirano could juxtapose the optimism of those early years with his disappointment in the Díaz regime. Although his career ebbed and flowed according to Mexico's political climate, Altamirano remained a permanent fixture in the nation's political discourse. From this vantage, he witnessed firsthand the *puro* eclipse in the aftermath of the French Intervention to concerns that made stability and economic development the highest priorities. In the 1870s and 1880s it appeared that the *puro* cause might return to prominence but with the rise of positivist thought the *puro* liberalism espoused by Altamirano returned to the political scrapheap. This development troubled Altamirano for in the Porfirian slogan "Order and Progress" he saw the misguided values of a materially obsessed regime. As a member of the elite,

Altamirano shared its obsession with development, order, and national progress.

Nevertheless, Altamirano's deeply seated *puro* nationalism drove him to focus on the cultural sphere over economic matters.¹³¹ Altamirano agreed with the rest of the elite in the conclusion that Mexico required change but he understood it in more Kantian terms.¹³² In contrast to the "Porfirian persuasion" that prioritized economic development and directed democracy, Altamirano felt that only through acculturating the Mexican people in *puro* civic values could the country expect to properly embark on the road to progress.¹³³

Altamirano included these ideas in a somewhat guarded form in *El Zarco*. While the novel is at once a repetition of the nineteenth century's common Romantic themes (celebration of liberalism over the retrograde colonial legacy, disruptive nature of banditry, national unification, etc...) it is also an indictment of the Porfirian regime.

¹³¹ Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 41.

¹³² For a discussion of Immanuel Kant and his emphasis on the individual see Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment: A New Approach to European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially 124-125.

¹³³ Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, 6. As described by Claudio Lomnitz in *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 70-80, ever since independence the numerous Mexican administrations made loud and frequent appeals to the country's citizens to stand up and defend the nation. As a consequence of this a citizen discourse emerged and occupied a prominent position in the political discussions of the time. In turn, this discourse constituted a significant facet of the debate to define the Mexican nation. Mexico's citizen discourse reached its apogee during the tumultuous 60 years following independence and influenced the intellectual environment from which the *puros* emerged. After 1867 and the *Juarista* victory, Mexico's citizen discourse slowly disappeared from view as the Juárez and Tejada administrations made economic development their overarching priority. Following Porfirio Díaz's ascension to the executive and his subsequent strengthening of state power, the citizen discourse all but disappeared from view. No longer burdened by visions of its own destruction lurking behind every corner, the Mexican state reformed its position on the citizen, ending its calls for the nation's defenders to rush to its defense. Instead, the Díaz regime dove into the task of modernization and economic development. Pursuing these goals inflicted a substantial amount of trauma upon the popular classes and during the Porfiriato, the state employed ever more stringent authoritarian measures to preserve order. The Díaz regime justified its oppressive tactics with a rationale that pointed to their absolute necessity. The government argued that in the absence of duty-conscious citizens, it had no other option if progress was to occur. Mexico could not think of building a full-fledged democracy until the people were properly educated in their civic culture. When the people met the necessary qualifications for complete democratic participation the government would step away from its authoritarian tactics. Altamirano agreed that the popular classes required instruction in the proper ways of the citizen, but he rejected the government's position of directed democracy. In all likelihood, Altamirano found the Porfirian elite lacking in the qualities of the authentic citizen.

Altamirano wrote *El Zarco* in 1888, the same year Porfirio Díaz openly abandoned his democratic pretensions and assumed a much more dictatorial nature. Finding this morally reprehensible, Altamirano wove his criticism of Díaz into *El Zarco*; Doña Antonia's comments make this much clear. Moreover, Altamirano outlines the method by which he thought the Mexican people could best return the nation to the proper progressive track, making *El Zarco* his roadmap for national salvation. Altamirano's emphasis on the duty-conscious and liberal citizen harkens back to the days of upheaval when the government made regular appeals to the nation's defenders. This point is indicative of the dangers he thought Mexico faced in the late 1880s. Altamirano's appeal to the citizen holds much in common with the work of his contemporaries with some important modifications. In a celebration of authentic Mexico, Altamirano makes his protagonists Indian or of mestizo extraction; the potential of the indigenous figures prominently in *El Zarco*. Furthermore, Altamirano appeals to the middle classes and their superior morality to save the nation.

Guided by their firm morals and inherent liberalism it is the duty of the middle classes to rise up and lead the rest of the nation against the Porfirian regime and its foreign allies. Although the rule of law is an important theme in *El Zarco* (the authentic citizen obeys the law and uses violence only when absolutely necessary) Altamirano's personal experience during the Reform wars provided him with a first hand lesson in the utility of violence if the conditions warrant its use. This idea is present in *El Zarco* in the manner in which the bandits are violently disposed of. From the clues Altamirano included in the text it is likely that Altamirano regarded citizen violence as a legitimate means for overturning the Porfirian regime. *El Zarco* is a story of national redemption

that revisited the dormant theme of civic duty during the Porfiriato. A fervent nationalist and *puro* Altamirano advocates nothing short of revolution to restore democratic principals to Mexico. Thus, *El Zarco* is his appeal to the middle classes to create an indigenous and inclusive republic, devoid of the morally degenerate Porfirians and their denial of authentic Mexico. For these reasons *El Zarco* stands out as Altamirano's most important work and demonstrates his enduring influence throughout the Porfiriato.

Developing Citizens: The Cultural Project and Citizen Violence

In the years prior to the development of the authoritarian liberal state, travelers to Mexico cast a harsh judgment upon the country and its people.¹³⁴ As their observations make clear, foreign travelers blamed ineffectual government and popular class inferiority for the chronic bandit problem and lack of profitable enterprise. In many ways Mexico's elite agreed, and with the growth of a stronger, more capable federal state the government made changing this negative perception of the country a priority. To this end, the government made use of a variety of propaganda techniques to promote the country's potential to investors abroad. Advertised as a commodity, Mexico's people and resources were portrayed in a fashion that demonstrated the country's status as a partner in the nineteenth-century's uniform ideal of progress.¹³⁵ During the Porfiriato, this vision entailed industrialization on a large scale, corporate agriculture, and a mining economy that employed modern technology and management techniques. Complementing the government's economic initiatives, the state intended its cultural project to fit the country's popular classes to its vision of industrial progress. While the liberals of the past hoped to transform the plebian orders to the benefit of the nation, they did so in response to the ideals of individual liberty and the constitutional equality guaranteed by a functioning republic. This drove the older generation of reformers to reject the blatant materialism and scientific approach to management that became the hallmarks of Porfirian development.

¹³⁴ For an account of how Anglo travelers perceived Mexico see "The Spanish Legacy and the Historical Imagination" in David J. Weber's *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 335-360.

¹³⁵ MacLachlan and Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo*, 172.

This refutation of Porfirian notions of development and the associated national vision is apparent in the pages of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Romantic novel *El Zarco*. As *El Zarco* makes clear, Altamirano professed an alternative, *puro*, vision for Mexico and its future. Grounded in his taste for simple living, Altamirano's vision espoused an indigenous and inclusive republic based on the rural institution of the municipality.¹³⁶ In his descriptions of the rural landscape, Altamirano displayed his belief in the country's inherent liberalism and unlimited potential. Despite this, Altamirano described obstacles to the realization of his vision, including a degraded lower and idle upper class, government corruption, banditry, and prostitution to foreign powers. Altamirano's answers to these problems centered on the citizen, an idealized type he defined as liberal, hardworking, and morally sound. Moreover, Altamirano's citizen possessed the courage and willingness to lay down his life in defense of the *pátria*. For Altamirano, the rural middle classes served as the repository for the country's citizens, and in *El Zarco*, he outlined his belief that these virtuous citizens should serve as the vanguard to the rest of the nation and rise up against Mexico's corrupted elements. In the effort to spread these ideas and promote his nationalist vision Altamirano saw a great deal of potential in media such as journalism and the novel; he actively sought to promote such sentiments throughout the population.

Travelers to Mexico invited themselves into this debate and from their accounts it is clear that a discourse of development framed discussions about Porfirian Mexico. In contrast to Altamirano's position, foreign observers agreed with the Porfirians and saw the future of the country in urban development. As their comments reveal, the

¹³⁶ Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 102. Brading, "Liberal Patriotism and the Mexican Reforma," 32-34. and Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation-States," 68.

developmental discourse represented a contest over the future shape of the country. In outlining their respective visions, Altamirano and the Porfirians were attempting to define the Mexican nation and the individual's relationship to it. Put simply, this discussion represented an argument over what it meant to be Mexican. A crucial piece to this debate involved the citizen, a category Altamirano made effective use of in his novels. Travelers also employed the citizen in their attempt to order Mexico and their conclusions on the matter are revealing. Despite their disagreement with Altamirano over the place of rural Mexico and the indigenous in the nation, the foreign observers agreed with him on the qualities that comprised the citizen. Moreover in the episodes they described, foreign travelers reveal an important correlation between citizenship and violence.

In *El Zarco*, Altamirano employed the characters of Nicolas and Martín Sánchez to illustrate the duty of the citizen to confront enemies of the nation with whatever means necessary. Although careful to point out the citizen's respect for the rule of law, Altamirano left the option for legitimate citizen violence on the table. As an Indian and mestizo, Nicolas and Sánchez contribute to Altamirano's vision of indigenous inclusion in the nation, a point that obscures the racial significance of their actions as citizens. In other words, the novel's broad indigenous theme hides the fact that the idea of Indian citizenship remained an oxymoron throughout the nineteenth-century in general and during the Porfiriato in specific.

In contrast to this, travelers to Mexico did not hesitate to extend a negative view of the country's "lower-class" populations of Indians and mestizos. When compared with Altamirano's depictions of the citizen, the travelers' accounts bring this theme into

sharp relief. In Porfirian Mexico the proper use of violence possessed the potential to confirm one's status as a citizen. For the country's middle classes this comprised one facet of several necessary preconditions, including morality, thrift, and hard work. For the country's suspect populations such as the "lower class" mestizos, Indians, and even some members of the elite (whose idle nature and unbridled lust for power made them obstacles to progress) violence could elevate or lower their standing. This reveals that instead of a statically-defined category, the citizen was fluid in reality, and by employing violence (or its emotional expression, courage in the face of death) suspect members of the Mexican population could claim ownership of their status as authentic citizens of the nation. The importance of this is manifest given the historical significance and definition of the citizen—a category rife with racial and class connotations—throughout nineteenth-century Mexico. This chapter argues that despite the efforts of liberal intellectuals such as Altamirano to spread their ideas about the citizen and thus, their vision of the nation throughout the country's population, their cultural project failed. Nevertheless, as the travelers' accounts reveal the idea of the citizen maintained relevance outside of Mexico's limited cultural community. The proper use of violence represented a means for suspect populations to demonstrate their status as authentic citizens, making the category of the citizen fundamental to negotiating one's position and inclusion in the nation after its importance declined in the official discourse.

Literature and the Arts

Much has been made of the importance of art, literature, and journalism to the liberal nation-building project of the post-war era. Internationally, cultural pursuits were intended to demonstrate the presence of high culture and civilization in Mexico while at home intellectuals such as Altamirano lauded the moralizing and educational potential of the literary and visual arts.¹³⁷ Working in tandem with a system of national education, these men maintained high hopes for cultural production in Mexico. From the available evidence it appears that Mexico's cultural elite succeeded in the first goal, but failed in the latter. Despite overtures to create a system of public education available to all, and claims that it had done just that, the Porfirian regime failed to erect anything of the sort.¹³⁸ Forays into public education were limited owing to the scarcity of resources available to the government. It is true that literacy rates did rise during the Porfiriato, (from 14.39 percent in 1895 to 19.74 percent in 1910) but the increase was small, robbing men such as Altamirano of his target audience.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, travelers to Mexico found such topics worthy of mention.

Taken together, the accounts portray Mexico as a country with a proud cultural tradition dating back to the pre-Hispanic era, but note its limitations then, as during the Porfiriato. Travelers deemed cultural production in Mexico as a worthy-equal to anything else in the world, yet found it woefully under-supported. Deprived of a large, educated public, Mexico's cultural life burned brightly within the confines of an

¹³⁷ Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 7-8. and Frazer, *Imagining Bandits*, 12.

¹³⁸ On this point Lummis notes "the sheer epidemic of public schools." and that "There is now in Mexico no hamlet of one hundred Indians, I believe, which has not its free public school." in *The Awakening of a Nation*, 9, 11.

¹³⁹ Vaughn, *The State, Education, and Social Class*, 39.

extremely limited circle. In the words of one commentator, Mexico's literary and artistic community might as well have produced on Mars since their work represented "caviare to the general."¹⁴⁰

In regard to the visual arts, the evidence of the liberal agenda's influence is apparent in the themes Mexico's most established painters chose to depict. While religious subjects continued to find an audience among the country's "higher classes," Mexico's artists also produced works that commented on the barbarism of Spanish colonialism and contributed to the nationalist agenda through depictions of the natural landscape.¹⁴¹ Moreover government interest in the visual arts increased, and due to its sponsorship the national academy hosted regular exhibitions; it even sent painters abroad, making them "famous outside their own country."¹⁴² As noted by William H. Bishop, those painters lucky enough to receive patronage from the government excelled in the "bold, large composition and the rendering of grandiose ideas." Bishop felt that this was their "strong point," making Mexican art of a quality superior to anything then produced in New York or the British Royal Academy. Yet Bishop's appraisal of Mexican art contained negative opinion as well. Despite the ability of the country's most celebrated painters to surpass the work of some of the world's most highly-acclaimed institutions, Bishop found this "devotion to large academical ideas" to be a true "source of weakness rather than strength from the money point of view." For Bishop, the constraints of Mexican art were simple. In general, the market for art of any kind was extremely small,

¹⁴⁰ William Henry Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona: Being a New and Revised Edition of Old Mexico and Her Lost Provinces* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 120.

¹⁴¹ Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 31. W. E. Carson, *Mexico: The Wonderland of the South* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 127. and Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 125.

¹⁴² Carson, *Mexico: The Wonderland of the South*, 127.

but that which did exist demanded “a domestic, *genre*, realistic, and not a grandiose art.” Additionally, Bishop cited few government commissions beyond “an occasional portrait or two,” and the absence of “enlightened patrons... There are no pictures of any consequence in the best Mexican houses.”

Apart from the talent embraced at the academy, Bishop took notice of the levels achieved by the country’s popular artists, but held low expectations for their success, lamenting that “The abundance of native talent receives little encouragement. Many a bright genius is forced to paint his inventions on the walls of *pulque* shops, and finally to quit the profession for lack of support.”¹⁴³ Although talented and worthy of inclusion in the ranks of the world’s finest, travelers to Mexico did not find a thriving community of visual artists. The inclusion of the liberal agenda appeared obvious in the works of Mexico’s artists, but owing to the dismal level of financial support a majority of the country’s greatest talent seemed destined for poverty. As such, it can be stated with reasonable certainty that visions of national progress along the liberal model did not reach the masses via the canvas during the Porfirian era. Paintings that celebrated the nation and received wide distribution would have to wait for the Riveras, Kahlos, and Orozcos of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁴

Travelers commented on Mexico’s literary life as well, reserving much of the same judgment for these genres as they did for the visual arts. All the travelers who addressed literary life in the country took note of the country’s long tradition of letters. “Mexico is—as she has been for centuries—far from poor in deep students, broad

¹⁴³ The previous quotes taken from Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 120-121.

¹⁴⁴ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 457.

historians, and able literary men.”¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, at least one visitor recommended to his American audience “An acquaintance with Mexican writers” due to its “great value in the study of Mexican life and customs.”¹⁴⁶ As the travelogues make clear, the world of Mexican letters received ample recognition. Among the most prominent Mexican authors, Justo Sierra, Guillermo Prieto, and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano receive attention, as “These are the native writers whose works are more frequently in the hands of the public than any others.”¹⁴⁷ That said, Altamirano, the supposed “*maestro*” of his literary generation is dealt with lightly; in some accounts he is not mentioned at all.¹⁴⁸ As described by Bishop, “Altamirano, a fiery Indian orator, who models himself in Congress rather after Mirabeau, chooses as his themes for poetry bees, oranges, poppies, morn, the pleasures of rural life. They are excellent subjects in themselves, but it is an artificial, and not a real, existence he describes. He would like to be Horatian, summons nymphs to disport with him in the shade, and abounds in florid terms, without thought.”¹⁴⁹ The real praise is reserved for Guillermo Prieto. Mentioned in every account, Prieto is described as not only the best Mexican poet, but the most national.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the travelers raise an interesting point in the format of the country’s novels. The national romances, “are printed with each sentence as a separate paragraph for easier reading.” According to Bishop, the readership of these “*Episodios Nacionales*” were the “middle and lower classes, the upper class, as in most provincial states of society, preferring books from

¹⁴⁵ Lummis, *The Awakening of a Nation*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ Wallace Gilpatrick, *The Man Who Likes Mexico: The Spirited Chronicle of Adventurous Wanderings in Mexican Highways and Byways* (New York: The Century Co., 1912), page 2 of foreword.

¹⁴⁷ Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 129.

¹⁴⁸ For one among many references to Altamirano as the “*maestro*” see Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel*, 94.

¹⁴⁹ Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 129-130.

¹⁵⁰ Lummis, *The Awakening of a Nation*, 95.

abroad.” From this account a clearer picture of national romances such as *El Zarco* emerges. Although the Mexican elite did not treat such novels seriously, they were important to their readership. “Their favorable reception may be accounted for in part by the lack of regular histories and of newspaper intelligence, so that the populace may to some extent be getting their information for the first time.”

Despite the acknowledgement of readership among the middle and lower strata of society, the impact of literature was not large. Due to the small reading public in Porfirian Mexico, literature did not pay well and in the words of one observer, a “thousand copies is a good edition even for a popular book.”¹⁵¹ In a country where “newspaper readers” earned a considerable income by reciting the contents of the daily press to the illiterate peons of Mexico City’s *pulquerias* the demand for published material could not have been high.¹⁵² Travelers to Mexico confirmed this in their accounts noting that “Mexico, of course, has as yet neither great publishing-houses nor a great book market, and there is no one to undertake a publication as a legitimate investment.”¹⁵³ On this point, a quick comparison of Mexico City’s business establishments in 1882 is revealing. Only 15 book binders and 16 book sellers were set up for business in a city that boasted over 200 merchant establishments.¹⁵⁴ Despite the aspirations of Mexico’s cultural intelligentsia to inculcate broad nationalist sentiments

¹⁵¹ Previous quotes from Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 128, 132-133.

¹⁵² Carson, *Mexico: The Wonderland of the South*, 28.

¹⁵³ Lummis, *The Awakening of a Nation*, 87.

¹⁵⁴ Businesses listed in the *Commercial Directory of the Principal Merchants of Mexico* found in the Appendix to Leonidas Le Cenci Hamilton, *Hamilton’s Mexican Handbook: A Complete Description of the Republic of Mexico, Its Mineral and Agricultural Resources, Cities and Towns of Every State, Factories, Trade, Imports and Exports, how legally to acquire property in Mexico, how to transact business under Mexican laws, Railroads and travelling in the Republic, Tariff Regulations, Duties, &c., &c., and a Commercial Directory of the Principal Business Men of Mexico; Combining practical information for ready reference by the Merchant, Miner, Real Estate Investor, Railroad Builder, Mining Engineer and Locator, Traveller and Settler* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., Publishers, 1883), ii.

and liberal values through their work and the fact that a limited readership did exist, when taken together the evidence points strongly in a different direction. In a country devoid of literacy and access to cultural production, it appears unlikely that intellectuals such as Altamirano had much impact beyond their own limited circle of enthusiasts.

A Tradition of Violence

Travelers to Mexico were well aware of the country's potential for violence. In addition to their lengthy descriptions of hotels, food, and "peculiar" social customs, observers noted the violence they witnessed first hand, impediments to violence such as police, rurales, and government soldiers, or the visible traces of violence etched into the landscape by a disordered past.¹⁵⁵ It is not too much to say that Mexico's tradition of violence and upheaval rank as one of, if not *the* most prevalent theme in the literature. William H. Bishop's imagining of what he would encounter upon arriving in Mexico is revealing: "There are those of us whose conception of Mexico has been composed principally of the cuts in our early school geography, and the brief telegrams in the morning papers announcing new revolutions. We rest satisfied with this kind of concept about many another part of the globe as well till the necessity arrives for going there or otherwise clearing it up. I saw, I think, a snow volcano, and a string of donkeys, conducted by a broad-brim hated peasant across a cactus-covered plain. I heard dimly isolated pistol-shots fired by brigands, and high-sounding *pronunciamientos* and cruel fusillades accompanying the overthrow from the Presidency of General this by General that, who would be served in the same way by General somebody else to-morrow."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ada M.C. Dress ed., *Thirteen Years in Mexico* (From Letters of Charles W. Drees) (New York: The Bbington Press, 1915), 39.

¹⁵⁶ Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 3.

Bishop was not alone in his preconceived notions of Mexico as a bandit-plagued and disordered land prone to perennial revolution. Thoughts such as Bishop's continued to color travelers' perceptions even after a considerable amount of experience in the country afforded them the opportunity to see that the anarchy they imagined was not wholly the case. Moreover, the reservations expressed by Mexico's visitors were not completely unfounded as many witnessed first-hand how suddenly a violent situation could emerge; more than one found himself an unwilling spectator to acts of bloodshed.

That said, travelers to Mexico also included lengthy discussions of why they had nothing to fear in their journeys. While making his way through Mexico's northern frontier John Frederick Finerty crossed paths with a party of American merchants. Finerty recounted the episode as such: "Are you traveling all alone with Mexicans?" he asked. "All alone," was my answer. "And you ain't afraid no more than if you were in the States?" "Not a particle."¹⁵⁷ Voicing a similar sentiment Bishop spoke to the "discourses of the improving tranquility" in his comment that "three ploughs are sold to one revolver."¹⁵⁸ The reason for the new-found sense of security was clear to all: Porfirio Díaz. Thanks to his guidance, in ten short years "the brigands of Mexico have been simply wiped out. Nowadays the bandit needs not. There is something else for him to do; and he finds it not only more salubrious, but more to his taste, to take a part in the development of the *pátria* he was proud of even when he was her curse. He would rather upbuild than tear down." Despite the fact that under Díaz's rule Mexico was an "Absolute Republic—self-government in chicanery," Lummis felt it worth the cost. "To-

¹⁵⁷ Wilbert H. Timmons ed., *John F Finerty Reports Porfirian Mexico, 1879* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1974), 48.

¹⁵⁸ Timmons ed., *John F Finerty Reports Porfirian Mexico*, 58.

day Mexico is—and I say it deliberately—the safest country in America.”¹⁵⁹ Their sense of increasing stability notwithstanding, other travelers found it difficult to echo Lummis’s level of optimism. For all of his faith in his Mexican companions, Finerty always traveled the country secure in the knowledge that he was well-armed.¹⁶⁰

In their descriptions of violence in Mexico, the travelers divided what they saw and heard into two categories that do much to illuminate the relationship between the citizen and violence during the Porfiriato: positive and negative. As trivial as these categories may appear, they assume a greater significance when compounded with the predominate definitions of race and class. The accounts make it clear that in the process of forming their opinions about Mexico and its people, the travelers paid close attention to the racial and class associations of those under consideration. While no group escaped condemnation altogether, (nor does any group receive unanimous praise) the darker the skin or more obvious the indigenous identity, the more consternation the travelers used. The travelers unanimously condemned the country’s mestizo and Indian poor when observed as lazy or drunk. Travelers judged the elite as well, and when confronted with obvious corruption or deviation from utilitarian middle-class values, Mexico’s upper strata were spoken of in equally harsh terms. Nevertheless, in general the latter fare better than the former in the published accounts. The great exception to this includes violence and as the travelers explained, violence served as a lever of equality in a society highly stratified by deep racial and class divisions.

¹⁵⁹ Previous quotes taken from Lummis, *The Awakening of a Nation*, 5-8.

¹⁶⁰ Timmons, *John F. Finerty Reports Porfirian Mexico*, 49.

The Patriotic Death: A National Characteristic

In 1879 John Frederick Finerty made his way through Mexico as a correspondent for several papers, the *Chicago Tribune* among them. At first Finerty did not hold out much hope for Mexico, leaving its fate to American immigration.¹⁶¹ In 1904, Finerty was near death and in an attempt to secure some sort of financial legacy for his family, he collected his old correspondence into book form. In describing his encounters at the dawn of the Porfiriato (1879), then providing commentary from its twilight, (1904) Finerty imparted a valuable account of continuity and change during the Díaz administration. According to his appraisal, Mexico had made triumphant progress since his time as a correspondent there, but also retained much of its former self. “The Mexico of today is strikingly different from that of 1877-79, socially, politically, and economically. It is now among the nations that truly live rather than merely exist and has made mighty strides in modern progress and civilization. In the rural districts, the manners, customs, and recreations of the masses have undergone but little change, while in the cities and larger towns, European and American habits, fashions, and business methods have steadily gained ground... Mexico suffers in point of picturesqueness from the change, but has gained much in wealth, commerce, and social and political tranquility. The railroads, the telegraph and the new postal system have done their full share in accomplishing this desirable result.” Aside from his valuable comments about the Porfiriato in general, the adventures Finerty described do much to illustrate the

¹⁶¹ Timmons ed., *John F Finerty Reports Porfirian Mexico*, vii. Finerty commented that “In what I have seen of the country of the Montezumas, I can say honestly to the people of the United States, there is no hope for Mexico but in you—if you will take the trouble of being her saviours. The strong arm and the equal laws of the land of Washington can alone preserve order and maintain life, liberty and happiness—undisturbed, in the unfortunate country beyond the Rio Grande.”

complex relationship between race, class, citizenship, and violence in Mexico. Of most importance, Finerty's account reveals how the nature of one's death could elevate the status of even the lowliest bandit-criminal.

A major reason for the significance of Finerty's account stems from his opinions of the popular classes. In regards to the Indians, Finerty denied them immediate potential for meaningful participation in the nation, noting that "Degraded as he now is, the Mexican Indian is capable of a very high degree of civilization, but it will take a generation or two of peace and order to make him what he should be in the matters of thrift and cleanliness." Although not unique in professing such a view, the sentiment expressed in this statement is a clear indication of where Finerty stood on the subject. Of most importance is Finerty's contrast of violence and class in Mexico. After the telling of a lengthy anecdote involving passion, betrayal, and murder Finerty concluded that "A jealous Mexican of the lower classes, when he makes up his mind to commit murder and gets the opportunity, is as much to be dreaded as the devil himself. A Mexican gentleman, if he should grow jealous, will in most cases make it a matter of personal honor and give you a chance to defend yourself in a duello. There is all the difference in the world between an enlightened Mexican and a low-down greaser." For Finerty, violence clearly contained class dimensions.

Despite this attitude, Finerty's next encounter compelled him to reevaluate the importance of honor to the lower class criminal and its relationship to citizenship. As recounted by Finerty, a bandit criminal, graciously afforded the title of "guerilla chief" was captured by the military and condemned to death. "He was, no doubt, a young scoundrel, and had cut many purses and slit many throats" but when the time for his

execution came, the bandit faced it without fear. The bandit's cool composure impressed the men and this increased upon the condemned man's request. "Face him about!" commanded the lieutenant. Remove that blindfold. That fellow is not afraid to look into the muzzles of the muskets. He is too brave a man to be shot in the back!" Stoically, the man looked death in the eye until the final moment. Two lines served as his eulogy:

"Fell as he was in act and mind,
He left no bolder heart behind."

The sheer bravado and courage with which the bandit faced his death led Finerty to comment that "I have never known men who face certain death with more absolute indifference than the Mexicans. They are brave in battle, but they become heroic when looking down the black throats of the guns of a firing party, if they are permitted to face them. You know how calmly Iturbide, Hidalgo, Miramón, and Mejía faced their executioners. It is a national characteristic. The fusillade has no terrors for the Lato-Aztec race." Distinguished by his gallant nature and embrace of death, a common bandit-criminal separated himself from the ranks of "jealous Mexican of the lower class" of Finerty's previous account. In death the criminal joined the ranks of Hidalgo himself and demonstrated a "national characteristic."¹⁶²

¹⁶² Previous quotes taken from Timmons, *John F. Finerty Reports Porfirian Mexico*, vii, xiii, 243, 58, 214, 215. As the top two generals in Maximilian's Empire Tomás Mejía and Miguel Miramón were both executed on the Hill of the Bells with their emperor by the *Juáristas* in 1867.

Bandits and Pronunciamientos

The two aspects of violence that proved the most fascinating to Porfirian-era travelers were banditry and revolution. Together, they were visible symbols of the country's great potential for disorder. Often, the difference between the two was hard to distinguish. Bandits maintained a special place in the minds of Mexico's numerous government institutions and in the words of Paul J. Vanderwood, "Nothing cultivates banditry like ineffective central government mired in a war for survival." In such a context "Distinctions between soldier, brigand, patriot, and avenger simply disappear."¹⁶³ Such was the case in Mexico and after independence, bandits became the bane of every government to rule. The greatest surge in bandit activity occurred in the immediate aftermath of the French Intervention as demobilized soldiers turned away from national defense and put their weapons, organization, and experience to use for personal enrichment.¹⁶⁴ Despite the connection between brigands and rebellion, Mexico's government officials refused to acknowledge bandits as anything more than criminals. This allowed them the convenience of disposing with agents of political rebellion under a harsh criminal code. Moreover, by labeling rebels as bandits, the state denied them any status as combatants and preserved the façade of government legitimacy. Representing forces of disorder, banditry and revolution posed a threat to progress; hence the preoccupation of the national elite to be rid of them. Indicative of this point is the fact that Porfirio Díaz fashioned himself as the man who could maintain order in the country and was widely credited with solving the bandit problem. For travelers, banditry demonstrated the inferiority of the Mexican race and the superiority of Anglo-Saxon

¹⁶³ Previous quotes taken from Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 5

¹⁶⁴ Frazer, "Imagining Bandits," 139.

culture and institutions.¹⁶⁵ As a result the bandit as “imagined” and his adjunct—political rebellion—became important devices for negotiating the status and role of the citizen; in Porfirian Mexico they were key components of the debate over what it meant to be Mexican.¹⁶⁶

Altamirano demonstrates that a fundamental component of the citizen involved utilitarian and constructive action. Clearly, the bandit and rebellion represented the antithesis of this, making them a corrosive feature of national life. Preoccupied with the bandit, travelers to Mexico identified him with the lower classes and criminality, instead of legitimate protest to government policies. In rebellion, travelers assigned blame to the elite, citing the greed and lust for power as malicious motivations for plunging the country into a state of distress. For the travelers, the worst aspect of rebellion involved the *pronunciamiento*—or pronouncement. In this word observers interpreted two meanings. At the beginning of any rebellion a *pronunciamiento* was issued, declaring the uprising and the reasons for it. The second connotation pertained to the warring factions themselves. Swayed by whatever motivation, when soldiers switched sides in the midst of a conflict they “pronounced” and from the published accounts it appears that this was a regular occurrence. The solutions to these problems the travelers proposed mirror those set forth by Altamirano in *El Zarco*. When confronted with bandits the travelers applauded evidence of citizens standing their ground in defense of their communities and property. Like Nicolas and Sánchez, fighting a retrograde element demonstrated

¹⁶⁵ Frazer, “Imagining Bandits,” 90, 12-13.

¹⁶⁶ For ideas regarding the imagination of banditry see Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, xxi-xxxvii.

citizenship. As for rebellion and *pronunciamientos*, travelers did not fault the common people, but the country's leaders instead.¹⁶⁷

This correlation between banditry, *pronunciamientos*, and citizenship is demonstrated in Albert Zabriskie Gray's account of Mexico in 1878. Intended as a travel guide for tourists Gray's rendering is part history, observation, and advice. In his rendition of Mexican history, Gray makes reference to the presence of "revolutionary ideas" since independence. Mexico's "first leader was a priest named Hidalgo, who soon sealed his patriotism in blood." Gray credited the struggles that followed to the "unprincipled ambition of such men as Iturbide, and Santa Anna, and alas, Mexico has been blessed with but few rulers, like Juarez, seem to have comprehended the great principals of their blood-bought Constitution!" Gray noted the effects of the country's chronic instability and banditry features prominently in his account. For those planning a trip to Mexico Gray recommended "a letter of credit, which...will load your pockets and trunks with Mexican bullion, and keep you somewhat nervous in brigand neighborhoods."

After traveling for the first time on one of Mexico's few existing railroads, Gray noted his "first startling reminder as to the insecurity of the country. One entire car is devoted to the escort of fifty troops, whose duty it is to see you safely through the regions of lawlessness and rebellion—either term doing as well as the other!" In his descriptions of the country and its people Gray was not short on praise and cited the charm in the "amusing" dress and vanity of the urban people. That said, he also found much fault in such customs, noting that "amidst all this animation of scene and character, we could not

¹⁶⁷ Bishop, *Mexico California and Arizona*, 66. According to Bishop "Want of courage is not a Mexican failing. It was want of leaders, unity, everything that gives steadiness in a great crisis."

be blind to the sad evidences of national instability and decay. The dilapidations are from intestine feud; the neglected churches show the lapse of faith, the lounging *señoras* and the dandy *caballeros* mark the lack of higher aim and ambition, which is confirmed by the abject appearance of the Indian peasantry; and altogether, our afternoon's walk in Orizaba leaves us with impressions as sad of its humanity as they are fascinating of its site and scenery."

In a trip through the country Gray turned his attention to the impact of banditry on local life. While the haciendas he observed contained a large population of workmen and appeared like "villages in themselves," the elite owners of the estates rarely visited them. "Indeed, this would increase the chances of attack from the ubiquitous brigands, who have an uncomfortable way in this republican country of carrying off a rich man to their dens and keeping him there until a good, fat ransom had been paid; and happy the Dives who returns in full possession of all his members!" Gray does not say whether he felt this cowardly or smart but did note the preparedness of the estates to engage the country's brigands. "These *haciendas* are all, therefore well walled and fortified, and carry on at times very respectable battles and sieges. They are usually situated on immense estates, and even under these adverse circumstances, yield great revenues to their owners." To Gray the signs of the government's effort to bring stability were apparent in the presence of troops in the area. "In fact, at every station of our road, we observed a body of volunteer cavalry drawn up in brilliant array to protect us from the possible raids of neighboring *banditti*." However, the government faced substantial obstacles in its war against Mexican marauders. Capping his story, Gray ended with the comment that "The moralizing reader may be interested to learn the sequel, if not the

conclusion, to the formidable display of friendliness to the government and ourselves. As we returned over this way a few weeks later, all these brave and patriotic protectors had become banditti themselves, or had “pronounced,” which is about the same thing!”¹⁶⁸

Gray’s sentiment about citizen violence and banditry is echoed in Wallace Gillpatrick’s turn of the century account of an encounter in Uruapan. In his own witty style, Gillpatrick described a scene in which country bandits invited themselves to a celebration being held by the city’s residents. The “self-invited guests, went at an unfashionably late hour, their hosts received them with open arms, *i.e.*, knives and pistols.” In the engagement Gillpatrick described one attacker was captured while the “others escaped to the mountains, where two were captured and shot. In the meantime the first prisoner had been executed close by the cemetery to save a funeral procession. It was also rumored that a female robber who had been aiding and abetting her admirers was sent to keep him company.” Gillpatrick noted that all of this was conducted “under the rose,” but he did not think it disturbed the serenity of Uruapan. Moreover, Gillpatrick credited the town’s political boss for the astute defense. “Clearly, the Jefe Politico was a man of nerve and action, and meant to make Uruapan and its surroundings as secure for residents and visitors, as other parts of the republic.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Previous quotes taken from Albert Zabriskie Gray, *Mexico As It Is Being Notes of A Recent Tour In That Country: With Some Practical Information For Travellers In That Direction, As Also Some Study of The Church Question* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company.), 12-13, 15, 29, 32-33, 40-42.

¹⁶⁹ Previous quotes taken from Wallace Gillpatrick, *The Man Who Likes Mexico: The Spirited Chronicles of Adventurous Wanderings in Mexican Highways and Byways* (New York: The Century Co., 1912), 139.

Immigration and Indians

The most revealing display of citizenship commented on by the travelers involved the Indians. During the nineteenth century the term Indian assumed a connotation synonymous with the non-citizen due to their poverty, traditional existence, and lack of education.¹⁷⁰ If there existed any group in Mexico that was seen to completely lack the attributes for citizenship and participation in the nation, it was the Indians. In contrast to this, one account from the 1880s demonstrates how violence could serve to create citizens out of Indians.

In 1883 Leonidas Le Cenci Hamilton published a detailed compendium of Mexico, including descriptions of each state, city, and town. His inclusion of the nation's general laws and business practices as well as detailed inquiries into the mines and the procedures governing their purchase leaves no doubt as to the purpose of his work; Hamilton was providing a guide for American capitalists interested in Mexican ventures. As such, Hamilton's account is filled with descriptions of potential business opportunities. On the whole, Hamilton felt Mexico represented a land of vast opportunity for profit and noted the immense quantity of mineral and agricultural resources at hand. Due to the country's natural abundance, Hamilton credited the short-comings of the Mexican people themselves for their inability to properly exploit such resources and achieve material prosperity. Hamilton's solution was a familiar one for he repeatedly mentioned the profits that might come if an "energetic class of immigrants" arrived to properly develop the country. As his comments make clear, when it came to the Mexican people, Hamilton did not hold them in high regard.

¹⁷⁰ Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 52.

In contrast to this, Hamilton's attitude changes when certain Indians are discussed. On this subject Hamilton saw two types of Indians: good and bad. In his discussion of the Yaqui and Mayo river valleys, Hamilton described a landscape filled with opportunity for investors. Although already inhabited by the two Indian groups who possessed the "best portion of the lands" he remained undeterred due to the fact that after establishing a reservation "millions of acres of arable lands would remain to be brought under cultivation. Here is an opportunity for colonization that is unrivaled in the United States or the Republic of Mexico." Hamilton praised their natural talents as they did not avoid "labor, and are employed in every capacity. They possess remarkable natural abilities, and soon learn the trades of blacksmithing, carpentering, etc.." In his opinion, the Indians' capacity for work and learning made them ideal for any foreign-owned enterprise in need of labor. Hamilton contrasted the Yaqui and Mayo Indians with the nearby Presidio of Buenavista, a semi-important military position the government maintained as a "barrier" against any potential uprising by the valley's Indians. Of the presidio, Hamilton reserved a low opinion as "Its soldiers" were "poorly supplied and seldom paid."

Nevertheless, rebellion appeared likely due to the government's attempts to survey the land. Apparently, Indian resistance compelled the government to suspend the survey, forcing it to wait for a "petition from the Legislature of Sonora to the general government to supply a force of 1,000 soldiers to keep the Yaquis in subjection during the survey and location of certain government grants upon those rivers." Putting this development into perspective, Hamilton reflected on the combat prowess of the valley's Indians. In the face of the government surveyors and dispossession of their lands the

Indian resistance failed to surprise Hamilton as “They have been known to revolt against the government and commit great atrocities. They are brave, and have been known to fight steadily for hours against the government troops.” Despite their evident similarity to Altamirano’s citizen as denoted by their ability to work, possession of trade skills, and courage in battle, Hamilton viewed the Yaqui and Mayo Indians as obstacles to progress. As he defined it, progress meant capitalist development and in their resistance to this the Indians of the valley placed themselves outside the nation’s shared trajectory into the future.

While Hamilton held the Yaqui and Mayo Indians in contempt (although he did grant them potential in the future as laborers), he afforded his greatest criticism to the Apaches. Hamilton held their status as wandering nomads in contempt and deemed them “the most savage of all the Indians of Mexico,” citing numerous examples of how their raids destroyed profitable enterprises throughout the north. Because of their “continued incursions...since 1832” the Apaches drove “off the unresisting inhabitants,” destroyed the planted crops and “depopulated and ruined the country.” In their wake the Apaches left nothing but “Deserted ranches...along the road.” According to Hamilton, the disaster was total. “No one lives here. No one dares to plant grain, and as it is here, so it is also throughout the northern part of the state.”

Hamilton’s eschewing of the Apaches, a clear illustration of what the citizen was not, is significant when he compares them to the Opatas, another Indian group in the region. In his description of the Opatas, Hamilton provides an instructive case in the way citizenship could be claimed through violence. Deeming them “frank and docile” Hamilton notes that many of them served as soldiers. Given his opinion of the Presidio

Buenavista this does not say much to recommend them. Moreover, Hamilton recounts a story of how the Opatas fought an engagement against government troops. Although they conducted themselves in a brave and courageous fashion, so too did the Mayo and Yaqui Indians. In Hamilton's view, what made the Opatas unique was their staunch resistance to the Apaches. Describing them as "brave to the last extremity," the Opatas "have been known to withstand an onset of the Apaches outnumbered eight to one. They are just and humane in their dealings, and capable of a high degree of education. They are the bitter foes of the Apaches, showing them no mercy in an encounter." In their stalwart resistance to the Apaches, a group terrible enough to chase off the middle class ranchers of the north (a category that should resist according to a traditional definition of the citizen) the Opatas distinguished themselves as useful and claimed their status as authentic citizens of the nation. Arriving at the same conclusion, Hamilton concludes in no uncertain terms: "The Opatas are most useful citizens, and have on many occasions proved their loyalty to the Mexican Government by resisting the attacks of the Apaches."¹⁷¹

Despite disagreement as to what it meant, development served as a major theme during the Porfiriato. While the government espoused industrial progress and urban development, *puros* such as Altamirano proposed a different view. Instead of the factory, Altamirano believed in a rural vision and attempted to spread his ideas through the novel, a form of literary modernity; his approach was more cultural while the government's was economic. A clash of visions resulted and from this emerged a discourse of development; each side attempting to define Mexico according to their own specific

¹⁷¹ Previous quotes taken from Hamilton, *Hamilton's Mexican Handbook*, 27, 43-48, 66.

view. Travelers comprised an important part of this debate and although they failed to agree with Altamirano's rural vision for Mexico, the travelers' involvement in the discourse of development sheds light on the continued importance of citizenship during the Porfiriato. At a time of enhanced state authority and directed democracy, foreign observers demonstrate the persistence of citizenship as a means for negotiating one's place in the nation; through violence in specific. As the travelers' accounts make clear, there existed a strong correlation between violence and citizenship and in this connection rested the possibility to transcend the country's potential barriers of race and class. In his brave confrontation with death a lowly bandit-criminal elevated himself to a level equal to that of Hidalgo, while the inhabitants of rural Mexico demonstrated their citizenship in the pitched battles they waged with the country's bandits. The Opatas claimed ownership of their status as citizens through resistance to the Apaches.

Violence also served to lower one's standing as a citizen or block it altogether. Although the Yaqui and Mayo Indians possessed qualities similar to the Opatas, their resistance to the government and its developmental schemes made them obstacles to progress, impeding their path to citizenship. In a similar fashion, travelers perceived the *pronunciamiento* as a force for disorder and the result of a power-hungry elite. Those who resorted to this Mexican tradition received the observers' scorn and noted it as evidence of the short-comings of the country's "better" classes. As such, in violent action rested the possibility for advance or decline in citizenship status.

The persistence of these ideas despite the obvious failure of Altamirano's cultural project demonstrates that Mexico's popular classes (in specific) understood the importance of citizenship to their inclusion into the nation. Moreover, in employing

violence in its positive form, the country's disinherited groups directly claimed their status as authentic citizens. This point demonstrates that in a context of ideological dispute over the future of the country, the citizen remained an important category for negotiating one's inclusion in the nation and a definition of what it meant to be Mexican.

Conclusion

Following independence in 1821, Mexico's national elites adopted a cultural approach to the nation. After 1867, this amounted to a liberal interpretation, a proposition that implicitly contained ideas that called for a homogenous national culture. To create a modern nation, Mexico's liberal elites employed cultural media to transform and fit the people to the type of society they envisioned. Ignacio Manuel Altamirano was instrumental to this endeavor and his work contributed to the country's cultural revival and elite reconciliation. Most of all, Altamirano expressed nationalist concerns and believed in the potential of cultural production to play a role in framing this reality. In addition to comprising a major part of his own works, Altamirano helped foster national themes in the works of his contemporaries as demonstrated by his importation of Echeverría's ideas about the landscape.

Despite his involvement in Mexico's cultural community and his influence throughout the national elite Altamirano faced political isolation at the end of his life. With the influx of positive thought, *puro* liberals such as Altamirano lost influence and were increasingly viewed as members of the proverbial old guard. In the 1880s and 1890s, the positivists noted that although the *puros* were crucial to Mexican history, they no longer retained much relevance to the present day. The disagreement between Altamirano and positivists such as Justo Sierra, the country's Minister of Education and a former pupil of Altamirano's, stemmed from different understandings of the nation and its future. While Altamirano believed in citizen culture and professed a vision of Mexico grounded in the country's rural areas, the positivists advocated industrial development and urban progress as the proper course of action. Moreover, the positivists understood

development in more “scientific” terms and thought the Scientific Method represented the best approach to administering society. Such a view contrasted sharply with Altamirano’s ideas about republicanism and the organization of power. As a classical republican, Altamirano did not embrace the authoritarian tendencies common to Porfirio Díaz and his cabinet of scientific advisors. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that positivism appealed to much of Mexico’s liberal elites for the same reasons Altamirano advocated personal morality and citizen duty; both concepts held out answers for Mexican progress that excluded racist explanations common to other developmentalist ideas of the nineteenth century.

Altamirano articulated his vision for the nation in much of his works but *El Zarco*, his last complete novel remains the most significant. As described in the novel, Altamirano’s vision of Mexico revolved around the country’s rural districts and expressed an interpretation of the country as inherently liberal in organization. Furthermore, Altamirano argued for indigenous inclusion in the nation and spoke to a deep tradition of personal honor that qualified the country’s Indian population for this. Altamirano proposed the citizen as the answer to the nation’s problems, a category he defined as liberal, hard-working, thrifty, and utilitarian in general. Moreover, Altamirano’s conception of the citizen involved courage; a citizen was someone brave enough to confront the nation’s enemies with violence if need be. Overall, Altamirano invested the country’s rural middle classes with status as the nation’s authentic citizens. According to his account, it was their duty to lead the rest of the nation against the Díaz dictatorship.

This point begs the question of influence since many of the ideas present in *El Zarco* emerged from the cultural ether during the Revolution of 1910. Did the ideas expressed in *El Zarco* spread in a fashion conducive to political change? It appears the answer to this is not likely. The available evidence points to the success of the late nineteenth-century cultural project in producing works on a level par to anything else in the world. That said, it failed to inculcate the sentiments in the population due to the absence of a mass audience capable of assimilating such ideas. At the height of the Porfiriato literacy rates were at 19.4%, robbing Altamirano of the reading populace required for his theories about culture to work. Although there is evidence of public readings that took place on a regular basis for the country's urban illiterate, more research is needed to reach a conclusion about the potential influence of such activities.

Finally, Altamirano's use of characters in *El Zarco* demonstrates his own social theories regarding idealized behavior. Although it is clear that Altamirano advocated a realistic description of the country's landscape and that he espoused the view that novelists should aspire to recreate an accurate portrayal of society in their novels, *El Zarco* is indicative of some characteristics common to Romantic novels. Altamirano's characters operate within the confines of a simplistic division of society. As such, they reflect the fashion in which Altamirano thought people should act; they constitute idealized types that do much to illustrate his personal theories about social behavior. Moreover, Altamirano's citizens are a reflection of the small audience to come into contact with his novels. Whether intentional or not, Altamirano's characters possess values common to the urban middle and working classes, not the rural districts. In *El Zarco*, Altamirano glosses over the misery common to rural life in nineteenth-century

Mexico and applies his theories of urban middle class life to the provinces and their inhabitants. That said, the novel does much to explain contemporary notions of citizenship, opening the door for deeper conclusions about the importance of this category during the Porfiriato.

Travelers to Mexico failed to see Altamirano's vision of rural Mexico coming to pass and viewed the country's future in urban progress and industrialization. Perhaps it is due to their adherence to the Porfirian developmental model that makes their comments about citizenship so revealing. In a context of directed democracy and authoritarian liberalism that spoke to the backwardness of Mexico's popular classes, foreign observers noted a correlation between citizenship and violence. This is significant due to the fact that the experiences of development during the late nineteenth-century rendered a definition of the citizen that excluded the country's Indians and "backward" classes. Thus, violence represented one mechanism for contesting the idea of the nation through the category of the citizen.

This study has shown that during the Porfiriato, there emerged a disagreement about the proper shape development should take. As contemporary voices make clear, the conflict over development stemmed from contrasting interpretations about the future structure of the nation. While *puros* such as Altamirano espoused a vision of Mexico that embraced the country's indigenous populations, rural life, and a citizen culture, the Porfirians understood the future in terms of urban development and industrial progress. These contrasting visions, the result of differing interpretations about the lessons and meaning of the recent past, demonstrate the absence of elite consensus about the meaning of the nation. In describing the future shape the nation should take, Altamirano and his

contemporaries provided a transcript of inclusion and exclusion that illustrates who and what they thought constituted an authentic Mexican. The end result of this amounted to a commentary about what it meant to be Mexican.

The idea of the citizen represented a crucial component to this debate and does much to illustrate the varying ideas about the nation. As everyone agreed, the citizen represented someone who belonged in the nation. The disagreement emanated from differing interpretations of what attributes made up the citizen. From the available writings it is clear that no one consulted espoused ideas that extended citizenship to the entire population; certain exclusions applied. Nevertheless, the scope of exclusion varied, depending on the commentator. Moreover, Altamirano wanted to develop citizens first while the Porfirians gave priority to economic modernization. Creating citizens united by a homogenous national culture, a major goal for *puros* such as Altamirano, ranked as something that might be realized in the distant future. All of this combined to make the citizen an important category for negotiating one's status in the nation. As the descriptions of citizen violence reveal, proper conduct in violent situations made "suspect" members of the population eligible for citizenship; it served to erase the stigmas of race and class that otherwise served to bar them from membership in the national citizenry. Violence represented a means for claiming ownership of one's status as a citizen and thus, worthy of inclusion in the nation.

At its core, Altamirano's *El Zarco* constitutes an alternative vision of the nation and provides a different vantage from which to view the Porfirian nation-building project. As a window into what might have been the novel demonstrates positivism's impact on the nation. Moreover, *El Zarco* represents a commentary on race and class during the

Porfiriato. From the novel it is clear that at the end of the nineteenth century Mexico's multi-racial society continued to respond to the rhythms of distrust that emanated from these categories. On the other hand, the foreign travelers, the agents of modernity also looked to change Mexico and in 1889, Altamirano found himself in the opposite role and witnessed modernity firsthand. As his comments reveal, he did not find anything superior in the world's center of modern life.

In that year Altamirano traveled to France with Manuel Payno—another government official—to direct Mexico's presentation at the Paris Exposition.¹⁷² Following this, the government appointed him Consul-General to Spain. At his request the government transferred him to France but his job remained the same. In 1893 Altamirano took ill and went to San Remo, Italy to recover his health in the more favorable climate. Shortly after arriving in Italy Altamirano succumbed to his illness and died, leaving as his legacy 12,000 pages of text. In accordance with his wishes Altamirano's body was cremated and his ashes returned to Mexico. In 1934 the Congress ordered that his ashes be placed in Mexico City's Rotunda of Illustrious Men. Two years before his death Altamirano penned some thoughts about Mexico from Paris, remarking "I now want...above all to breathe the air of my Homeland, to contemplate its blue sky and warm myself under its radiant and burning sun, the god of my parents, far from which I feel ice in my veins and sadness in my spirit. Europe is beautiful, Paris is marvelous; but Mexico is my Homeland, and you well know it: the mother is preferred not because of being beautiful, or rich, but because she is the mother."¹⁷³

¹⁷² Frazer, "Imagining Bandits," 104.

¹⁷³ Nacci, *Altamirano*, 7, 49-50.

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