

# Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico

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I

In the realm of public ideology, the Mexican Revolution was preceded and accompanied by an upsurge in nationalism. Intellectuals as diverse as Andrés Molina Enríquez and José Vasconcelos denounced the sterile aping of European doctrines which had characterized the Liberal Reforma of the 1850s, in favour of measures which were based on colonial precedent. In fixing upon *mestizaje* as the historical mainspring of Mexican nationality, both men echoed Justo Sierra, high priest of Liberal patriotism in the Porfirian era, who had declared that 'the *mestizo* family . . . has constituted the dynamic element in our history'.<sup>1</sup> That both Social Darwinism and Romantic Idealism were invoked to justify these claims demonstrates how powerful was the nationalist impulse in Mexico during the first decades of this century. It fell to Manuel Gamio (1883-1960) to apply the principles of Boasian anthropology to further the same cause, albeit, in this case, by insisting on the enduring contribution of Indian civilisation to Mexico's development. As the title of his book, *Forjando Patria* (1916), clearly attested, Gamio welcomed the Revolution for its destruction of obstacles to the creation of 'the future nationality . . . the future Mexican patria'. Although he did not participate in the revolutionary struggle, he praised Pablo González, Venustiano Carranza's lacklustre general, as 'an intuitive nationalist', and later characterised Carranza himself as 'a man of many faults, but withal a true progressive and a man of the people', clear evidence that he favoured the victory of the constitutional coalition over the popular forces led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa.<sup>2</sup> In 1935 he asserted that his public goal had always been to promote 'a true, integral nationalism', thus avoiding the contemporary extremes of fascism and communism.<sup>3</sup>

To assess the significance of Gamio's contribution to the Mexican political and cultural tradition, it should be recalled that although Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and Carlos María de Bustamante, the chief ideologues of the 1810 Insurgency, had invoked the grandeur of Anáhuac as the chief glory of their Creole patria and defined the Mexican people as a nation which had struggled for three centuries to regain its freedom, a thesis enshrined in the Act of Independence of 1821, by contrast most early nineteenth-century Mexican Liberals dismissed the Aztecs as mere barbarians and viewed contemporary Indians as a hindrance to their country's modernisation.<sup>4</sup> In adopting this approach, they could cite Alexander von Humboldt who, in his study of Indian monuments and codices, expounded the neo-classical

doctrine that aesthetic achievement and political freedom invariably co-exist, a union supremely realised in ancient Greece, but all too absent among the Aztecs whom he described as 'a warlike, mountainous people, strong, but of an exaggerated ugliness if judged according to the principles of European beauty, degraded by despotism, accustomed to the ceremonies of a bloody cult, and little disposed to elevate themselves through the cultivation of the fine arts'.<sup>5</sup> In the light of these remarks, it comes as no surprise to find Ignacio Ramírez, Minister of Justice in the first cabinet of Benito Juárez and a great admirer of Humboldt, condemning the Aztec realm as an abject despotism, dominated by superstition and fear, the surviving remnants of its art and literature notable only for their barbaric taste. What lessons could be learnt from texts which admitted that 'the first Mexican emperor ate his wife during their wedding night and before the sun rose the next day changed her into a goddess'?<sup>6</sup>

The Liberals discerned two great obstacles to the emergence of a secular, democratic society in Mexico: the wealth and influence of the Catholic Church and the enduring, isolated backwardness of the Indian peasantry. The Reforma thus sought to quit the Church of its property and to deprive the clergy of all public authority. So, too, Indian villages were stripped of their juridical personality and their communal lands distributed on an individual basis. The result was to leave many communities virtually defenceless against the expansion of neighbouring *haciendas*. Even where Indians continued in possession of land, there occurred a process of concentration of ownership. But the radical ideologues who framed these measures were remarkably slow to perceive the consequences of their policy. Dogmatically convinced that economic progress could only derive from the free play of individual interest in an unrestricted market, Ignacio Ramírez observed that the Indians were so immersed in the dull rhythm of rural life that they more resembled industrious ants than the free citizens of a liberal republic. Indeed, by reason of their isolation and multiplicity of languages, most Indians could not be defined as Mexicans, since 'these races still conserve their own nationality, protected by family and language'.<sup>7</sup> Only with the publication of *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909) did a liberal intellectual offer a persuasive defence of the principle of communal ownership of land by Indian villages. Even so, Andrés Molina Enríquez displayed scant interest in native history and excluded Indians from the Mexican nation, which he defined as essentially *mestizo*.<sup>8</sup>

The achievement of Manuel Gamio was to reinstate Anáhuac as the glorious foundation of Mexican history and culture, thus reversing a century of Liberal scorn. Equally important, he rejected neo-classical canons of aesthetic judgement and demanded a reevaluation of native art-forms. As much as Molina Enríquez, he called for land distribution on a collective basis and advocated the revival of village handicraft industry. In the last resort, however, the official *indigenismo* promoted by Gamio sought to incorporate Indian communities into the national society of modern Mexico. A secular liberal, Gamio condemned both the Catholic Church and the folk Catholicism which governed the minds and life of Mexican Indians, offering by way of an alternative the diffusion of scientific knowledge and aesthetic achievement.

*Indigenismo* was thus a means to an end rather than an enduring mission: if incorporation was its aim, then essentially it sought to destroy rather than fortify the peasant culture of native communities. Modernising nationalism of the brand advocated by Gamio certainly found consolation in past glories but its inner vision was based on the liberal resolve to transform a backward country into a modern nation able to defend itself from foreign hegemony.

## II

The intellectual foundation of Gamio's public career lay in his professional skill as an archaeologist. In 1909–1910 he studied at Columbia University with Franz Boas, a vital influence, since not merely had Boas spear-headed a renovation of American anthropology, he also played a leading role in the establishment of the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico City.<sup>9</sup> It was under Boas' direction that in 1912 Gamio conducted excavations at San Miguel Amantla in Azcapotzalco which for the first time in the American hemisphere employed the method of stratigraphic analysis, a method which enabled archaeologists to trace the sequence of cultures through successively deeper and older levels of deposited shards. In recognition of the quality of his research—the results were made public in the 1913 International Congress of Americanists—Gamio succeeded Boas as Director of the School of Archaeology and also served in the department of Archaeological Monuments, 1912–1915, rising to become its Director General, an appointment which coincided with the worst flurries of revolutionary conflict.<sup>10</sup> It was in 1917, largely thanks to the patronage of Pastor Rouaix, then Minister of Agriculture, that Gamio was made Director of the newly-established Department of Anthropology, a post he occupied until 1924 and during which he undertook the work for which he is still remembered.

Gamio's main achievement was the reconstruction of the archaeological site of Teotihuacán. Already, in the last years of the Porfiriato, Leopoldo Batres had cleaned the two great pyramids of their centuries-long cover of natural vegetation, a clumsy, unprofessional job which robbed these monuments of their symmetry and left the surrounding site filled with rubble. With the assistance of a team of archaeologists and some 300 workmen, Gamio conducted a thorough survey of the ceremonial centre, uncovered its main features, and, most important, cleansed the Ciudadela of vegetation, revealing that it had formed a temple dedicated to Quetzalcóatl, with the great serpent heads that protruded from the pyramid attesting to the cult. The entire site was then carefully restored so as to prevent deterioration. In addition to this renovation of ancient monuments, Gamio undertook several depth excavations, employing stratigraphic analysis to determine the sequence of human settlement at Teotihuacán. Careful plans and photographs of all work in progress were maintained. Equally important, in 1922 Gamio edited a handsome two volume survey, undertaken by his research team, entitled *The Population of the Valley of Teotihuacán*.<sup>12</sup> It was left to Ignacio Marquina to set out in print, accompanied by lavish illustrations, the first complete description of the monuments and overall site of Teotihuacán, with careful analysis of the ceramic sequence and the surviving friezes. Other

members of the group provided accounts of the mythology and cultural developments of Indian civilisation. As Gamio confessed in his introduction, the precise dating of the monuments was still uncertain and the relation of Teotihuacán to Tula, the capital of the Toltec realm, still a matter for speculation. It is significant that Gamio did not essay any rounded synthesis or description of Indian civilisation, content to let the archaeological findings speak for themselves. Despite this omission, the professional quality of the enterprise was abundantly evident and Columbia University awarded Gamio a doctorate for his work, at that time a rare honour for a Mexican, and clear proof of his international standing as a scholar.

The reconstruction of Teotihuacán at once converted the site into the greatest public monument in Mexico and effectively re-instated Indian civilisation as the foundation of Mexican history. It was no longer possible for radicals to dismiss the native past as a story of barbarism, still less for American anthropologists to rank the Aztecs as superior Iroquois. The sheer imposing scale of the ceremonial centre in itself evoked comparison with the pyramids of Egypt and thus restored the old Creole insistence on the grandeur of native empire as the enduring glory of Mexico. It was a thesis Gamio popularised in a tourist guide to Teotihuacán which he published at this time, clearly designed to attract visitors, both Mexican and foreign, to inspect the results of his project.<sup>13</sup> In all this, Gamio thus inaugurated what was to become a distinctively Mexican industry, the reconstruction of ancient monuments—a craft industry financed by the Mexican state and justified by the joint aim of recuperating national glory and attracting mass tourism. In Mexico archaeology has always been governed as much by political and practical rationale as by academic criteria.

Not content merely to study the past, Gamio sought both to analyse and reform the present. The findings of archaeology were to be paralleled by the applied research of anthropology. What linked the two ventures was the thesis, which Gamio first presented in *Forjando Patria*, that the bulk of the Mexican population, if defined in broad cultural terms rather than by strict linguistic criteria, were Indians. To demonstrate this thesis, Gamio organised an ethnographic survey of the district of Teotihuacán, running concurrently with the excavations at the site, employing an entire team of assistants to complete the project. The results which were published in the second volume of the *Valley of Teotihuacán* dealt with a multiplicity of themes, ranging from agriculture, land tenure and diet to religious practice, folk-lore and medicine, with colonial history added to bridge the gap between the native past and the contemporary scene. Once more, Gamio left the actual presentation to his team, seeking only to summarise their findings so as to afford a basis for his policy recommendations. Governing the entire project was Gamio's conviction that contemporary Indians conserved in essential, albeit in eroded, form the culture of their ancestors. Both in its material base and in its intellectual presuppositions, native civilisation exhibited a resilient, intransigent identity, its essential configuration much the same in the twentieth century as it had been at the time of the Spanish conquest.<sup>14</sup> To demonstrate this proposition, Gamio first showed that although only 5 per cent of Teotihuacán's inhabitants spoke *nahuatl*, crude physical measurements revealed that some

60 per cent of the population were Indians, with the rest mainly *mestizo*. Moreover, a carefully framed scheme of cultural characteristics equally demonstrated the existence of two separate groups, the one broadly native, the other predominantly *mestizo*-white.<sup>14</sup>

In his approach to the native population, Gamio drew on the work of Franz Boas who had consistently argued against the explanatory value of the concept of race, hitherto dominant in American social science, seeking to replace it by the concept of culture. According to Boas there were no inferior or superior races, since all human groups were endowed with much the same range of talents and qualities. If this was the case, then there was little point in arranging races and nations in any general, evolutionary scheme, an approach much favoured in Social Darwinist circles where the Teutonic white nations were generally thought to head mankind's universal progress. All this was grist to Gamio's ideological mill, since it enabled him to escape from the genetic determinism that then afflicted social thinking in Mexico. All peoples were equal in the eyes, if not of God, certainly of the anthropologist. It was for this reason that he always referred to Indian or native 'civilisation' and introduced his fellow country-men to the Boasian concept of culture, defining it as 'the natural and intellectual manifestations' of any human group. Moreover, if contemporary intellectuals manifested sunk in rural idiocy, then their backwardness should be attributed to their poor diet, their lack of education, their material poverty, and their isolation from the stimulus of national life. There was nothing original in these assertions, since Justo Sierra in a well-known essay had equally fixed upon diet and education as the twin determinants of native retardation.<sup>15</sup>

With these principles to hand, Gamio defended the aesthetic achievements of Indian civilisation, launching a frontal assault on the canons of neo-classical taste which had governed academic art in Mexico until the eve of the Revolution. Was there not, he queried, an impressive similarity between guiding principles of cubism and Aztec art? In any case, the most cursory inspection demonstrated that the literature and art of pre-Columbian civilisation was as beautiful and as original as anything produced in Mexico in subsequent centuries. At the same time, he warned against any ill-informed application of European criteria to the appreciation of Indian artefacts. As yet, the grounds for an aesthetic judgement of such objects did not exist. Most observers simply singled out as beautiful those images which possessed a fortuitous resemblance to European form. If the elaborately carved image of Coatlicue was dismissed as grotesquely ugly, the warrior's head known as the Eagle Knight was widely admired. Not content merely to defend the essential relativity of aesthetic taste, Gamio argued that Mexican artists should seek inspiration in these native sources, the more especially since in this fashion they would produce works more accessible and appealing to the contemporary native population. It was with this didactic view in mind that Gamio proposed the establishment of a Department of Fine Arts, funded by the State, to encourage the emergence of national art in Mexico, asserting that such art was 'one of the great bases of nationalism'.<sup>16</sup> By way of encouragement, he commissioned Francisco Goytía, a native artist, to paint landscapes,

churches and folk-scenes in Teotihuacán, canvases done in somewhat impressionistic style, which were reproduced in the published survey.

In accordance with this revaluation of native civilisation and its art forms, Gamio also initiated a campaign to revive Mexican artisan industry, singling out popular textiles, ceramics, lacquer, metal-work and porcelain. Although most of these crafts originated in the colonial period, they also, so he argued, preserved a native tradition and embodied a harmonious integration of hispanic and Indian forms and techniques. Unfortunately, production in all these lines had suffered considerably during the nineteenth century owing first to foreign imports and then to the establishment of modern industry in Mexico itself. Yet whereas mechanised factory products could never find a market abroad, in contrast native crafts met with immediate success, always provided they enjoyed government encouragement in modernising their techniques and in marketing their wares. 'National industry', as Gamio termed these goods, provided a much-needed rural employment and in particular promoted the economic development of native communities. At Teotihuacán Gamio actively encouraged the revival of artisan crafts and, if not all survived, the impressive array of stone objects which greet the modern tourist to that zone offers a tribute to his prescience.<sup>17</sup> Once again, Gamio thus initiated a policy which was to be implemented by subsequent Mexican governments and which to this day continues to characterise official *indigenismo*.

In no sense did Gamio confine himself to the realm of culture, since he strongly insisted on the necessity of land reform. In a clear echo of Molina Enríquez he commented that whereas the colonial Laws of the Indies had protected native land tenure, by contrast the Reforma had effectively stripped the Indian peasantry of its land. 'The constitution of 1857', he declared, 'is of foreign character in origin, form and basis'. The radicals had brought in legislation and a form of government that was suitable for a mere quarter of the population, a system that was exotic and inappropriate for the native masses. In *Forjando Patria* he called for measures to reconcile the Yaquis of Sonora and the Mayas of Quintana Roo, so to incorporate these dissident groups within the nation. More important, he admitted that although elements of banditry had entered Zapatismo, there also existed a 'legitimate Zapatismo or Indianism' which simply sought to reverse the laws of the Reforma, endowing native villages with collectively owned land. Nor was the movement confined to Morelos, since Gamio estimated that the Zapatistas represented the claims of about a third of the population. In this sharp attack on the Reforma, Gamio reiterated the dictum, originally coined by Montesquieu, that laws should be 'derived from the nature and necessities of the population', rather than merely apply abstract principles imported from abroad.<sup>18</sup>

In the great survey of Teotihuacán, Gamio commissioned Lucio Mendieta y Núñez to trace the history of land tenure and the current distribution of land in the district.<sup>19</sup> The published text made it clear that although Spanish land-grants began in the sixteenth century and that the Spanish share of arable land steadily increased as the native population declined, nevertheless, most villagers enjoyed some access to common lands until the Reforma

when the bulk of the population was reduced to the conditions of landless labourers. The district had not benefited from Independence and indeed there were grounds for supposing that its population was not much greater in 1919 than it had been in 1876 or even in 1810. The lack of land, when combined with heavy infant mortality, periodic famines, and out-migration, all served to explain this secular stagnation. As it was, some seven *haciendas* owned 9523 hectares or 90 per cent of the available arable land, with the remainder held by 416 small proprietors. Much of the *hacienda* territory was devoted to maguey plantations which produced pulque for Mexico City. Only four *haciendas* had any irrigation and only one enterprise owned a tractor. All wheat was cultivated by the large estates, but maize production was divided in equal amounts between the *haciendas* and villagers. Despite the preponderance of the *haciendas*, in 1900 they only supported some 371 resident peons, the remainder of the population living scattered in over 30 small villages and towns, most of which were built in dispersed fashion with many houses endowed with substantial gardens. Although Mendieta offered figures which suggest that village landholdings were somewhat larger than his estimate of 977 hectares, nevertheless, there is little reason to dispute his conclusion that most families lacked sufficient land to support themselves, so that the largest class in the community were day-labourers, migrating in search of seasonal employment or hiring themselves to the local estates. Nevertheless, there also existed in each village a family or more of Indians who possessed land and who acted as the effective leaders of their communities. Despite the bleak picture he drew, Mendieta y Núñez cautioned against any indiscriminate haste in land redistribution, since if the Capital was to be fed the countryside required efficient small properties based on irrigation and mechanisation. It was thus necessary both to increase the endowment of land available to the villages and to prepare conditions for the modernisation of agriculture.

Here were conclusions that Gamio made his own. At the same time, he displayed considerable caution in specifying the precise mechanism of agrarian reform and indeed chose to defend his recommendations by an attack on Bolshevism. These were the years, it should be remembered, of the Oregon presidency and of the 'red scare' in the United States. For all that, Gamio's arguments were singularly lacking in dialectical ingenuity. In the first place, he admitted that in Mexico City 'socialism has made as great and positive conquests as in whatever other country in the world', always excepting Russia. In recent years workers had improved their condition by means of collective action and the organisation of unions, thus incorporating themselves into modern civilisation. By contrast in Teotihuacán socialist ideas were unknown and inappropriate. Unfortunately, there were 'pseudo-Bolshevik leaders' in the Capital who had proposed implanting soviets in Mexico, men who sought to ignore 'the unescapable laws of evolution', and impose foreign, modern forms of organisation on communities that existed still at varying degrees of the neolithic, pre-hispanic or medieval levels of culture. In any case, he added, Washington would never accept such a development, but would intervene and thus prejudice national independence. By way of an alternative, Gamio noted that in the pre-hispanic period

qualification into a thorough-going antithesis when he wrote: 'In human evolution we observe that scientifically governed activities have followed an ascending curve in their development ... whereas ... in activities or intellectual manifestations bereft of the scientific character to which we have alluded, such as art, religion, ethics and politics, activities which are merely conventional, emotive and sentimental, their irregular evolution cannot be described graphically by an ascending curve but only by one which alternately descends and ascends'.<sup>23</sup> In effect, all local national concerns were but countervailing eddies, doomed to dissolution, when confronted by the universal tide of scientific progress.

The degree to which Gamio's positivism controverted his romantic impulse is best demonstrated by his failure to encounter any value in Indian culture other than its artistic production. The all-important fact that contemporary Indians in Mexico preserved in their daily lives the essential figuration of pre-hispanic civilisation was not for Gamio a cause for national exaltation, offering an enduring base on which the nation could be refounded or constituting a source of social values hitherto eroded by foreign influence, but rather embodied an obstacle to *mestizaje*, and signified economic backwardness and cultural stagnation. Even in his treatment of classical Teotihuacán, Gamio entertained traditional liberal reservations. True, he asserted that despite the practice of human sacrifice native religion had exercised a benign moral influence, always provided 'the evolutionary stage then attained' was taken into account.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, the density of population far exceeded the numbers supported in subsequent centuries. In an essay written for American consumption, he argued that native civilisation was 'spontaneous, that is, it grew from progressive, convergent mental development, from geographic and biological influence. For this reason their racial characteristics were normal, their cultural manifestations logical and their social structure natural and properly organised'. However, all these observations were undercut by his description of the pyramids at Teotihuacán where he commented that the immense masses of earth which sustained the temples 'signified ... the offering of toil, sorrow, blood and tears made by the people to the gods, subjugated by the theocracies that exploited their fanaticism'.<sup>25</sup> Ignacio Ramirez could not have put the matter more starkly.

Moreover, if the society of Teotihuacán exhibited evolutionary promise, thereafter it was down-hill all the way for the native peoples of Mexico. After the Spanish Conquest the Indians 'barely preserved their race' and were soon reduced to 'a mechanical, dark and painful existence, broken by occasional surges of rebellion and hatred for their oppressors'. All that Spain bequeathed to Mexico after independence was an enserfed population dominated by a 'hybrid, defective culture'.<sup>26</sup> This process of secular decline was best illustrated by the discovery that the descendants of the *mestizo* historian of the early seventeenth century, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, still lived in Teotihuacán, comprising a family of petty proprietors, Indian in appearance and culture, who lived in blissful ignorance that they could count among their ancestors both Nezahualcōyotl, the philosopher-king of Texcoco and Ixtlilxóchitl, the only native historian in Mexico to rival the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega,<sup>27</sup> but Gamio did not dwell on the charm and interest of

villages had been governed by 'a communist organisation of work', which he described as 'a practical and happy application of the theories of Marx'. Much the same 'communist system of property' had continued during the Colony and had only been abolished during the Reforma. There were thus ample historical precedents for implementing the 1917 Constitution and endowing native communities with land, based, so Gamio advocated on the system of co-operativism (*mutualismo*) or rural communism, but not Bolshevism.<sup>28</sup> If we recall that in the same year Molina Enriquez defended Article 27 of the Constitution as based historically on the regalain rights of the Spanish Crown and philosophically on the positivist principles of Comte, then the ideological clumsiness of Gamio's vocabulary will become clear.<sup>29</sup>

### III

To emphasise Gamio's revaluation of pre-Columbian art; his encouragement of artisan industry; his insistence on the enduring influence of native civilisation; his advocacy of land restitution for Indian villages; his sharp critique of classical liberalism and contemporary communism as alien ideologies; his concern with social realities as against abstract doctrines and his evident aspiration to create a united, strengthened nation;—all this is to portray Manuel Gamio as a typical romantic nationalist, as a man whose heart and mind almost instinctively responded to the themes and ideals which in the eighteenth century had driven German patriots to reject the Enlightenment. The very 'historical particularism', of which Franz Boas has been accused, prepared the ground for the rejection of social Darwinism and the imperialist penetration it served. Certainly, in the opening pages of *Forjando Patria*, he struck a decidedly romantic note when he appealed to the 'revolutionaries' of Mexico to forge a new *patria* from hispanic iron and native bronze. Moreover, the starting point of his manifesto was the admission that when judged by the standards of Japan, Germany and France, Mexico did not constitute a true nation. As yet, it lacked the four defining features of a common language, a common character, a homogeneous race and a common history. By reason of their many languages, rural isolation, poverty and illiteracy, the Indian communities constituted a series of separate countries, *pequeñas patrias*, whose inhabitants did not participate in the 'national life or exercise their rights as citizens of the republic. The grand aim, so Gamio declared, must be to create 'a powerful *patria* and a coherent, defined nationality', based on 'racial approximation, cultural fusion, linguistic unification, and economic equilibrium'.<sup>30</sup>

No matter how romantic and nationalistic were the impulses that animated Gamio's public career, in the last resort he was far too deeply influenced by his liberal, positivist formation to yield to the ideological thrust of these emotions. From the start, he conceived of himself as a social scientist who sought to deploy his professional expertise in service of the Mexican people and the Mexican state. The implications of this latent positivism can be clearly observed when after rejecting any 'integral, ascending progress' in favour of 'periodic, temporary progress' in human culture, he exempted science from this general rule, noting that its universal momentum was sustained by an international caste of savants. In 1935, he developed this

this story. Instead, he pronounced that 'there is in Mexico two great social groupings living side by side in the same territory: the one, numerically inferior, presents an advanced and efficient civilisation, and the other, numerically the larger, displays a backward civilisation'. It was a contrast drawn between the natives and the *mestizo*-whites, between what in colonial parlance were called *Indios* and *gente de razón*.<sup>28</sup> By then entering its fifth century of conflict, so Gamio declared, the struggle between the cultures remained as strong and oppressive as ever. The degree to which he denied that native civilisation possessed any enduring value or offered any lesson to contemporary Mexico was amply demonstrated in the following remarks:<sup>29</sup>

The extension and intensity that folk-loric life exhibits in the great majority of the population, eloquently demonstrates the cultural backwardness in which that population vegetates. This archaic life, which moves from artifice to illusion and superstition, is curious, attractive and original. But in all senses it would be preferable for the population to be incorporated into contemporary civilisation of advanced, modern ideas, which, if stripped of fantasy and traditional clothing, would contribute in a positive manner to the conquest of the material and intellectual well-being to which all humanity ceaselessly aspires.

In short, Gamio probed native culture in the spirit of a pathologist analysing the physical decay of the patient. The great survey of Teotihuacán was thus designed not as a quest for Mexico's native roots and foundation, but rather as an exploration of the lower depths of human deprivation. Statistics and facts were always forthcoming to support such an approach. Popular diet was barely sufficient and lacked the tonic qualities necessary for the display of prolonged physical energy, the average caloric consumption more close to that of the Egyptians than of the Europeans, a measurement that led to the conclusion that 'the natives that now inhabit the Valley of Teotihuacán belong to a race which is physiologically decadent'.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the grand object here was to remove the obstacles to *mestizaje*, that centuries-long process which would eventually create a homogeneous Mexican nation. In pursuit of this goal, Gamio was adamant that Indians should be encouraged to learn Spanish, since otherwise they would remain trapped within their own villages, dwelling as 'foreigners in their own country'. Although he did not actively discourage the use of native tongues, he clearly hoped that they would slowly wither away, since after commenting on their decline he observed that 'this decadence . . . is beneficial to national unification'.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, his emphasis on cultural rather than genetic definitions of the native population entailed some curious conclusions. For he declared that men such as Juárez or Altamirano could not be considered as natives, despite their genetic status, since they had become fully incorporated in modern culture. As late as the 1930s Gamio continued to draw a distinction between the quarter of the population which enjoyed a modern scientific culture, predominantly urban, and the majority which were still dominated by anachronistic, folk-loric ideas and practices. By then he had become enamoured of the soya-bean as the cutting edge of dietary improvement and sought to introduce modern medicine to the rural population.

Appointed Director of the Inter-American Indigenista Institute in 1938, a post he continued to hold for many years, he still claimed that 'native culture is the true base of nationality in almost all the countries of America'; insisted on the 'brilliant future of artisan industry'; characterised autochthonous culture as 'more natural, spontaneous and picturesque' than the foreign civilisation of the cities;—yet defined the aim of his Institute as assisting 'the necessities of the groups that vegetate in the lowest stages of evolution'.<sup>32</sup>

What renders Gamio's case yet more indicative of the ideological source of official *indigenismo* in Mexico is that beneath the stern mask of the social scientist there lurked an unregenerate anti-clerical liberal. Throughout the great survey on Teotihuacán there was a fierce condemnation of the three centuries of Spanish rule as a period in which the native community was virtually enserfed, the victims of exploitation and mindless cruelty. All the emphasis was on the tragedy of their displacement and oppression. However, in his introduction, Gamio reserved his harshest critique for the role of Catholicism, asserting that 'the imposition of this religion was the chief cause or one of the most important causes . . . of the pronounced and continuing decadence of the native population both in the colonial and contemporary epochs'.<sup>33</sup> Despite the efforts of conservative propagandists to depict the first friars as the protectors of the Indians, the mendicants had exploited the natives mercilessly, forcing great contingents to labour on the construction of the vast churches and convents that soared far above the squalid huts of the peasantry. Men such as Las Casas and Sahagún were a rarity, not the rule, an assertion which prompted Gamio to query: 'Who knows how many blood-thirsty, exploitative friars should have been hung at the gallows?' if by reason of their observance of 'the sombre rules of the misanthrope of Assisi', the Franciscans built less ostentatious edifices than their Augustinian counterparts, nevertheless, the chronicles of Motolinia and Mendieta were essentially misleading. For the mendicants failed to impart any true knowledge of the Christian gospel to the Mexican Indians, since all that occurred after the conquest was the substitution of pagan idols by Catholic images. To this day the natives practised 'a coarse polytheism . . . a strange hybrid of superstition and idolatrous religious concepts, very far from the principles of Roman Catholicism'.<sup>34</sup>

The bitter animus against the Church displayed by Gamio was eminently characteristic of the constitutionalist coalition which defeated the popular alliance in the Revolution. Heirs of the Reforma, they condemned the Church as the chief obstacle to their plans to build a modern, secular society in Mexico. As the survey of Teotihuacán revealed, the peasantry were eminently religious, expending their exiguous resources on fiestas and on church adornment. Moreover, their devotion left them at the mercy of the country clergy, who generally displayed little concern for the material well-being of their flocks, but rather charged high fees for all their services, lived with common-law wives and generally exercised a retrogressive influence. Detailed research on the ethnography of Teotihuacán did not always confirm this harsh verdict. True, the enquiry found that if 4826 persons exhibited some rudimentary acquaintance with the chief tenets of the Christian faith, another 3419 persons could only be described as pagan Catholics. At the

same time virtually all Indians employed folk-medicine and its practitioners to cure their ailments and equally subscribed to folk-beliefs about the world and its spirits which had little to do with Church dogmas. Yet the author of the survey also noted that the influence of the clergy, great as it was, depended on individual priests gaining the sympathy of the natives, since at least one cleric had been virtually expelled by irate parishioners. Moreover, the survey concluded that religion was a necessity for the Indians, since it provided the only ray of light in the otherwise 'animal life of these men'.<sup>35</sup> Such was the force of these findings that Gamio did not recommend any frontal assault on the Church. Instead, he merely suggested that the government should intervene to lower fees charged for religious rites and seek to encourage the clergy to marry. So he also urged that the absurdly dressed, often sanguinary images that attracted popular veneration should be removed or, at the very least, improved, since their crudity corrupted native sensibility. More to the point, he recommended that 'other religious faiths and other clergy, such as Protestantism and its pastors, should be implanted in the region and that regional masonic lodges and other civic associations should be organised'. In later years, Gamio expressed the hope that the innate aesthetic qualities of the natives should be encouraged to the point where artistic expression might replace religious devotion. As always, he berated religion as the chief cause of the natives' cultural stagnation and advised the Government to promote education and science to combat its pernicious influence.<sup>36</sup> The *indigenismo* preached by Gamio thus sought to extirpate the folk-Catholicism that had emerged during the colonial period: Leviathan would brook no rivals in its popular domain.

## IV

In a *Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles*, compiled by David Alfaro Siqueiros in 1922, a group of leading Mexican painters and sculptors, including Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, proclaimed that 'The noble work of our race, down to its most insignificant spiritual and physical expressions, is native (and essentially Indian) in origin. With their admirable and extraordinary talent to create beauty, peculiar to themselves, the art of the Mexican people is the most wholesome spiritual expression in the world and this tradition is our greatest treasure'. In this pronouncement we encounter a messianic euphoria, worthy of the visionary patronage of José Vasconcelos, in which Mexican artists asserted their vocation to create forms of universal significance, albeit of native origin. The tension between native roots and universal, not to say, futurist ambition eventually led both Siqueiros and Orozco to attack the work of Rivera, condemning his overly narrow nationalism as an unoriginal blend of archaeological revivalism, folkloric narrative and Gauguinesque primitivism. By contrast, in his American exile Siqueiros strove to develop new techniques and employ new materials, consonant with the machine age of the twentieth century. Moreover, he rejected historicist modes as romantic and asserted that revolutionary art had to be classic, public and monumental, characterised by an emphasis on basic, geometric forms, an emphasis already to be found in both the early David and Cézanne. So, too, Orozco deplored the contemporary concentra-

tion on Indian origins, commenting that much of Mexico's vaunted folk-art derived from 'the creoles and *mestizos* of rural areas'. Moreover, he argued that nationalism in aesthetic matters might well benefit folk-art of local and transient interest, but could only undermine great art which had to follow the universal standards common to all countries. He added: 'each race will be able to make and will have to make, its intellectual and emotional contribution to that universal tradition, but will *never* be able to impose on it the local and transitory modalities of the minor arts'.<sup>37</sup>

In the ideology of Manuel Gamio, we can observe much the same dichotomy between the insistence on the native roots of the Mexican people and the stern affirmation of the necessity of modernity. In art the tension between these contrasting impulses led to the creation of paintings which at their best were both national in content and modern in form and technique, a combination in part justified by the experience of the Revolution and by the revolutionary ambition to create modes of expression which were public and didactic. The images of the past that the great muralists presented were derived from the liberal nationalist ideology promoted by the Revolutionary Government. So equally in the work of Gamio we encounter the same ambition to employ the most advanced techniques of the social sciences to elucidate the realities of national history and the contemporary condition of the native peoples of Mexico. In the field of archaeology, modern methods were similarly applied to uncover the sequence of past cultures and, more important, to recuperate and renovate the great monuments of native civilisation, incorporating them as the tangible, public demonstration of Mexico's native origin.

In conclusion, it is surely significant that the ethnographic survey of Teotihuacán conducted by Gamio was the first systematic enquiry into native beliefs and religious practices since the 1560s, when Bernardino de Sahagún completed his monumental compilation. There is a haunting identity of purpose in the two projects. For the Franciscan justified his accumulation of so much data on pagan religion by comparing his work to the research of a doctor into disease: he studied paganism so as best to devise the means to extirpate it, fully persuaded that before the Indians could be incorporated into the universal culture of the Catholic church, the very roots of their religion had to be uncovered and destroyed. So Gamio assembled a team of assistants to investigate every aspect of 'Indian civilisation', so as to encounter the measures which would enable the Mexican state to incorporate the native peoples into the national community, which in turn he implicitly defined as but one variant of the universal culture of Western liberal capitalism, firmly persuaded that modernity required the destruction of existing folk-lore beliefs and practices and in particular, demanded the uprooting of the influence of the Catholic Church. In essence, the only item of value that Gamio encountered in his exploration of Indian civilisation was its aesthetic artefacts, objects which could serve as a legitimate source of national pride and hence worthy of display in museums erected to celebrate Mexican cultural achievements. From the three centuries of Spanish oppression, he sought to rescue only its architecture, artistic patrimony and folk-crafts. In sum, Gamio dismissed the long cycle of human civilisation in

Mexico as possessing few, if any, lessons for the present: the past was dead and, where its influence lingered, ripe for extirpation leaving only its material monuments and artefacts for contemporary admiration.

Despite Gamio's affirmation that the native population preserved the culture of Anáhuac, his own evidence revealed that it was the colonial period which constituted a living past, a culture which in many important spheres continued to dominate the peasantry. The very folk-crafts he sought to promote derived from that epoch. The forms of communal land-tenure he advocated represented little more than a return to colonial practice. More important, the all-pervasive vitality of folk-Catholicism testified to the enduring influence of those centuries. There were indeed two Mexicos. But the conflict was between a Catholic majority and a liberal minority, between a populace whose traditions and institutions were rooted in the three centuries of Spanish dominion and the modernising projects of the revolutionary state. It is not our purpose to question the wholly admirable concern for the material well-being of the native population which inspired Gamio's public career. But there is little doubt that his *indigenismo* derived from his liberalism and was animated by a modernising nationalism, which promoted the incorporation and assimilation of the Indian communities into the urban, hispanic population. The ultimate and paradoxical aim of official *indigenismo* in Mexico was thus to liberate the country from the dead-weight of its native past, or, to put the case more clearly, finally to destroy the native culture which had emerged during the colonial period.

#### NOTES

1. D. A. Brading (1984), *Prophecy and Myth in Mexican History*, pp. 63-80, Cambridge Centre of Latin American Studies; Justo Sierra (1948), *Obras*, Vol. IX, p. 131 (14 Volumes) (Mexico).
2. Manuel Gamio (1960), *Forjando Patria*, 2nd edition, pp. 169, 181 (Mexico); José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio (1926), *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, p. 177 (Chicago). Predictably, Vasconcelos wrote about 'The Latin American Basis' and Gamio about 'The Indian Basis' of Mexican civilisation.
3. Manuel Gamio (1972), *Arqueología e Indigenismo*, introduction and selection by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, p. 175 (Mexico). Note that this selection reprints parts of *Hacia un México nuevo* (Mexico, 1935).
4. D. A. Brading (1985), *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*, pp. 48-55, 73-74, 81-92, Cambridge Centre of Latin American Studies.
5. Alexander von Humboldt (1974), *Vistas de las cordilleras y monumentos de los pueblos indígenas de América*, translation and introduction by Jaime Labastida, pp. 87, 95, 230-237 (Mexico).
6. Ignacio Ramírez (1966), *Obras*, Vol. I, pp. 221-222 (2 Volumes) (Mexico).
7. Ignacio Ramírez (1966), *ibid.*, Vol. I, 190-191; Vol. II, 183-192.
8. D. A. Brading (1984), *Prophecy and Myth in Mexican History*, pp. 64-71, Cambridge Centre of Latin American Studies.
9. On Gamio's career see Juan Comas (1956), 'La vida y la obra de Manuel Gamio', in I. Bernal and E. Dávalos Hurtado (eds), *Estudios antropológicos publicados en homenaje al doctor Manuel Gamio* (Mexico); also Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1971), 'Prólogo in Alfonso Caso', in *La comunidad indígena*, Sep-Setenias (Mexico).
10. See Ignacio Bernal (1980), *A History of Mexican Archaeology*, pp. 160-169 (London); Gordon R. Willey and Jeremy A. Sabloff (1974), *A History of American Archaeology*, pp. 89-91 (San Francisco); see also David Straug, 'Manuel Gamio, la Escuela Internacional y el origen de las excavaciones estratigráficas en las Américas', in M. Gamio, *Arqueología e indigenismo*, pp. 207-233.

11. Manuel Gamio (ed.) (1972), *La población del Valle de Teotihuacán* (2 Volumes) (Mexico); facsimile edition, divided into 5 Volumes, introduction by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (Mexico, 1979).
12. On tourism see M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), pp. lxxviii-viii.
13. For this thesis see M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, p. 96; *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), p. xxix.
14. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), pp. xxvii-ix; Vol. II (iv), p. 165. Physical measurements yielded 5657 *indígenas*, 2137 *mexizos* and 536 *blancos*; cultural assessments yielded 5544 persons of 'civilización indígena' and 2866 of 'civilización moderna'.
15. M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, pp. 24, 95, 106; Justo Sierra, *Obras*, Vol. IX, pp. 126-127. For Boas see George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture and Evolution. Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 161-234; and Marvin Harris (1969), *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, pp. 250-318 (London).
16. M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, pp. 40-47, 55.
17. M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, pp. 140-147; *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (ii), pp. xc-iii.
18. M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, pp. 30, 72, 172-181.
19. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (ii), pp. 709-774; Vol. II (v), pp. 448-470. Note that Mendieta y Nuñez also provided a general study of the agrarian problem in Mexico and a review of current legislation, based largely on the works of Wistano Luis Orozco and Andrés Molina Enríquez, in Vol. II (v), pp. 477-572.
20. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), pp. lxxxi-v; p. xcvii. The pseudo-Bolshevik here was probably Vicente Lombardo Toledano who had suggested dividing Mexico into a series of Indian republics: see Ramón E. Ruiz, 'The Struggle for a National Culture in Rural Education', in I. Bernal and E. Dávalos Hurtado (eds), *Estudios antropológicos*, p. 480.
21. D. A. Brading, *Prophecy and Myth*, pp. 71-72.
22. M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, pp. 6-8, 12, 183; *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, p. 177.
23. M. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, p. 106; *Arqueología e Indigenismo*, p. 164.
24. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), p. xliii. He feared that after such a favourable assessment 'se nos tache de indianistas a outrance'.
25. M. Gamio, *ibid.*, Vol. I (i), p. lxxv; *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, pp. 105-106.
26. M. Gamio, *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, pp. 118, 169; *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), p. xix.
27. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (ii), pp. 546-548.
28. M. Gamio, *ibid.*, Vol. I (i), p. xxviii.
29. M. Gamio, *ibid.*, Vol. I (i), p. lii.
30. M. Gamio, *ibid.*, Vol. II (iv), p. 186.
31. See Onésimo Ríos Hernández, 'Gamio y la juventud nativa', in I. Bernal and E. Dávalos Hurtado (eds), *Estudios antropológicos*, pp. 49-50; M. Gamio, *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, p. 130.
32. Manuel Gamio (1948), *Consideraciones sobre el problema indígena*, pp. 2, 5, 8-9 (Mexico); M. Gamio, *Arqueología e Indigenismo*, pp. 125, 131-135, 158-159, 162.
33. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), p. xliii.
34. M. Gamio, *ibid.*, Vol. I (i), pp. xlvi-ix; M. Gamio, *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*, pp. 110-111.
35. M. Gamio, *Teotihuacán*, Vol. I (i), pp. xxxii, xlii-iii; Vol. II (iv), pp. 226-229.
36. M. Gamio, *ibid.*, Vol. I (i), p. xcix; M. Gamio, *Arqueología e Indigenismo*, pp. 166-169.
37. David Alfaro Siqueiros (1975), *Art and Revolution*, pp. 21-24, 31, 62, 113-115 (London); José Clemente Orozco (1974), *The Artist in New York*, pp. 89-90 (Austin). See also Justino Fernández (1972), *Estética del Arte Mexicano*, pp. 495-526 (Mexico).