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**MURALS IN MOTION: MEXICAN MURALISM ON THE SILVER SCREEN AND ITS
PLACE IN CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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MAJOR: MODERN LANGUAGES

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving family. Your support and love shown to me over the past years and throughout this program has never been taken for granted.

To my sister, Alisa, thank you for being my constant thought partner, for pushing my thinking beyond comprehension and for encouraging me when I felt like this work would never be finished.

To my Dad, Michael, my high school track and life coach, thank you for your midday pep talks and strategy sessions. Thank you for always teaching me to leave it all on the track.

And in loving memory of my mother, Patricia, whose love for me and dedication to my learning in my early years are the reason I could even consider reaching for the “high places”.

“The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.” Habakkuk 3:19

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Introduction

A visitor to Detroit would be astounded by the number of murals present within the city. Murals vary in their placement, some gracing the sides of business buildings while others find themselves on inconsequential walls on dilapidated edifices. The subject matter and imagery also differ, ranging from musical icons from the Motown era, abstract figures or representations of the city's diverse ethnic population. Anyone unfamiliar with Detroit would conclude that the abundance of murals would seem natural given the plethora of blank walled canvases available in the city center. However, Detroiters know that the city's tie to muralism runs deep and is birthed out of one mural dedicated to a portion of its own identity and history. Detroit is the home to one of Diego Rivera's rarest murals that depicts the Ford Assembly line during a time where industrialization of the automotive sector resulted in mass migration of some of the country's marginalized populations from the south to the north.

No different than some of the content found in modern murals throughout the city today, *The Detroit Industry Murals* were once deemed controversial not only in subject but for the sociopolitical views of the one who painted it. Furthermore, like some of Rivera's initial works in the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, *The Detroit Industry Murals*, too, faced the threat of destruction and removal. Fortunately, the murals escaped such a fate and became a city treasure and, like its counterparts in Mexico, began a movement of creating art for the people and about the people in ways that viewed history through a critical lens. The seed of muralism was planted by one of the founders of Mexican Muralism himself and still retains its unique purpose—to educate and reflect the identities and histories of those who surround them. Of course, murals are not the only artform with the ability to conjure reminiscences and challenge collective histories. The static imagery of the muralism era later gave way to their replication through still photography and moving images in film. The technological advancement in each art form

offered a means to continue the artist's

storytelling through carefully choreographed montages. I believe and examine how film enriched the mural experience for audiences by controlling what the viewer saw as well as when and from what perspective they saw them. As a result, the subjects and histories at the heart of muralism could be examined in a reimagined way and open to more than select passersby.

Through their images and illustrations, the artists elicited emotive responses to narratives is done so methodically in both muralism and film and can be traced from the first appearance of murals in Mexico in 1922 through Mexican Golden Age cinema to the 21st century in films like *Roma* (2018). Academy award winner and director Alfonso Cuarón approached this film as an attempt at “recovering moments” of his youth that allowed him to grapple with the inconsistencies of his childhood memories alongside the realities of his nanny Libo using his contemporary knowledge and experiences as a framework. By doing this he was able to see the characters for who they were and connect with them emotionally and to understand the existence of their emotions lying just beneath the surface (Cuaron Variety). When questioned about the essence of *Roma* Cuarón responded that “*Roma* is a look at the past from the standpoint, the prism, of the present” (Evans 2).

In the same way that Cuarón approaches *Roma*, and observers of Rivera's murals approach

La historia de México as well as *The Detroit Industry Murals*, this research engages with the histories of the past through the perspectives and understandings of the present by examining the representations of Mexico's Indigenous populations through Mexican muralism and Golden Age Cinema through the lens of the 21st century theory of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. The analysis of *Roma* serves as both a bridge and product of the 20th and 21st century representations of these individuals and groups in film and art in a way that acknowledges its

faults but also the subtle advances from decade to decade. In doing so, similar to Cuarón, this research grapples with the inconsistencies of cultural and government educational initiatives with the realities of their implementation in Mexican society in an effort to observe the progress of social transformation, representation and appreciation for the multiplicity of Mexican Indigenous cultures and peoples through modern art forms.

To thoroughly examine both the progresses and failures of societal and governmental agendas concerning Mexico's Indigenous peoples, it is necessary to refer to the nation's promised yet unfulfilled cultural and social transformations beginning at the precipice of the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

Recently elected Mexican president (2018), Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), desire to address the social and economic needs of the poor and Indigenous populations within Mexican society are the cornerstone Mexico's fourth transformation. In the history of Mexico, AMLO's political predecessor also sought to change Mexican society to improve conditions for marginalized groups and for society as a whole. The nation's first historical transformation was marked by Mexico's War for Independence in 1810 led by Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. Though it led to the end of a 300-year Spanish colonial rule and is noted in history books as Mexico's Independence, it would take a little over a decade for The Spanish Crown to acknowledge their independence with the Treaty of Córdoba. Even with the prize of independence, this transformation would fall short of a complete victory. Mexico had rid itself from an absolute monarch in exchange for a powerful dictatorship in the leadership of Antonio López Santa Anna.

Santa Anna's dictatorship led to Mexico's second unsuccessful transformation, The War of Reform from 1854-1876 spearheaded by Benito Juárez. Following a short French

occupation and rule in 1862, Juárez successfully won the presidency, however, failed to fully implement his proposed laws, the Ley Juárez and Ley Lerdo; laws seeking to restructure the overreaching powers of the clergy and military through the confiscation of church properties that were not used for the express purpose of worship. The third transformation befalling Mexico followed several dictatorships, but again aimed to reform and establish a republic for the people. The Mexican Revolution of 1910¹ mobilized notable historic figures such as Francisco Madero, Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Pascual Orozco whose intentions focused on improving the nation for its forgotten people. Although the intended outcome was to establish democracy within the republic, the Mexican Revolution quickly became a series of military coups and betrayals among the aforementioned figures which resulted in the abandonment of fulfilling the needs of Mexico's disenfranchised population.

Cultural and societal transformation in Mexico seemed taboo and elusive to many leaders of the late 20th and early 21st centuries until the popular vote favored AMLO in the 2018 presidential elections. His Presidential campaign would unearth familiar memories of those unfulfilled societal and government initiatives of old. Presidential hopeful often referred by AMLO, proposed his plans for what he called the "fourth cultural and historical transformation" of Mexico². While Obrador's grandiose promise was exciting to hear, his desire to transform Mexico through supporting its disenfranchised people his idea can be found within the historical foundations of Mexican history. This phraseology was well known in Mexico as the nation had already experienced three significant former transformations that had long-lasting impact but were never complete successes.

Equal to its predecessors, AMLO proposed that the fourth transformation would again seek to alter the trajectory of the nation and would do so by focusing on social equality and

justice for Mexico's marginalized populations. Through his leadership, Obrador's presidency planned to address issues concerning access to health care, education, and opportunities for economic stability and growth. In as much as President Obrador's platform for social and economic reform became a focus for Mexico, so it is with current artists and filmmakers who are seeking to create dialogue concerning the same issues. I argue that Cuarón's *Roma* (2018) did just that as they have found their way to international screens, reflecting the culture and sharing the stories of these often-silenced groups. *Roma* through the story of an Indigenous house maid named Cleo incites its audience to consider if Mexico's fourth transformation had begun and if it served as a sign of potential success.

This dissertation will demonstrate that the three aforementioned transformations, too, found their way into artistic mediums such as 20th century Mexican Muralism and cinema. Following the 1910 Mexican Revolution and formation of the Ministry of Public Education, its appointed leader, José Vasconcelos according to the agenda set by President Álvaro Obregón sought to reform education throughout Mexico, especially in the rural areas. His campaign aimed to decrease Mexico's illiteracy rate, which at the time was prevalent in the more rural areas of nation and among the country's indigenous population while also simultaneously unifying the country through one historical narrative (Mijangos et al 51). Vasconcelos set his sights on improving the educational system utilizing three strategic initiatives; expanding access to public libraries, establishment of vocational schools to train teachers and developing of rural schooling, and finally commissioning murals that depict the history of Mexican civilization and aspirational visions for its future.

It was the commission of the murals that would have long lasting effects on both a national and international scale with artists like Rivera travelling to Europe and the U.S. to

complete commissioned projects. The murals original intention, as mentioned previously, was to educate the masses within the Mexican border, however the artistic genius of these muralists captured international attention and admiration. Muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros were charged to assume the role of both artist and historian by filling public walls and municipal buildings with Mexico's so-called official history while simultaneously chronicling Mexico's attempt at yet another attempt at a cultural and historical transformation.

To simply state that restructuring the educational system and imparting knowledge to those without the ability to read in the far reaches of Mexico was Vasconcelos' only agenda would be incomplete. Predicated on his theory of "el mestizaje"³, Vasconcelos sought to "incorporate Indigenous peoples into the 'national community' (Manrique 2). With this idea at the center of his educational reform, Vasconcelos' objective for the commissioned murals was to correct, repackage, and retell pre-existing narratives about Mexico and its people for the purpose of combating less than desirable narratives as well as reframing the conquest as a means to "la raza cósmica"⁴ end. La Raza Cósmica, a term coined and developed by José Vasconcelos, himself, was the theory that the intermixing of the world's races would give birth to a new race, the fifth race⁵. This new race would be comprised of only the best traits from each of the contributing regions. His theory suggested that due to the effects of colonization in Mesoamerica, Mexico was prized to spearhead this new fifth race propelling Mexico to the forefront of world leadership (Vasconcelos 1). The illustrations of Mexico stepping into its rightful place as the superior fifth race were also to be depicted in the commissioned murals in an effort to instill a strong unified national identity among Mexican citizens.

Incorporating Indigenous people and their cultures into the mainstream community was

done so with the goal of assimilation rather than acknowledgement and appreciation. This cultural assimilation was viewed by Vasconcelos as necessary in order for Mexico to unify and emerge from the revolution with a respected international presence. The Minister of Public Education's agenda concerning murals would have his Cosmic Race theory at the helm of any prevailing theme in the anticipated murals and he continually encouraged the muralists to capture his artistic vision. Diego Rivera and his counterparts, though, often failed to deliver Vasconcelos' requests, rather consistently painted murals that explored the complexity of the revolution and the fallout experienced by the marginalized at the hands of a government too obsessed with its image to care for about the struggles of its own people. Additionally, the murals frequently demonstrated the presence of at least three revolutions happening within the Mexican Revolution that is the issues of Agrarian reform, the formation of a strong nation-state with the ability to stand up to the U.S. government's overreach in Mexican affairs and Mexican worker's rights (Craven 231). Vasconcelos constantly complained of Rivera's work stating that it included "too many indigenous people or brown peasants" however his comments never deterred Rivera, nor his colleagues from critiquing Mexico's post-revolutionary state as they continued to place indigenous subjects, rural landscapes, and workers at the heart of every panel (Marinique 7).

As muralism was hitting its stride in the early 1930s, Mexican cinematography continued to develop as a visual artform, carrying with it similar themes and subjects; one of them being the aesthetic imagery of Mexico⁶ (*Tendencias del cine* 1). More films depicting Indigenous people as their main subjects and reflecting similar panels from famous murals would appear on the silver screen during Mexico's Cinematic Golden Age which is suggested to have spanned the years of 1941-1945. A filmmaker from the Soviet Union by the

name of Sergei Eisenstein became enraptured by the artwork of Diego Rivera which led him to visit Mexico in 1930. For a little over a year, as Eisenstein visited various regions throughout the country and gained more inspiration, he conceived *¡Qué Viva México! (Long Live Mexico!)* (1951) a film that put Rivera and his counterparts' murals in motion. In paying homage to Rivera's artistry as well as Eisenstein's fascination with Mexico's rich indigenous cultures and history, Sergei Eisenstein replicated similar subjects and landscapes in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* transforming what would have been otherwise a mere glimpse into Mexican indigenous culture into a didactic art form without borders.

Cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa and film director Emilio "el indio" Fernández would continue to help shape perceptions of Mexico's Indigenous population and the importance of their presence in the accurate re-telling of Mexico's history with films such as *Flor Silvestre* (1943), *María Candelaria* (1943) and *Río Escondido* (1947) along with Luis Buñel's *Los Olvidados* (1950). These films and others would explore Mexico from the perspective of those who know her best—its citizens who were experiencing the post-revolutionary aftermath.

Years later in 2018, the film *Roma*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón, would depict the similar mural-like style as Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!*, as well as Indigenous representations found in Fernández' *Flor silvestre* (1943). Set in the 1970s and shot in black and white, the film's main character is a young indigenous woman named Cleo who serves as an in-home maid and nanny to a Mexican middle-class family. Approaching *Roma* from the same analytical viewpoint as the aforementioned films as a mural in motion, it would be logical to also categorize it as an art form whose intention is to educate its audience through the eyes of underrepresented or marginalized people. I argue that the beginning elements of Culturally

Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), however, small were present and identifiable in both murals and Mexican cinema of the 20th century though there was no name to identify it as such. Furthermore, this research considers the nexus of the 1921 educational initiative introduced by Vasconcelos' to educate the masses through murals, the murals' replication of imagery and subject in Mexican Golden Age films and its subsequent survival and appearance well into the 21st century as evidenced by Cuarón's *Roma*. Murals continue to be didactic art forms that have evolved from solely static images to subjects and landscapes in motion.

First, an introduction to the terms Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, henceforth known as CSP, will be defined. Following this definition, a glimpse into the representation of Indigenous peoples and their cultures depicted in Eisenstein's work *¡Qué Viva México!* as an amalgamation of Rivera's murals in the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)⁷ is examined. Finally, an analysis of similar muralistic-like qualities and themes in Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* is leveraged to determine if the artistic outcomes are aligned with modern day critical social justice pedagogical theory. Then, these comparisons and considerations will lead to a critical evaluation of both murals and films, as the genesis of culturally relevant pedagogy and an extension of Jose Vasconcelos' educational initiative of the 1920s.

CSP was introduced by educational theorists Django Paris and Samy Alim in 2012 well after Rivera's murals were painted and Eisenstein, Gabriel Figueroa and Emilio Fernández's films were conceived and filmed. Even so, Rivera's murals were commissioned in hopes of being an educative tool for the masses and Eisenstein's intention for his film was to present that same richness of Mexican culture and history to the world. With this in mind it is interesting to consider if both artists, through murals and film, planted the seeds for what would social justice theory educators would consider Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. Defined by Paris an

Alim, CSP

seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good and see the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. (*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies 2*)

As its focus, CSP generally refers to the support and nurturing of languages, practices and perspectives of marginalized groups as they are often excluded from historical narrative or their stories are told from either a Eurocentric perspective or that of the dominant societal group. Additionally, the aim of CSP is to distance itself from the deficit mindset and banking education discussed by Paulo Freire in his notable work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which states that marginalized groups are lacking knowledge and thus mainstream knowledge, or that from the dominant culture's group, must be impressed upon them in order for them to be educated. Thus, it requires educators to push past asset pedagogies which has its teachers instructing from a position of student deficit wherein students are lacking cultural, social skills related to the dominant culture.

The purpose of this research is to not only chart the trajectory of the educational initiative and its evolution but to also explore *Roma* as one of the first films produced during AMLO's promised fourth transformation. I suggest that *Roma* is a film that offers a visual interpretation of the wounds of Mexico's past failed social, political and cultural transformations and serves as a reminder of the task in which modern Mexican society has to contribute. With this aim, Vasconcelos' original educational initiative is charted from conception to present day along with an examination of the transferences of images from Diego Rivera's panels painted on the walls of the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico City to the screen in Eisenstein's *¡Que Viva México!* From there, analysis of indigenous subjects and mural

inspired images during Mexico's Golden age of cinema as found in the works of Mexican filmmakers Gabriel Figueroa and Emilio "el Indio" Fernández will serve as the link to present day film through Alfonso Cuarón's 2018 *Roma*; of which his main character, Cleo, is an indigenous woman. Lastly, and most importantly, I examine the representation of marginalized figures, specifically indigenous people of Mexico, in film that reflected Mexican Muralism of the post-revolutionary era, and the possibility of said representations as the potential genesis of the 21st century theory Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy; a term coined by theorists Django Paris, Samy Alim. This research acknowledges that Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is a 21st century theory but argues that elements of the theory, however small, were present in the muraled works of Mexican artists and films of the 20th century decades before language existed to identify and discuss its core tenets. To that end, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy will be used to measure not only if the aforementioned artists' works could be considered exemplars for modern day researchers of Mexican history and culture, but as evidence of what President Andrés Manuel López Obrador alluded to as Mexico's fourth cultural transformation.

The prominent form of artistic works used in this research spans the plastic and dramatic arts through murals and film. Of the murals discussed, heavy emphasis is placed on Diego Rivera's panels at the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública) and the replication of imagery in Eisenstein's black and white *¡Qué Viva México!* The murals by Orozco and Siqueiros are analyzed with the express purpose of unpacking common themes related to Indigenous peoples, national identity and Mexican history. Those themes are later identified again in notable films of the Mexican Golden Cinema Age; *Flor Silvestre* (1943) *María Candelaria* (1943), *Río Escondido* (1948) and *Los Olvidados* (1950). Later, *Roma* (2018) is discussed as an amalgamation of the progress each film before it had made in both subject and Indigenous

representation.

For the context of this investigation the culture and customs of Mexico's indigenous peoples featured in both the murals in the SEP and reiterations in *¡Qué Viva Mexico!*, the films of the 40s and 50s, as well as Cuarón's main character Cleo, would be seen as such representative groups to be "sustained" according to the pedagogical theory. As stated previously, this theory was created well after Diego Rivera's murals at the SEP were painted after Eisenstein developed his idea for his film about Mexico, and much later than Figueroa and Fernández's films featuring Indigenous subjects. However, *Roma* comes on the heels of development of CSP. With this in mind, the content and themes presented in Cuarón's work appear to point towards the intended outcomes of CSP as well as evidence of the much anticipated fourth cultural transformation.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1- Mexican Muralism

The chapter begins with background information regarding Mexico's Minister of Public Education José Vasconcelos, his beliefs about the absences in public education that were preventing Mexico from entering into a modern future, and how those beliefs contributed to his three-pronged educational initiative from 1921 to 1924 which included the creation of libraries, murals, and provision of teacher training in rural areas. Vasconcelos' beliefs on Mexico's barriers to modernity are discussed with emphasis placed on what he deemed the Indigenous problem as referenced in his essays *El problema de raza* (The Race Problem) and *la raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race).

Though three areas of educational reform are identified, only muralism is explored to establish its connection to repackaging the history of Mexico and communicating a unified national identity in response to the so-called Indigenous problem befalling the nation. Thus,

much of this chapter describes the Mexican Muralism movement following the 1910 Mexican Revolution from the angle of a national educational initiative. Additionally, consideration is given to Mexico's esteemed value of artistic expression and its effect on the explosion of murals throughout the nation and inspiration as well as practicality in leveraging art as an educational medium for the masses. With this in mind, a complete description of Jose Vasconcelos' educational initiative of the 1920s is offered with particular attention given to murals as an educational tool.

Following a thorough examination of the birth and successes of the muralism movement is a deep dive into the subjects and themes portrayed within murals of that time, specifically underrepresented indigenous figures and cultures. This will include works by Mexico's most well-known muralists referred to as "Los Tres Grandes"; Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Examining the murals of the "big three" will serve as a foundation for further critique and analysis of indigenous representation in artistic expression and its influence on future films. In identifying recurring themes and subjects within artistic narratives, connections will be made between murals of the time with films produced in the 20th as well as 21st centuries.

Though many muralists took part in shaping Mexican muralism post revolution, this body of work prioritizes the works of Diego Rivera, whose murals have national and international presence and recognition. Additionally, it explores the personal relationship between Diego Rivera and Sergei Eisenstein as esteemed colleagues, Rivera's accompanying Eisenstein in a tour through Mexico, and inspirational influence to conceive and produce *¡Qué viva México!*. The replication of Rivera's murals on screen will serve as the tie between educating the public via wall and screen and its implications on Mexican historical narratives.

Furthermore, this chapter assesses the origins of the subjects and themes included in Mexican muralism and connects them to the Indigenist period in which they are placed; identifying that period's recurring messages and characters in order to later highlight those of the same within specific murals. Those said subjects and themes often found within Mexican muralism, specifically the murals of Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Orozco are then scrutinized through the lens of CSP. The location of murals is only considered to determine if these specific places and spaces served a greater purpose and meaning to Vasconcelos' desired outcome, and, if said murals can be considered political propaganda with an educational façade.

Lastly, as a bridge to the work of Russian director Sergei Eisenstein in Chapter 2, a tie is made between the murals painted by Diego Rivera in the SEP, the symbols and subjects that are portrayed within them, and how these panels would later become inspiration for *¡Que Viva México*, one of the first films about Mexico in the 20th century that preceded the Mexican Golden Age of Cinema.

Chapter 2- Eisenstein & ¡Que Viva México!

Chapter 2 analyzes Sergei Eisenstein's film *¡Que Viva México!* as a reflection and reproduction of murals painted during the Mexican Muralism movement. Furthermore, it considers the subjects, landscapes and themes depicted within *¡Que Viva México!* from the perspective of a European outsider and uses this lens to critique the images and subjects depicted within the film. Additionally, the aforementioned viewpoint is contemplated for its influence on future films created about and within Mexico. Commentary from Eisenstein himself and fellow colleagues is incorporated to observe the filmmaker's infatuation with Mexico's landscapes and cultures in an effort to give context to the genesis of the film as well

as prepare for later analysis of *¡Qué Viva México!* as a preliminary approach CSP. Additionally, this chapter discusses the inspiration for this film as a result of Eisenstein's close contact of those who were leading the Mexican Muralism movement, specifically *los tres grandes*, as well as those who were recounting the events of the movement as it occurred.

Following the film's background and origins is an overview of critiques presented by cinematic researchers and cultural historians who have viewed *¡Qué Viva México!*. Consideration is given to the lapse in time between filming and release of the film to the public. By examining this gap in time between production and release, conclusions are drawn regarding possible outdated narratives and stereotypes as well as a tendency to create ontological distance between indigenous subjects and viewers.

A comparison of recurring themes and Indigenous representation between *¡Qué Viva México!* with the murals of the time will seek to answer the question of historical narrative consistency. This includes, but is not limited to representations of Mexican landscapes, indigenous groups and cultural practices, and typical narratives within muralism. Inasmuch, the images and subjects found within Rivera's SEP mural cycle specifically *Las Tehuanas* and *Liberación del peón* as well as Orozco's murals at La Escuela Nacional Preparatoria are discussed and analyzed in their original form as well as their replication in Eisenstein's film. This analysis is approached by first offering detailed descriptions of the film's structure and relevant scenes.

Lastly, though the outcome of the film and its inspiration for films produced by Gabriel Figueroa and Emilio Fernández are reserved for Chapter 3, this chapter does address how *¡Qué Viva México!* is as an example of how film serves as a didactic art medium with two-way influence—creating and inspiring other art forms while simultaneously being created.

Chapter 3- Mexican Cinematic Golden Age through the works of Emilio “El Indio” Fernández, Gabriel Figueroa and Luis Buñel

Chapter 3 begins by bridging the work of Eisenstein’s ¡Qué Viva México! with the works of filmmakers Emilio “el indio” Fernandez, Gabriel Figueroa , and Luís Buñel from the 1930s to the late 1950s. It examines these films as an extension of muralism as a moving educational art form that reflected Mexico’s societal beliefs regarding its Indigenous populations. That is to say that Indigenous peoples of Mexico were in need of rescue through educational civility.

Similarly, to Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 approaches the three filmmakers in the same way as “Los Tres Grandes” by emphasizing how their bodies of work reflect their perspectives regarding the nation and its marginalized groups. Parallels and disparities are drawn with regard to content, subjects and themes found in both muralism and film during the Golden Age in an effort to chronicle the evolution of these matters on screen. As a result, the implicit and explicit messages communicated by filmmakers are analyzed against CSP through scene descriptions in order to quantify elements of the theory present during this film era.

Flor silvestre (1943), María Candelaria (1943), Río Escondido (1948)

and *Los Olvidados (1950)* are chosen and discussed as samples of intentional messaging to the masses about the successes and failures of the revolution and its impact on disenfranchised groups, specifically Indigenous groups. Furthermore, these films offer concrete examples of *mexicanidad*⁸—a definition of the newly formed ideas surrounding Mexican identity. Though in-depth summaries of all said films will not be present, descriptions of pertinent scenes capturing the essence of muralism in film and CSP will be given to offer context and make connections to the driving question of this research; to determine if the themes and subjects depicted in muralism in direct response to Vasconcelos’ 1920s educational initiative, continued to appear in film, and

asa result have set the foundation for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.

Chapter 4- Alfonso Cuarón's Roma: The cinematic catalyst of Mexico's Fourth Cultural Transformation

Chapter 4 focuses on Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning film *Roma* (2018) and his effort to look at the past from the standpoint of the present. It examines a recentering of marginalized voices and subjects through the narrative of his childhood nanny Libo portrayed by Indigenous actress Yalitza Aparicio. Connections are made between the content of the film and its impact on international audiences as well as evidence of the beginnings of Mexican President Andrés López Obrador's proclaimed fourth cultural transformation.

The analysis of *Roma* is not unique and follows the same approach as films discussed in previous chapters with consideration given to the foundational characteristics and qualities of CSP as well as the possible effects of the theory on cinema and culture in the 21st century. Cuarón's *Roma* receives the same critical treatment with scene-by-scene descriptions and brief look at his growing body of work that consistently focuses on the amplification of often silenced groups. This provided additional support to the argument that *Roma* is not only a groundbreaking film in Mexican cinema for its cinematographic qualities but also a reflection of the evolution and progress of Indigenous representation in the plastic and dramatic arts.

As done in the descriptions of muralism of the 1920s and films of the mid 20th century, recurring themes are examined in *Roma*. This leads to an analysis of the progress or lack thereof of indigenous representation and culture in modern day film. These representations are then measured against CSP, as the films and murals before it, to determine *Roma*'s placement on the continuum of the theory and how it supports future work to push its advancement.

Finally, this chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the success and controversy that surrounded the casting of Yalitza Aparicio Martinez because of her Mixtec and Trique

heritage, for the lead role as Cleo and its implications for indigenous representation in film. This leads to the conclusion that supports the overarching argument that the absence of minority groups, specifically Indigenous, in the retelling of personal and historical narratives is imperative in Latin American film and studies programs and doing so fulfills Paris and Alim's vision of CSP.

Much research has been done in regard to the evolution of Mexican cinema and the development of feature length films that position Mexico and its people as central subjects. However, information connecting the journey from the scenes and subjects depicted throughout the early Mexican muralism movement to films is limited with the exception of Rivera's direct connection to Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* Furthermore, investigations of Jose Vasconcelos' original educational muralist initiative and the possibility of its prevailing, yet subconscious existence in modern day film, appears to be nonexistent.

In film studies, scholars approach their investigations solely for their educational value and never in conjunction of murals. My research is unique in that, rather than examining murals and films as independent entities as previous research has done, I analyze them cohesively; that is to seek to understand how they function as a unified and integrated extension of educational reform initiated by Jose Vasconcelos during the construction of Modern post-revolutionary Mexico. Additionally, this research fills the aforementioned absences by intentionally examining and identifying how murals and films that depict Indigenous subjects and cultures are what I consider murals in motion. This research goes a step farther by considering the works of the Mexican muralism movement, their appearances in films of the Mexican Golden age as well as later in the 21st century with the film with Cuarón's *Roma*.

Finally, this work's contribution to the field of Latin American Cultural studies is more

than just an analysis of muralistic film with an educational origin, rather a critical look at the beginnings of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogical theory in the 20th century through the consistent depiction of Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Using this theory by Django Paris and Samy Alim, this research seeks to measure the impact of integrating the previously identified films within Latin American Cultural studies as a means to achieving a more culturally inclusive and comprehensive curriculum.

Chapter 1. Mexican Muralism

Muralism has always had a presence that has transcended civilizations and time periods. Be they frescoes in Italy painted on ceilings, or stick figures on cave walls, murals have continually been utilized as didactic tools recounting the narratives of history and projecting into the future; all educating their audiences to knowledge deemed essential. Mexico's Minister of Public Education, José Vasconcelos was aware of the power of murals, but also realized that in using murals he would simultaneously be reinforcing plastic arts as a superior art form. In an effort to capitalize on Mexico's third historical transformation, The Mexican Revolution of 1910, he commissioned the work of talented muralists known as the big three; Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco⁹. All initially converging on *La Escuela Preparatoria Nacional*, Vasconcelos would envision that his artists begin and end their work simply as bearers of his own artistic and didactic vision.

However, each artist approached this vision from varying perspectives including their own personal convictions and beliefs. While Rivera would aim to represent Mexico's indigenous civilizations with great accuracy, he would also idealize Mexico's past with an overarching theme of peace and harmony (Goldman 114). José Orozco fell on the opposite spectrum of Rivera, attempting to give balance to Rivera's rosy view of Indigenism and opting to represent Mexico through mythological themes. Finally, Siqueiros, then, forged his own path choosing to abandon archeological accuracy and paint metaphors that represented the current state of Mexican society and identity. All their works would enter and exit continually from Vasconcelos' original idea intermingling their own beliefs as artists working for the people and the establishment concurrently. This was exemplified in the murals painted by Diego Rivera at the Secretariat of

Public Education (henceforth known as SEP) infusing his own beliefs, often with a communist lens, about essentially historical knowledge on the very walls of the government building in charge of educational reform.

The purpose of the chapter is to give historical context to the educational reform begun in 1920 by José Vasconcelos, Mexico's Minister of Public education at the time, that led to the commissioning of murals throughout Mexico and how these murals, their subjects and themes, served as mirrors to Mexican film of the 20th and 21st centuries in addition to the ongoing internal and external dialogue regarding the nation's historical and desired future identity following the Revolution of 1910 as well as the Mexican Indigenous population's place in these identities. To achieve this end and narrow the scope, the chapter only focuses on murals created at the beginning of Vasconcelos' appointment and ending in 1933—the beginning of Mexico's golden age of film. While murals located outside of Mexico and painted by the big three are mentioned, they are only used as examples of recurring themes and subjects.

The chapter begins with background information regarding José Vasconcelos, his beliefs about the absences in public education that were preventing Mexico from entering into a modern future, and how those beliefs contributed to his three-pronged educational initiative—libraries, murals, and teacher training in rural areas. Muralism, then, is analyzed for its intent to correct and repackage the history of Mexico as it relates to its so-called Indigenous problem as was referenced by Vasconcelos' himself in his essays “El problema de raza” (The Race Problem) and “La raza cósmica” (The Cosmic Race).

Furthermore, this chapter examines the origin of the subjects and themes included in muralism and connects them to the Indigenist period in which they are placed; identifying that period's recurring messages and characters in order to later highlight those of the same within specific murals. Those said subjects and themes often found within Mexican muralism, specifically the murals of Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Orozco are then examined and analyzed against Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. The location of murals is only considered to determine if these specific places and spaces served a greater purpose and meaning to Vasconcelos' desired outcome, and, if said murals can be considered political propaganda with an educational façade.

Lastly, a tie is made between the murals painted by Diego Rivera in the SEP, the symbols and subjects that are portrayed within them, and how these panels would later become inspiration to a film about Mexico by Russian director Sergei Eisenstein of whom greatly revered Rivera in work and friendship.

José Vasconcelos and Post-Revolutionary Educational Reform through Plastic Arts

Known as the *El Caudillo cultural*¹⁰, José Vasconcelos, Mexico's Minister of Public Education from 1919-1924, assumed the task of reforming a neglected public educational system. The lack of resources and attention given to public education during previous administrations meant Vasconcelos' initiatives would have to confront multiple educational concerns simultaneously while pushing the nation forward. A trained lawyer and educational philosopher, José Vasconcelos believed that education was the fundamental resource for attacking modernity's two greatest enemies; ignorance and poverty which in his musings regarding post-revolutionary Mexico, were two characteristics that were rampant among the nation and its people (Herrera & Garza 1). Without resolving both Mexico would be unable to

compete with the swiftly modernizing and industrializing world. Eradicating ignorance and poverty were at the forefront of Vasconcelos' initiative as it is said that he was convinced of education's ability to deliver liberation to man and his beliefs while teaching core values (Herrera & Garza 2). In doing so, his educational initiative according to Herrera & Garza was to "rescue the *pueblo* from intellectual inaction, generated at large by years of humiliation by those who had been obligated to not act, and redeem it allowing it to increase its confidence and identity by means of order and discipline" (2). In short, education served as a means of self and national improvement towards modernity and progress while reaffirming a national identity.

This national identity and educational reform, again, could only take place with the elimination of ignorance and poverty. Thus, Vasconcelos' sought to create an initiative to attack them head on. The Secretariat of Public Education, then, was formed by Vasconcelos as the seat of educational government and the location in which legislature regarding such matters would take place (Hilton 400). It was during his tenure that he boasted not only the creation of the Ministry of Education, but primary education which saw the increase of schoolhouses in rural zones, and technological education to help Mexican citizens capitalize on their artisanal skills. Furthermore, as an admirer of John Dewey, Vasconcelos valued the importance of *bibliotecas populares*¹¹ and desired for each school to have a library of its own. To that end, he imported over two thousand copies of *Don Quixote* and distributed them to each school and had, what he believed to be the most reputable Greek literary works translated into Spanish (Hilton 401).

However, his most visible act of educational formation would be mural paintings that covered government buildings throughout Mexico. Hilton states, "The Mexican Revolution was for Vasconcelos more than a mere social and economic upheaval. It was to renovate all of

Mexican life, and it could provide the logos for the new Mexican art” (402). It could be surmised that much as the frescos in Italy had served the church during the Renaissance in educating the masses, Vasconcelos believed the same could be true for the Mexico’s citizens following the revolution.

However, Vasconcelos was not alone in his desire to use muralism to move the nation into modernity. President of Mexico Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) highly valued muralism and he believed it able to accomplish three imperative tasks for Mexico. First, muralism would be used as a sign to the international community that Mexico was under a transformation from its previous agrarianism to a more modern and industrialized nation equal to that of their U.S. neighbors to the north and Europe (Greely 18). Secondly, as was the desire of Vasconcelos, Obregón was deeply persuaded that muralism would be of service internally; helping to construct and reinforce specific political and economic ideologies that would cross classes and bring unification (18). Lastly, muralism would resolve potential future rebellions among the lower classes, specifically those in rural areas. Greely states

Campesinos, who could no longer be ignored, had to be made to believe that Obregón’s government represented their best interests (especially on the land question) and, at the same time, had to be prevented from interfering with efforts to turn Mexico into a modern, profit-making nation. Obregón and his successors thus sought—with varying degrees of success—to incorporate the masses as symbol into the new nationalist rhetoric while at the same time undermining their real political effectiveness and subordinating them to the centralized state. Muralism was crucial to visualizing this strategy. (18)

In short, muralism was a figurative silver bullet with the potential to communicate ideals that affirmed and educated the masses while ensuring the Mexican government retained ultimate control with the promotion of nationalistic ideologies.

Reaching these goals would require the artistic expertise of Mexico’s best. Thus, Vasconcelos recruited Diego Rivera, David Orozco, Álvaro Siqueiros. As pioneers of the

movement they earned the moniker “Los Tres Grandes”, and were contracted not just to paint, but to educate the public of Mexico’s history and its path towards modernization through their art.

This vision for art accessible to the public led to the birth of the Mexican Muralism movement and would usher in a heavier presence and popularity of murals in Mexico immediately following the Mexican Revolution more specifically, the years that spanned from the 1920s-1940s. The commissioned artists were to lend their artistry to the walls of public and government buildings in order to reflect Mexico’s history, culture, and modern future. In the words of Shifra

M. Goldman, muralists of the time were to create a realistic “painted book” that would serve as a narrative to educate a widely illiterate audience of the 1920s (111). Of the three muralists, Diego Rivera would achieve international acclaim and the responsibility of painting the recently founded Ministry of Public Education, henceforth known as the SEP building at the behest of Jose Vasconcelos. Rivera, having spent time in Italy, had studied fresco painting, and upon his return to Mexico in the early 1900s, began incorporating this time-consuming art form in his works.

Upon meeting and hiring Diego Rivera, Vasconcelos sent the artist to Yucatán in 1921 to view and study pre-Columbian sites. Rather than tasking Rivera to incorporate concrete examples from the people he encountered into his murals, though, Hilton notes that “...Vasconcelos sought universal symbols and was not interested in Indian or strictly Mexican themes. He wished to raise Mexican art from the level of folklore to the status of a universal art” (403). These statements are problematic in that they began to reveal Vasconcelos’ beliefs about the people in which is sought to educate. To refuse examples from an existing indigenous

group within an artform whose main purpose was to educate the masses about their national identity, seeking universal symbols in essence eliminates uniqueness in exchange for homogeneity; the exact opposite of who Mexico was and is ethnographically. The question, then is, if it was Vasconcelos who was directing the muralists to paint the official history and culture of Mexico, which official historical narrative and culture would be painted and what was modern Mexico to look like on plastered walls? For Vasconcelos, it was not only what was communicated through the murals of importance, but the manner in which they were communicated.

With the assistance of the muralists and their artistry, Vasconcelos sought to communicate his theory of *la Raza Cós mica* as a means of demonstrating Mexico's unique ethnic and racial mixing throughout history and, as a result of this intermixing, its potential to be leaders in the modern world. To achieve this end, all people within the nation would need to be enlightened of their uniqueness, and as mentioned previously, this could only be achieved through a form in which everyone could engage and respect—art. Vasconcelos expresses his intentionality in the murals and construction of the SEP in his work *La Raza Cós mica* (1925), written during his tenure as Minister of Public Education and published at its end. He states

In order to express all these ideas that today I am trying to expound in a rapid synthesis, I tried, some years ago, when they were not yet well defined, to assign them symbols in the new Palace of Public Education in Mexico. Lacking sufficient elements to do exactly what I wished, I had to be satisfied with a Spanish renaissance building, with two courtyards, archways, and passages that give somewhat the impression of a bird's wing. On the panels at the four corners of the first patio, I had them carve allegories representing, Spain, Mexico, Greece, and India and the four particular civilizations that have most to contribute to the formation of Latin America. Immediately below these four allegories, four stone statues should have been raised, representing the four contemporary races: The white, the red, the black, the yellow, to indicate that America is home to all and needs all of them. Finally, in the center a monument should have been raised that in some way would symbolize the law of the three states: The material, the intellectual and the aesthetic. All this was to indicate that through exercise of the triple law, we in America shall arrive, before any other part of the world, at the creation of a

new race fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous ones: The final race, the cosmic race. (412)

However, his statement of treasures from previous races conflicted with his request of Rivera to eliminate specific cultural symbols of the indigenous communities, such as with the people of Tehuantepec, in exchange for a new universal symbol. These new symbols, left to the artist to create and paint, point towards an official post-revolutionary culture. As if the Mexican Revolution was a stop point for the plethora of pre-Hispanic civilizations, their languages, practices, products, and perspectives, Vasconcelos used the time period following the revolution as a start point for a culturally unified Mexico.

This unified cultural identity on the basis of Vasconcelos' overarching idea points to a desire for a historical metanarrative or official culture. Roger Bartra in his article "Mexican Oficio" discusses the multiple elements that contribute to a thorough definition of "*cultura oficial*"¹² and utilizes said definition as a structure for interpreting post-revolutionary murals. As his definition comprehensively addresses Vasconcelos' mission and that of the Ministry of education, that is educating citizens of their historical identity while simultaneously instilling a sense of national identity, it will be used to better understand the themes and subjects painted in the commissioned murals. Bartra states that *cultura oficial* "refers to both the 'ensemble of habits and values that mark the behavior of the Mexican political and bureaucratic class' (7). He goes on to state that "the government offices issue a stamp of approval for artistic and literary creation, to restructure it in accordance with established cannon" (8). However, he notes that even though artists and their works may portray these habits and values deemed culture, not all of them can be deemed official spokespersons of governmental culture (8).

Though, this is potentially challenging. If official culture reflects that of a nation and a nation must be unified, how then can the diverse populations, their histories and customs that

makeup the nation be melded into one symbol that represents them all? Furthermore, who has the power to choose that symbol and how does this struggle appear in the illustrations of the muralists? The simple answer is they cannot be forged into a singular symbol, and if the possibility existed, the power of the narrative would belong to the owner of the pen; or in the case of Mexican muralism, the paintbrush.

Recurring Themes of Mexican Muralism

Before launching into a comprehensive analysis of the Big Three's murals against Culturally Sustaining and Pedagogy, it is imperative to have an understanding of the recurring themes found within the Mexican muralism movement. As Shifra M. Goldman begins to identify major themes of muralist, her article acknowledges again the social role and responsibility Mexican muralism had as educator of the masses. To reiterate, it was of the utmost importance that the Mexican public were clear on their historical past and their promising future and, inasmuch, the murals painted were to depict Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage. At this point in Mexican history, this was revolutionary in itself, as much of Mexico's historical narrative was derived from a Eurocentric perspective; that is to say that their history began, officially, with the arrival of the Spanish (111). This would require that the murals portrayed Mexico's rich ethnic heritage, its complete history of the nation, which included the centuries prior to the Spaniard's arrival, the conquest, as well as the years leading up to and through their independence in a way that had not been done before. Finally, the murals would attempt to address both national and international issues left in the wake of Mexico's reform to their contemporary period.

Communicating these narratives would require the use of images and subjects whose collaborating effect could read like a history textbook without words. Goldman discusses how the artists achieved this by utilizing certain themes and categorizes them by muralist. She

highlight Indigenism¹³, Mestizaje¹⁴, Mexico's revolutionary history and projection of modern Mexico as central themes of Mexican muralism at the time. However, I would like to go a step further and propose subcategories for each of those mentioned including Mexican mythology, pre-Colombian civilizations, the impetus for the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and the inclusion of political commentary of Mexico's post-revolutionary future through the use of controversial political figureheads, respectively, and will address them in the aforementioned order.

Beginning with Indigenism and Diego Rivera, Goldman cites that Rivera greatly valued and respected pre-Colombian civilization, culture, and artifacts carefully researching their history, culture, and other art forms in an attempt to represent them with great accuracy and detail. (113). This fact is well-known and documented and, as mentioned previously, Vasconcelos encouraged Rivera to learn as much as he could on his assignment in the Yucatán. However, Vasconcelos' vision was for a united nation over a fragmented one and he directed Rivera to use the culture as inspiration to develop a universal symbol for all pre-Columbian civilizations. Many researchers in this field agree that this directive can be viewed as the Mexican government's attempt to address what Vasconcelos referred to as *el problema del indio* by the blatant erasing of cultural nuances within each indigenous population and replacing them with a more unified and palatable nationalistic culture.

Not only was Indigenism a central theme for Rivera's work, but he found himself preoccupied with other issues. Rivera desired to change the pre-established narrative regarding the conquistadores' view of ancient civilizations which regarded them as vicious barbarians in desperate need of civilizing. Furthermore, Rivera was compelled to attack the anti-Indian and anti-mestizo attitude that had begun to emerge in Mexico during the Porfiriato¹⁵ administration (113). As a result of his deep appreciation of indigenous cultures as well as his strong

convictions about their mistreatment both historically and politically, Rivera often put two opposing central subjects in his murals; the Indian versus the European conqueror. The Indian was illustrated in a way that praised their rich heritage, while the European was painted as an abuser, villain, and exploiter. Indian civilizations in the imagery of Rivera were illustrated as a near utopian society; completely absent of conflict or violence. Goldman offers a concrete example of this tendency in Rivera's work located in El Palacio Nacional (1929-1935) featuring a scene of an Aztec marketplace to support this argument citing:

Rivera's mural of the marketplace Tlatelolco is an encyclopedic presentation of the multiple products, services, activities, and personages to be seen at the great Aztec marketplace. Presided over by an enthroned official, all is calm and orderly in the market. In the background is a topographical view of the Aztec capital city Tenochtitlan, with its pyramids, plazas, palaces, and canals. The painting gives no hint of Aztec imperialism, which the market symbolizes. Tribute and sacrifice victims were brought to Tenochtitlan from the subject peoples. (115)

Rivera's paintings, then, applied a soft-focus to pre-Colombian history and civilizations in an effort to right the wrongs of the conquest while addressing the political ideology being disseminated and encouraged by the Porfirian regime. Goldman notes that not every muralist embraced Indigenism as passionately as Rivera. If Rivera's work was to be known for its high regard for ancient Mexican civilizations, José Clemente Orozco's work, then, would be known for the absence of the intense glorification that Rivera chose, taking a more *hispanista*¹⁶ approach. Valuing the Spanish heritage brought by the conquistadores over the pre-established civilizations that they conquered, Orozco's paintings did not eliminate the indigenist subject completely. His approach brought indigenist beliefs and legends to the surface through the depiction of Mexican Mythological figures. Unfortunately, the focus fell on those deities from Mexican Mythology that, as legend describes them, embody European physical and character traits. (Goldman 114). When painting the Mesoamerican god, Quetzalcoatl, in the mural titled *The Epic of American Civilization* (1932-1934) (figure 1) at Dartmouth College in the United

States, Goldman states that the painter “depicted him as a statesman, educator, promoter of the arts” which non-coincidentally also was said to have been “white-skinned, bearded, and blue-eyed”(114).



Figure 1. 1 *The Epic of American Civilization: The Departure of Quetzacoatl* (1932-1934)
José Clemente Orozco Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

His noble representation reaffirmed the prevailing historical narrative that even though civilizations were living before the arrival of the Spanish, even in Mexican Mythology they knew they could only go so far without the helping civilized hand of Europeans.

These types of figures were not new for Orozco, who perpetually painted heroes with Greek and Spanish origin opting for what Goldman calls a European ethnocentricity (115).

In maintaining an hispanista approach to indigenist themes, Orozco painted the pre-Hispanic culture as bloodthirsty savages, the antithesis of what one finds in Rivera's works. Goldman again cites that “Aztec culture for Orozco was cruel, bloodthirsty, and barbaric. He illustrates a scene of priests holding a victim's body from which a priest is about to tear out the heart” (115).

Although Orozco's work also includes the violent nature of Spanish during the conquest, he paints them as having a higher level of civility due to their affiliation with the Christian faith, of which Orozco favored over what he saw as the archaic religions of the Americas (116).

David Alfaro Siqueiros, too, included indigenist themes within his work, but again, varying in his approach and thus, sharing his belief system about the value of the indigenous civilizations of Mexico. Rather than creating a utopian like visual of the ancient civilizations like that of Rivera or portraying the natives as barbarians in need of civilizing by Spanish Christian invaders, like Orozco, Siqueiros did not choose to paint either side as overly good or evil. He avoided recreating any archeological accurate visions of the Americas and instead infused "indigenous motifs as allegories or metaphors for contemporary struggles" (116). Differing from Orozco's portrayal of Quetzalcoatl, Siqueiros painted the last of the Aztec emperors, Cuauhtemoc in *Tormento de Cuauhtemoc* (Cuauhtemoc's torment) (1950) (figure 1.2) as a symbol of resistance throughout history (116).



Figure 1.2 *Tormento de Cuauhtemoc* (Cuauhtemoc's Torment) David Alfaro Siqueiros, 1950 Museo de Bellas Artes, Ciudad de México, México

Closely related to indigenist themes with murals was that of *el mestizaje*, or the mixing of European, African and Indigenous races. This being one of the results of the violent conquest was, as Vasconcelos' indicated in his essay *La raza cósmica*, the very advantaged that Mexico had to secure her place as a leader in the modern world. Thus, el mestizaje became another foundational theme embedded within murals, but more pointedly in the works of Rivera and Orozco and, unlike with Indigenism, the artists's narrative regarding mestizaje found more similarities than differences.

Rivera, in contrast to his approach to Indigenism, incorporated el mestizaje historically; choosing to neither exaggerate nor tone down the genesis of racial intermingling. This required him to paint images of mestizaje in the likely manner in which it occurred—through the raping of Indian women by Spanish soldiers (118). Rivera used nonspecific subjects to illustrate how Mexico arrived at its ethnic diverse population, thus showcasing that mestizaje touched the masses of Mexico and not just individuals.

Orozco, however, used historical figures such as Hernán Cortés and Malintzín (La Malinche) as representatives of mestizaje in his mural of the same name. Hernán Cortés being a Spanish conquistador, took Malintzín, a Nahuatl and Mayan-speaking indigenous woman, as his guide and translator through the New world, and with her help was able to conquer the Aztec empire. Malintzín became mother to Cortés' children and represents mestizaje that made its way to the upper ruling classes of Mexico (118). In illustrating Cortés and Malintzín in this way, Orozco communicated the same narrative as Rivera—that the racial intermixing that took place during the conquest involved the capture, exploitation, and rape of Indian women.

The three muralists also captured Mexico's Revolutionary history on the walls they painted. During the time Mexico's history was Eurocentric in nature, emphasizing the beginning of the nation with the arrival of the conquistadores and so-called discovery of the New World. Los tres grandes, then, would have to revise said history so that it encompassed the entirety of Mexico's past which included the pre-established civilizations living in Mexico before the Spaniard's arrival. To achieve this end, Goldman states that the muralists "did not choose to represent Mexican history as a succession of colonial aristocrats or post-Independence rulers, but as a series of insurgencies and revolutions by the Mexican people and their leaders against colonizers and dictators" (118). Rather than create a series of murals depicting periods of time leading to the Revolution, Rivera pushed them together on one wall, sectioning historical events into panels. The subjects that appear in his mural at the National Palace, the seat of Mexico's government, that embody the theme of Revolutionary history. In it are historical figures, known and unknown, including the victims of the conquest, conquistadores, Porfirio Díaz, Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa all converging on one wall space. As if living during the same time frame, Rivera uses these subjects to illustrate the path to revolution spanning the years of 1810 to 1910.

Siqueiros, on the other hand, sharpens his gaze on a singular event that he posits as the catalyst for the Mexican Revolution; the 1906 strike of Cananea Consolidated Copper Co. by Mexican workers (119). In his mural, *Del Porfirismo a la Revolución* (From Porfirianism to the Revolution) (1957) (figure 1.3), located in the Castle of Chapultepec Siqueiros paints two opposing sides of the conflict, the pueblo, and the regime of the Porfiriato.



Figure 1. 3 Del Porfirismo a la Revolución (From Porfirianism to the Revolution) (1964) David Alfaró Siqueiros, El Castillo de Chapultepec, México.

In between said entities is the strike of Cananea which embodies to the collision of the working class with the bourgeoisie. Here, Siqueiros points to one event that summarizes the reason for Revolution: the incessant exploitation of Mexico and her people from the conquest to present day.

While I believe that Goldman's categorization of Revolutionary History as a theme is appropriate, I argue that it also includes not just a narrative of the events that led to the revolution, but the artist's own critique about the need for the Revolution itself. Drawing this conclusion comes from Leonard Folgarait's comments about interpreting Rivera's mural at the National Palace, as not a linear narrative at all of which I postulate can be applied to many of the murals of the time. He states

Again, the possibility that this is not a narrative at all is presented, in that the isolated moments of chronology in the central wall can be seen as merely mixed and juxtaposed as cloned modules, next to and amongst each other because they belong in that history all at once as equals, and not necessarily positioned by order of occurrence of historical importance. (25)

Broaching the murals in this way may lead the viewer to see the subjects and themes depicted as not chronological events leading to the revolution, rather as individual instances and reasons that when viewed together resulted in the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The subjugation of indigenous peoples to European rule and eradication of entire civilizations, the myriad of

dictatorships that abused governmental powers and stripped the pueblo of their civil rights all became catalysts for the need for Revolution. Though they painted on behalf of the people, their funding was dependent on the satisfaction of the entity that hired them. This is to say that more than one vision was at play in their artwork; the commissioner, Vasconcelos, the artist himself and the people they painted.

Lastly, murals contained illustrations of Mexico's projections into modernity. In doing so, all three muralists began with a deep dive into the historical events and factors, both at home and abroad, that continued to contribute to their present situation. Rivera's *Hombre controlador del universo* (Man, Controller of the Universe) (1934) (Figure 1.4)¹⁷, reflected reminiscences of World War I as well as the present Depression in which the muralist painted.



Figure 1. 4 *El hombre controlador del universo* (Man, Controller of the Universe) 1934 Museo de Bellas Artes, Ciudad de México, México.

The mural depicts a Russian laborer at the center hovering over the universe's control panel, surrounded by soldiers wearing gas masks, police officers attacking strikers, the rich, and Lenin. Jaen Madrid describes the meaning behind these images stating "*Man, Controller of the Universe* was designed to show, in three planes, the poles of capitalism and communism (right and left, respectively), with a man at the center who works the universe as one might

a machine. He manipulates life and divides the macrocosm from the microcosm” (1).

Orozco’s murals possessed similar attributes to Rivera’s. Located in El Hospicio Cabañas (Cabañas Hospice) in Guadalajara, Mexico, the walls making up this collective mural display yet again, another subtheme of artistic political criticism towards to Mexican state and its proposed advancement. Of the murals Alfred Neumeyer describes the images as such:

Man is the bringer of light, and its destroyer, as a conqueror and a colonizer, the suffering masses and the militarized masses, the demagogues, dictators, and despots—they are assembled here, far way from the mainstream of history, and yet in spite of their geographical removedness, they form the most important comment of an artist to our epoch of terror. A parallel to the mob is the machine. The machine as the killer of human initiative and freedom, as the murderous instrument of wars, and as impersonal slave driver, appears over, and over again in the frescoes of the last twenty years. (124)

With the uncertainty of what a post-revolutionary Mexico would bring, muralists attempted to fill in the gaps with postulations but served with a warning. In both murals it is man who has the ability to drive their society into the future and it is man who can be the undoing of their civilization and others.

These illustrations featuring socialist leaders and any other symbols referring to socialism were not surprising to encounter in either Rivera nor Orozco’s works due to their heavy involvement and participation in the Mexican Communist Party and admiration for the Soviet Union (Goldman 119). These beliefs found themselves in the inclusion and placement of certain subjects; peasants and laborers as the proletariat facing the industry or the bourgeoisie. Rivera’s admiration was so strong, in fact, that it led to the working relationship and eventual friendship of Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, of whom later recreated images from Rivera’s SEP murals in his film *¡Qué Viva México!*. Shifra Goldman, again, makes reference to the political symbolism through historical figures used within the works of all three muralists actually served artistic commentary of the country’s post-revolutionary state. She

states:

In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the muralists and other cultural workers were aware of the need to create a new formal and thematic language in the interests of social change. New aspects of history were to be emphasized, new heroic figures to be given prominence, and new views of social relationships to be advanced. This language would reflect political concepts that emerged from the revolutionary process: agrarian reform, labor rights, separation of church and state, Mexican hegemony over natural resources, defense against foreign economic penetration, and literacy and education for the masses. (122)

With this being said, I argue that in order for the muralists to achieve their goal of illustrating Mexico's future, they implored the nation to be reminded of their current state, and in the process, offered political commentary that reflected their own beliefs about the direction of the country. Rivera's murals from the beginning of the muralism movement through its height in the 1930s continued to present farmers, both male and female, tilling the earth, utilizing its resources while powerful forces, within and outside of Mexico, attempted and often succeeded in exploiting workers and land. It is a theme that perpetually appears in Rivera's most notable works including his mural at El Palacio Nacional detailing the history of Mexico, the SEP which spans multiple levels and features the women of Tehuantepec, in *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park* that pokes fun of the bourgeoisie by representing one of them as *La Catrina*¹⁸.

Though "Los Tres Grandes" were handpicked by Vasconcelos to illustrate his vision of Mexico's history and culture, undoubtedly, they began to filter the historical narrative through not just their political beliefs, but also what they perceived as culturally valuable to include. My work examines the identified themes, then, through the lens of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, which will be defined and later described through the specific murals of Mexican Muralism's most productive artist, Diego Rivera. I argue that the evolving images of underrepresented figures, including but not limited to marginalized individuals such as

indigenous peoples and women, in the murals created immediately following the Mexican Revolution became the beginning stages for what is now known as CSRP and can be seen blooming through 20th and 21st century Mexican film. Chapter 2 discusses at length concrete examples of the first leap from muralled wall to silver screen by Russian filmmaker, friend and colleague of both Orozco and Rivera, Sergei Eisenstein in his film *¡Qué Viva México!*.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Mexican Muralism

It is important to note that the forthcoming analysis of murals by Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros against Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is only done so to examine the potential genesis of said theory and not as examples of CSP in its totality. The social climate following the Mexican Revolution and the beginning development of an intentional educational system would make it difficult for the 1920s and 30s to embody all that CSP purports to be and achieve. However, the shift and evolution of narratives that take place within the murals to follow, can be observed as seedlings that eventually led to the theory that is now deemed Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. In anticipation of the detailed analysis of murals by Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros I offer a definition of Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogy. Defined by its theorists, Paris and Alim, culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP)

seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. (*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies 2*)

As its focus, CSP generally refers to the support and nurturing of languages, practices and perspectives of marginalized groups as they are often excluded from historical narratives or their stories are told from either a Eurocentric perspective or that of the dominant societal group. Furthermore, it requires educators to push past asset pedagogies which has its teachers

instructing from a position of student deficit wherein pupils are viewed as lacking cultural, social skills related to the dominant culture. With this definition, this research begins with an examination of works from each of the three muralists commissioned by Vasconcelos and how his proposed muralism initiative embodies underpinnings of Eurocentrism yet produces artwork that exhibits elements of CSP that in direct conflict with the project's original purpose.

Their first assignment would find the artists in La Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (The National Preparatory School). The significance of this building should not be lost for several reasons; because it was not only the first location of murals commissioned by Vasconcelos, but also one of the few places where all three muralists worked under the same roof. Also, the academy provided not only ample space for the artists to begin their work but had strong connections to La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The resulting mural's intent would be to affect its onlooker in the same way a teacher would in the classrooms they enshrouded but without textbooks or words.

Rivera being the artist viewed with the most expertise was given the entire auditorium of El Anfiteatro Bolívar. *La creación* (Creation) (1922-1923) (figure 1.5) would be the inaugural work of the muralism movement and would reflect the essence of Vasconcelos' educational initiative; to bring all of Mexico, especially those indigenous groups and rural inhabitants, to an understanding of their need to be educated in order to secure their rightful place as world leader.

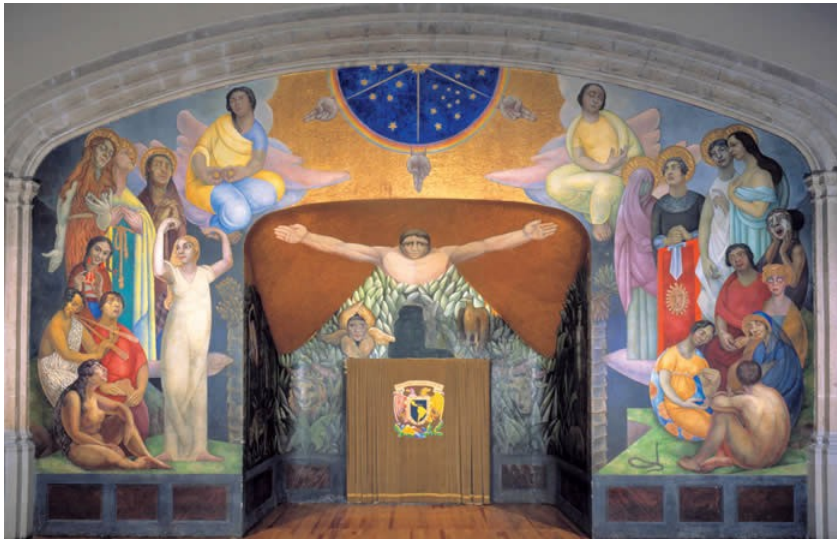


Figure 1. 5 *La creación*, 1922 Diego Rivera Acervo del Antiguo Colegio de San Idelfonso

Covering the archway that houses the pipe organ his mural and flanking walls, *La creación*, according to Jean Charlot, can be divided into two parts with Rivera's trip to Tehuantepec serving as the line of demarcation (143). Beginning at the bottom of each side of the arch are two unclothed figures, one man and one woman, of which Folgarait describes as being uncultured and unenlightened (38). The viewer can surmise that the two naked persons are Adam and Eve based on their opposition to one another and the slithering snake that sits at the man's feet. Folgarait continues his description of the mural by noting that hovering over the man and woman presides "...allegorical figures representing and 'wearing' the arts and sciences of western societies and heavenly culture" (38). Hanging in suspension over the woman are the personifications of the arts and virtues; dance, music, song, comedy along with charity, hope, faith and wisdom. Lingering above the man and opposing the woman are fable, erotic poetry, tradition, tragedy, and science paired with the virtues of knowledge, prudence, justice, strength, and continence (San Idelfonso). The top arch depicts two winged characters floating on clouds which is said to reflect science and knowledge. They sit on either side of a gold leafed sun burst and blue semi-circle with three hands stretch out in opposing directions.

It is interesting to note the overwhelming presence of woman as the central subject of a mural of this magnitude. The woman embodies both virtue and highly esteemed cultural arts and can be viewed as the giver of such knowledge to mankind. Rivera's *La creación* at surface level appears to give voice and power to a marginalized group—women, by making them the center offocus. However, hiding just beneath the surface within the mural, the viewer finds evidence that communicates Vasconcelos' and possibly Rivera's deficit approach to educating the masses. This approach ascertains that the languages and cultural ways of communities, specifically marginalized communities, are deficiencies that need to be overcome and replaced with the dominant and legitimized culture (Paris & Alim 4). As mentioned previously, Folgarait makes it clear that the two naked figures sitting at the base of the arches in the mural are an allegorical Adam and Eve who represent the primal descendants of Mexico. In his estimation, pre-Columbian civilizations are blank canvases awaiting the input of knowledge and culturing from the figures above them. The nakedness of these indigenous peoples alludes to their backwards presence in a modern and the critical need from a more enlightened, civilized entity to transform them in a way only they can. The terms enlightened and civilized are coded language that assumes that a standard for being exists. As Indigenous people are illustrated in this painting as primitive "other" in the form of Adam and Eve sitting at the feet of those who embody the arts, it is important to recognize that the acknowledged arts in this mural and in society are not that of those present within Indigenous communities, rather of European culture.

The inclusion of subjects with darker skin tones, again, appears to be another surface level nod to CSP as communities of color are often eliminated from historical narrative or serve in secondary roles. Folgarait describes those included in the mural as "unrefined, prehistoric, with a massive jaw, curled lips, and protruding teeth" (39). If accepted and applied to the mural,

Folgarait's interpretation could have multiple implications as it relates to Rivera and Vasconcelos' artistic vision and internal views of Indigenous peoples resulting in the same outcome as previously mentioned; a visual depiction of their deficit. On the one hand it could potentially reveal internal perspectives and imagery that Rivera subscribes to regarding Indigenous people while on the other, it could reflect a fulfilled request made on behalf of Vasconcelos. This is to say that Rivera may have been given a vision of what to paint by his employer and Rivera obliged. While a plausible argument considering Vasconcelos' writings concerning Indigenous people as a problematic, greater issue is at play. The characteristics used to describe the facial features of the Indigenous subjects by Folgarait could be the very thing that Rivera chooses to celebrate and demonstrate, finding no negative issue with their inclusion and emphasis. It is Folgarait's description and interpretation of the subject's facial features that portrays a sense of otherness. To project this interpretation as truth on the artist's work without the artist's support would be to misrepresent the possible artistic representation of the work in its entirety.

It can be said that the illustration in *La creación* depicts imagery that opposes some of the tenets of CSP, one primarily being the portrayal of Indigenous figures as primitive subjects in need of enlightenment and education by those above. However, an additional argument could be made that the positioning of the Indigenous figures in this painting suggests underlying patriarchal philosophies that were pervasive within Mexico pre and post Revolution. Though the hovering figures are both male and female, their position implies a hierarchical entity, ordained by God and of which under its subjugation would catapult those beneath it upward towards a level of refined civilization and achievement. The interpretations offered here may not conclude that *La creación* fully embodies CSP, rather it demonstrates the existing tensions

and dialogues between not only Vasconcelos and “Los Tres Grandes”, but those that the artists grappled with internally as they processed through the aftermath of the Revolution. Diego Rivera’s works following his entry to muralism specifically those in the Secretariat of Public Education, continually evolved to better reflect his beliefs at the time in which he painted them of which he outlined in the manifesto¹⁹ published through the Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers of Mexico. Rivera’s mural cycle at the SEP foreshadows more frequent appearances of CSPs characteristics and would lead Russian director Sergei Eisenstein’s to develop an idea for a film about Mexico later titled *¡Qué Viva México!*. Chapter 2 examines this film in depth, for its exact replications of panels from Rivera’s SEP murals along with other muralists of the time.

José Clemente Orozco would be the second muralist to arrive to La Escuela Nacional Preparatoria and was given the task of adorning the main patio and a stairwell with his murals. Upon entering the main patio, *La trinchera* (The Trench) (1926) (figure 1.6) is the first of many murals by the artist that a viewer sees.



Figure 1. 6 *La trinchera*, 1926 José Clemente Orozco Acervo del Antiguo Colegio San Idelfonso

In it, two dead men and one living are placed in front of a barricade, forming a triangular like

shape. Their covered faces give them an anonymity that allows the artist to use them as generic representations of the thousands of men who fought and died during the revolution. The three men are also interpreted as a version of the crucifixion with one man having no weapons or gun belt in which to protect himself. Along with Folgarait's aforementioned interpretation, he summarizes the subject matter of *La trinchera* identifying it as that of the massacre of the land-hungry campesinos under the leadership of Pancho Villa or Emiliano Zapata during the Mexican Revolution (68). However, he notes that this snapshot in history could also be a foreshadowing of the future; in short it is Orozco's warning and a promise to Mexico that what has happened before could happen again.

When viewing Orozco's *La trinchera* against CSP, it is important to consider Orozco's underlying beliefs about the aesthetic of his works. Orozco was extremely critical of the promotion of *mexicanidad*, specifically from the vantage point of an Indian Mexico, and believed it to be at the point of disintegration and disappearance (Folgarait 56). In addition, he held that strong belief that this type of aesthetic, of painting the poor or soiled, was humiliating to the subjects it purported to represent thus refusing to paint them. However, he did concede that in painting these types of subjects it would likely result in the subject's desire to become better and will themselves into civility (Folgarait 57). This manifesto of beliefs that Orozco strongly clung to at the commencement of his artistic career has strong ties to the social theories promoted by José Vasconcelos and cannot be ignored when considering the presence of elements of CSP.

Although Orozco states that he is opposed to the promotion of *mexicanidad* and believes the poor and soiled do not fit his aesthetic, they become the central subject of his murals at La escuela nacional preparatoria. In *La trinchera*, Orozco features three barefoot, bare chest

men who are chosen to represent all those who gave their lives to fight in the Mexican Revolution. Folgarait puts emphasis on the use of bodies in Orozco's paintings interpreting them as not only representatives of the soldiers of the revolution but as potent, manipulable, and ritual prone. He continues by stating that bodies are placeholders for simultaneous physical and cultural change and transformation (69). Again, it is prudent to restate that Folgarait's interpretation of Orozco's work could be opposite of the artist's intention. However, if accepted, his mention of ritual is interesting as it relates to body and can indirectly be tied to the presence or absence of CSP elements within this and other works.

Folgarait regards ritual as a way of managing change and, as bodies in his estimation are ritual prone, they thus have the capability to manage change. Furthermore, the belief surrounding ritual is that change is mandatory, inevitable and beneficial to those who participate in it. It guarantees new status, one of greater power and self-knowledge, responsibilities and rewards (70). Folgarait highlights two moments of great change in Mexico's history; the conquest and the Mexican Revolution. With the occurrence of change, rituals act as public symbols that cultural change is imminent. During Obregon's post-revolutionary regime, it was necessary for citizen to be aware of the end war and beginning of peace. Vasconcelos aided Obregon in creating a ritual in the form of educational reform through literacy programs and murals.

Mural thus became educational propaganda to make citizens aware that their physical bodies and cultural practices were to undergo a transformation. In regard to propaganda Folgarait states "Propaganda is at the heart of a campaign to enforce a ritual, to make certain its initiates feel as initiates and in turn acknowledge their new status at the end of the initiation" (70). He continues by stating that an initiate at the conclusion of a ritual should feel a deep sense of

importance in belonging to a new rank in a legitimate social system which replaces the stigma of lack felt before the ritual which gave reason for the ritual in the first place (70). In other words, the intended outcome for the ritualizing Vasconcelian reform with murals as an educational medium, was not to sustain cultural pluralism as CSP would suggest rather it was to showcase the socio-cultural illegitimacy of the indigenous populations of Mexico in order to help them see themselves as lacking and their endless potential should they join the new Mexican order of civility.

If viewed without the underlying beliefs of the artist as communicated through his own manifesto, or through the lens provided by Folgarait as national propaganda disguised as an educational initiative, *La trinchera* and others produced by the big three during in the early 1920s could all be considered to be in opposition to CSP. However, if the words of Orozco on how his works should be interpreted are considered, the beginnings of culturally sustaining pedagogy maybe within reach. Two documents that would contain Orozco's thoughts can be found in *The Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors* and an article written by Orozco exclusively entitled *New World, New Races, and New Art*.

In December of 1923, a collective of artists including José Clemente Orozco crafted and signed the Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors. Written before Orozco began his murals at la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, its introduction identifies to whom and for who their future art would be dedicated; among the first group to be named is the Indian race with soldiers, workers, peasants, and finally to those intellectuals who are not under the servitude of the bourgeoisie. The artists proclaim that art that comes from the Mexican people is "the highest and greatest" expression of the world as it is a collective that is derived from the people (320) Furthermore, in using their own aesthetic, Mexican art has the

power to destroy bourgeois individualism (320). During the time of the post-revolution their art's main objective was to create beauty for all, not just for parlors and the enjoyment of the upper class. In painting and sculpting for the people and about the people, the beauty found within Mexican art would enlighten all those who engaged with it.

The manifesto continues with the promise as an artistic collective, to work relentlessly through their artwork to prevent the bourgeois government's agenda in Mexico, because if not addressed, the result would be the declining of the Mexican race's Indigenous aesthetic, which, at the time and in their estimation, could only be found in the working class. Taking this into consideration, it may be surmised that when muralists such as Orozco, who frequently painted the working class as subjects as he did in *La trinchera*, incorporated these figures he did so in order to leverage them as placeholders for the Indigenous groups of Mexico.

It is also important to note, that Rivera and Orozco subscribed to Marxism of which critiqued the capitalist society's abuse of the working class. A group made up of primarily marginalized individuals such as Indigenous people. *La trinchera* is not only an illustration of the result of unbalanced power within Mexico following the revolution, but also an illustration of two of the three Revolutions at play during the time of historical transformation—that is the agrarian based revolution which sought a radical redistribution of land to the Mexican peasant and what is referred to as "...the proletarian revolution by urban workers in modern factories" (Carter 286).

The clear agenda outlined within the manifesto to use their artistry to promote and foster the cultural aesthetic of Mexico, is further supported in a direct quote. The artists state "Not only are our people (especially our Indians) the source of noble labor but even the smallest manifestations of the material and spiritual vitality of our race spring from our native midst. So

does the extraordinary and marvelous ability to create beauty” (320). Again, when considering the definition of CSP is to perpetuate, foster or sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as a part of schooling for positive social transformation, one can look to the murals created during the post-revolutionary era to find small glimmers of CSP as well as ongoing narrative discourse of three different revolutions befalling the nation and affecting multiple groups of Mexican citizens. The artists dialogue with and to the observer regarding Agrarian reform, workers’ rights and constitutional reform through visceral imagery that often included Indigenous subjects intentionally positioned on canvas. Having acknowledged the source of their artistic aesthetic as the Indian race and vowing to protect it from the bourgeoisie individualism that sought to squelch its existence and assimilate it under the guise of Mexican nationalism, these murals, including those of Orozco, have set the standard for their purpose.

Although it may appear that the muralists contracted by Vasconcelos may have incorporated some of his ideas in the forms of images and themes within their works, as previously stated by Orozco, through the statements of this manifesto, these artists make clear their intentions for how their work should be viewed. The source of their creativity as artists and as a people can be traced to the autochthonous civilizations from which Mexico was birthed.

New World, New Races, and New Art, written by Orozco in 1929 and in his own words, continues to support the collaborative manifesto in which he signed. He too acknowledges the inherent value of what he calls “historically and ethnically diverse art” of Mexico. However, Orozco makes one clear distinction stating “To lean upon the art of the aborigines, whether it be of antiquity or of the present day, is a sure indication of impotence and of cowardice, in fact, of fraud” (322) While some may interpret this statement as Orozco’s way of degrading the

inclusion of Indigenous subjects and themes in art, and support this interpretation with the known notion that he had a strong disdain for the promotion Indianism through such work, Orozco offers the following: "...each cycle must work for itself, must create, must yield its own production, its individual share to the common good" (321). Orozco is not discouraging the use of Indigenous subjects and themes, rather, he is calling artists to create for their time period and add to an already rich aesthetic left to them, just as their ancestors had done in the centuries before. He uses European artists as an example who he claims are stuck in the past and its ruin. Orozco admits that while the ruins and artwork of the historical past may be interesting and useful from an ethnographical standpoint, he believes that they cannot be the start point for new art and creation (321). Finally, Orozco closes with one of the boldest statements of the entire document, which. It reads

The highest, the most logical, the purest and strongest form of painting is the mural. In this form alone, it is one with the other arts—with all others. It is, too, the most disinterested form, for it cannot be made a matter of private gain; it cannot be hidden away for the benefit of a certain privileged few. It is for the people. It is for ALL. (322)

The placement of murals, in open spaces and on public walls supports the manifesto's claim that this art was for the masses. Although Mary Coffey in her book asserts that while murals were not enclosed in museums and open to the public, they still cannot be considered public art for all as only those who lived within the urban centers could learn from and enjoy their presence (22). Even the Preparatoria murals had a selective audience; the students who attended said school. However, the muralists branched out from the small school where the Mexican Muralism movement began giving substance to the declaration that muralism was indeed for all.

David Alfaro Siqueiros, the main contributor to the Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors double downed on its premise through his own works and musings. His contribution to La Escuela Nacional Preparatoria found itself in the *Colegio chico*²⁰. Though he painted the fewest murals of the three, his *Entierro de un obrero sacrificado* (Burial of a Worker) (1923) (Fig.6), is striking in its Revolutionary content and imagery. The work depicts three indigenous men carrying the coffin of a fellow worker. A fourth man, mestizo in appearance stands in the upper right-hand corner. The coffin is blue, which according to Folgarait's detailed description, is intentional as it reflects an indigenous tradition meant to ward off evil spirits. Within the mural are the communist proletariat symbols of the hammer and sickle also accompanied by the recognizable red star (52).

This mural is of significance as it was painted concurrently with the formation of the El sindicato de obreros técnicos, pintores y escultores (Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors) who upon their founding wrote and published the manifesto that bears its name. Cantor states that Siqueiros embodied the manifesto in which he spearheaded through his artwork (26). Thus, again, it is necessary to refer to said manifesto, as well as Siqueiros' written work "Toward a transformation of the Plastic Arts" (1934) to better understand and interpret *El entierro de un obrero sacrificado* against CSP.

A description of the manifesto's content was already given in great detail when examining Orozco's *La trinchera*. To that end, attention is given to Siqueiros' individual written work. "Toward a transformation of the Plastic Arts" was yet another manifesto written by Siqueiros in preparation for an art study program for painters and sculptors. In it he writes that "We must put an end to the superficial folk art, of the type called 'Mexican Curious' which predominates in Mexico today, and substitute for it an art which is internationally valid though

based on local antecedents and functional elements” (333). He continues with a call to end the “egocentrism of modern European art” as well as the “false collectivism” of Mexican art and promotes the collaboration of all artists through their experiences and abilities (333). This declaration and the cultural pluralistic content within *Burial of a Worker* would serve as a strong connection to what theorists now identify at CSP.

Siqueiros’ conviction to stray away from superficial folk can be interpreted as his disinterest and disgust with stereotypical depictions of rural and indigenous Mexico; instead he implores artists to create art that speaks to the world in which can only be done through the fostering of cultural plurality. Shannon Cantor discusses the underlying themes found within this mural that would support Siqueiros’ desire to connect to the world through shared experience and thus promote authentic cultural pluralism. Specifically, she identifies the campesino and urban indigenous spheres of Mexico that appear within the work through the illustration of burial rituals.

By highlighting the content of the mural, workers burying a fellow worker using indigenous customs she touches on the intersectionality of Indigenous people of Mexico at the time; that is to say their socioeconomic status as peasant farmers and their ethnic roots. The subject of death and the performative ceremonies that it provokes, is one which all cultures have experienced. To have such a unifying experience on a wall, accompanied by specific depictions of cultural rituals, offers its viewer not only a glimpse into some of Mexico’s pre-Colombian civilizations by way of burial rituals, but also gives permission to reflect on one’s own practices. This interpretation along with Siqueiros own words would suggest an affinity towards promoting and fostering cultural plurality; the very definition of CSP.

Coming on the heels of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, the Mexican Muralism

Movement gained traction thanks to the artistic efforts of artists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco. Together they reimagined the international art form of muralism to fit into the Mexican context as an educational tool that would communicate the nation's new identity. José Vasconcelos, the Minister of Public Education appointed by Obregón, had a vision of what that identity would be and chose murals as a medium in order to educate the masses whilst reinforcing the supremacy of the plastic arts. Furthermore, his educational reform would seek to gain traction in Mexico's third historical transformation.

With "Los Tres Grandes all converging on La escuela nacional preparatoria, it seemed certain that Vasconcelos' vision of modern Mexico and *mexicanidad* would appear on the walls in which they painted. While some of the visions imagined by the minister of public education found their way into the murals painted by the artists, many times their work saw an amalgamation of convictions, ideas and principles swirling through post-revolutionary Mexican society. Even when approaching their work from varying perspectives, some similarities across murals are evidence of the declarations outlined in the manifesto they crafted and signed. Folgarait best summarizes their approaches stating,

The Mexicans expressed the essence of their manifesto each within his individual temperament and style: Siqueiros dealt with working-class content, Orozco with the ideas and abuses of the revolution and the formation of the Mexican nation, Rivera with the indigenous and popular culture, the history of the revolution and the role of Yankee imperialism. Their styles were responsive to the search for new expression and the educational needs of post-revolutionary Mexico. (5)

The recurring images and themes of Indigenism, Mexican mythology, and the working class found within the works produced by said muralists gives some promise to elements of what is Cultural Sustaining Pedagogy; an educational theory developed by Samy Alim and Django Paris which in its definition seeks to perpetuate, foster and sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as a part of schooling for positive social transformation (1).

In the Manifesto of The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, signed by all three artists and others, they acknowledge the source of beauty that permeates through Mexican artistry finds its roots the Indian race. Inasmuch, they vowed with the signing of the manifesto to protect it from the bourgeoisie and any form of assimilation under the façade of Mexican nationalism. This manifesto, as quoted by Folgarait, set the trajectory for the muralist's works. José Clemente Orozco's *La trinchera* (1926) upheld the manifesto in the form of three anonymous men, two dead and one living as he used these figures represent the thousands of campesinos and indigenous men who fought and died during the revolution. Making good on the promises written in the Manifesto of Syndicate Workers, his perpetual usage of the working class in his murals would be the force that would sustain the Mexican race's indigenous aesthetic of which they believed only existed within the working class. In his own words, Siqueiros appeals to artists to create art that communicates across continents. To do so, would require that he illustrate experiences of which everyone could relate. In his mural *El entierro de un obrero sacrificado* (1923) achieves this aim through the shared experience of death. The imagery of mestizo men carrying a blue coffin reflective of traditional indigenous burial rituals, invokes a sense of introspection into one's own death customs, yet it does not promote one over another. It is through these images that Siqueiros does his part to promote cultural pluralism and while still communicating messages about proletarian solidarity with the imagery of the hammer and sickle.

Rivera's *La creación* (1922-1923), though, serves as an outlier, as the content of this particular mural may suggest that indigenous populations come from a knowledge and cultural deficit. His illustrations call on the arts to fill the empty minds of the pre-Colombian Adam and Eve figures seated at the base of the arch within the Anfiteatro Bolívar. However, the Rivera's

mural installation at the SEP would redeem and solidify his promise declared in the Manifesto, garnering the recognition and admiration of Russian director Sergei Eisenstein. Eisenstein would borrow panels from both Siqueiros' *Burial of a Worker* and Rivera's SEP mural cycle to create

¡Qué Viva México! bringing movement to stagnate murals and watering the seeds of CSP planted by the muralist movement's founders.

CHAPTER 2. Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* and Mexican Muralism

Chapter 2 builds upon the foundation laid in Chapter 1 as it analyzes Sergei Eisenstein's film *¡Qué Viva México!* as a reflection and reproduction of murals painted during the Mexican Muralism movement by "Los Tres Grandes". Particular interest is given to the comradery between Eisenstein and Diego Rivera together with Alfaro Siqueiros, and the replication of panels from both muralists' work within the film. Furthermore, it considers the subjects, landscapes and themes depicted within *¡Qué Viva México!* through a foreign filmmaker's perspective of Mexico and will use this lens to critique the images and subjects depicted within the film. Additionally, the aforementioned viewpoint is contemplated for its influence on future films created about and within Mexico.

Beginning with a glimpse into the Russian filmmaker himself, this chapter discusses the inspiration for *¡Qué Viva México!*, through the close contact of those who were spearheading the Mexican Muralism movement, specifically "Los Tres Grandes", as well as those who were chronicling the movement as it occurred. Emphasis is given to Eisenstein's original plans and intended outcomes for this film and how they directly impacted the Mexican people and culture. Additionally, utilizing commentary from Eisenstein himself and fellow colleagues, the filmmaker's infatuation with Mexico's landscapes and cultures is explored in an effort to give context to the film, the significance of its timing as well as prepare for later analysis of *¡Qué viva México!* against Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP).

Following Eisenstein's background and origins of the film is an overview of critiques presented by researchers of both film and culture of *¡Qué Viva México!*. This includes analyses of the gap between the filming and release of the film to the public, the use of certain subjects, recurring Mexican muralist themes, and chosen cultural practices, products and history reflected in the film. The contributions offered in these reviews are leveraged as a framework

for later analysis of *¡Qué Viva México!* against CSP. Finally, detailed descriptions of the film's episodic structure is examined with emphasis placed on the representation of Indigenous subjects and pre-Colombian cultural practices.

To achieve this end, comparisons are drawn between images and subjects found within Rivera's SEP mural cycle specifically *Las Tehuanas* and *Liberation of the Peon* as well as Orozco's murals at La escuela nacional preparatoria. These comparisons lead to the aforementioned critical analysis of *¡Qué Viva México!* as a continuation of the underpinnings related to cultural relevant pedagogy found in muralism and its translation to film. *¡Qué Viva México!* attempts to pick up where the muralism movement left off by informing and showcasing the value of Indigenous people of Mexico throughout history. The end result of Eisenstein's film does not embody the totality of CSP, as it is a film that reflects the perspectives and societal beliefs surrounding Indigenism and Indigenous people at the time, it serves as a valuable piece to study within the framework of CSP for its ability to demonstrate the lasting impact of historical narratives regarding a nation and people from an outside Eurocentric perspective. The aim of this chapter is to examine how the narratives and representations of Indigenous people in this film, having drawn direct inspiration from Mexican muralists, passed through the filter of Eurocentrism, thus shifting and decentering the Indigenist tones asserted in the muralism movement and how these representations influenced and may have been perpetuated in the films of the Mexican Cinema Golden Age discussed in Chapter 3.

Thus, it considers the possibility that *¡Qué Viva México!* can be identified as a dual didactic art form. Firstly, *Qué Viva México* is the result of inspiration and education provided by the artwork of muralists and secondly, it later inspires and informs the pictures of filmmakers

such as Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa by communicating messages regarding Mexican Indigenous people and culture.

Sergei Eisenstein and the inspiration for ¡Qué Viva Mexico!

Born Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein in the Soviet Union in 1898, the filmmaker made a name for himself early on as the father of the montage as well as being the first Russian artist to have been invited to Hollywood (Iutkievich 23). Eisenstein's love for multiculturalism was birthed through his deep appreciation of the arts and the fact that he spoke three European languages fluently, (add the languages here) adding Spanish after his encounter in Mexico with los tres grandes. Bergan cites that he was particularly fond of commedia dell'arte, actors of the 19th century including the French mime Jean-Gaspard Debarau (16.) Even still, critics of Eisenstein called his works and the filmmaker "calculating" and "a didactic theorist whose films lack humanity" (Bergan 16). These critiques did not seem to deter Eisenstein from producing well-known films such as *El Acorazado Potiomkin* (1925), a silent film that garnered international attention and fame for the filmmaker, led to a later introduction to Upton Sinclair, and began the trajectory for

¡Qué Viva México!.

To separate the origin story of *¡Qué Viva Mexico!* from Eisenstein's life as a filmmaker would be a grave mistake; the two are intertwined in every piece of research to be had concerning both. Eisenstein's fascination with Mexico began early on in his youth when he read accounts of the Mexican revolution. Afterwards it was lectures and current events that sparked a curiosity in him about Mexico and anything Mexican (*Eisenstein y su concepción* 2). When his friend, Vladimir Mayakovski, a poet who had spent considerable time in Mexico, illustrated through his words the paintings he had been shown writing "En una decena de murales, el pasado, el presente y el futuro de la historia de Mexico están representados. El arte moderno de aquel

país y no en las formas decadentes y eclécticas que se han importado de Europa. La idea del arte es parte—aunqueno del todo conciente—de la lucha y la liberación de los esclavo de la colonia” (De la Vega 3). Eisenstein yearned to know more about the artist of which Mayakovski described—Diego Rivera.

Mayakovski, would later invite the Mexican painter to Moscow to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the beginning of the Russian Revolution. There he introduced Eisenstein to Riverawho shared with Eisenstein not only the history of Mexico but photos of his early murals that attempted to explain that history (De los Reyes 80). From there, his fascination with all things Mexico turned to obsession and in 1929 Eisenstein begins a long international trek with its final destination being Mexico. Arriving to Germany first, the filmmaker visits a few magazinecompanies, specifically Kölnische Illustrierte and Abrbeiter Illustriete Zeitung; two magazines thathad been printing photos and articles covering past and current events in Mexico (81). While Eisenstein really coveted more information about Día de los Muertos, a celebration of which he had read about and seen illustrations, he found more than what he could have asked. The issues not only included photos of monuments like Chichen Itzá, La cúpula de la iglesia del convento del desierto de los leones, and the Acueducto de los Remedios, but also followed the election of Plutarco Elías Calles and the rebellion of General Escobar (82).

Eisenstein unexpectedly became immersed in the history of Mexico and events as they happened through the eyes of photographers and German magazines. Of the most influential images that Eisenstein came across was of bodies hung from electric posts on the sides of the highway during La Guerra Cristera²¹. Taken by Enrquie Díaz it was said that this photograph in particular was likely taken back to Moscow by Eisenstein himself with the evidence being that hispartner, Grigory Alexandrov, incorporated said photograph in his version of *¡Qué Viva*

México!. These images and others, such as those taken by photographer Tina Modotti depicting eight deadbodies in their respective coffins surrounded by mourning women, have been said to have moved Eisenstein to visit Mexico and see for himself all that he had seen and read through other artists. De los Ríos supports this argument commenting

Sin duda, dichas revistas nurtieron y alimentaron su curiosidad y pasión por México y contribuyeron a fijar en su mente por lo menos tres de los temas que desarrollaría después, relacionados con la política y el folklore popular: el día de muertos, la villa Guadalupe y el tema de la hacienda pulquera (83).

With his assistant Grigori Alexandrov and cameraman Eduard Tissé, Eisenstein set out for Mexico in early December of 1930 without a clear vision for a film and a recently terminated contract with Paramount studios for a Mexican film for which Eisenstein had no content (84). At this point, suggestions had been made by many filmmakers and artists, including Diego Rivera, who proposed Eisenstein create a film all about Mexico, even offering a working title of “Life in Mexico”. Eisenstein’s tennis partner and friend, Charlie Chaplin, also offered his advice, encouraging the filmmaker to reach out to novelist Upton Sinclair for financial backing for his Mexican film; he too had an idea for a working title—*Mexican Picture* (86). Ultimately, Sinclair and his wife Mary Craig Sinclair, agreed to finance his film, approving Eisenstein’s sketch of six novellas and an epilogue dedicated to the Mexican artists that inspired him.

Later Eisenstein would reflect on his incomplete film and its structure stating “It was constructed like a necklace, like the bright, striped coloring of the serape or Mexican cloak, or like a sequence of short novellas. This chain of novellas was held together by a set of linking ideas, proceeding in a historically based sequence but not so much chronological epochs as by geographical zones” (Bergan 16). This metaphor was also used to describe his perspective of

Mexico (quote Eisenstein and Serape). Again, Eisenstein's appreciation for the arts and the culture it represents shone through which could be attributed to not only his friendships with Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, but the photographs of their works. It is noted that upon arriving to Mexico and lacking direction for the film he had not been financed to create, Eisenstein began to purchase books about Mexico that would offer him focus and inspiration. Of those books were *Las obras de José Guadalupe Posada*, Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* and a book illustrated by Orozco that included his painting *Las soldaderas*. With these tools in hand, Eisenstein commenced his journey through Mexico, and by March 1931, had filmed in Mexico City, Acapulco, Oaxaca, Tehuantepec and was heading for the Yucatán peninsula with a clear mind to create *¡Qué Viva México!*.

Though others saw Eisenstein as an artist who valued himself over the subjects he filmed, Eisenstein's view of himself shed light on his fascination and obsession with creating a film with Mexico at its core. According to Bergan, Eisenstein saw himself as more than a filmmaker and felt that to identify oneself as such would be to simultaneously deem oneself as an architect, poet, painter and composer (17). Inasmuch, his film *¡Qué Viva México!* reflected this belief as his aim was to expose the world to the cultural richness and history that permeated specifically throughout Mexico and its people refuting the narrative that its offerings were inferior to that of its European counterparts. Iutkievich supports this while refuting the aforementioned critique of Eisenstein's distancing between himself and subject, stating:

En su película Mexicana no se contenta con las asociaciones pictóricas surgidas de las obras de El Greco, Callot, Daumier o Goya, sino que con los mismos derechos introduce en el cine la experiencia y las imágenes de José Guadalupe Posada, Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros, Picasso y los llamados 'primitivos' aztecas, mayas y toltecas. (27)

(In his Mexican film he was not content with pictorial associations derived from the works of El Greco, Collat, Daumier or Goya, rather with the same directness he introduces in the film the experience and of the images of José Guadalupe Posada, Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros, Picasso and the so called primitive Aztecs, Mayas and

Toltecs).²²

The importance of a film about Mexico as well as the subjects and images included in such film, was not lost on Eisenstein. Having spent time in the social and professional circles of some of history's greatest artists, Eisenstein was aware of the underestimation given to Mexico. This can be inferred from his constant musings and accounts of Mexico's cultural lushness found within his memoirs entitled "Yo"; named as such in Spanish according to Naum Kleiman "...to give the memoirs 'an ironic distance, diluting its concentrated egoism'" (Bergan 15).

Eisenstein's memoirs having been written following a severe cardiac event and inspired by the author James Joyce, Eisenstein writes a stream of conscience-like account of his work with few facts about his actual life, however, the memoirs contain an overwhelming description of his time in Mexico (Bergan 15). The filmmaker had time to consider his strong memories and feelings about Mexico after the production of the film was abruptly halted and Eisenstein was directed to immediately return to the USSR. Bergan alludes to his longing for the West while remaining in Russia stating that "even though he felt 'stuck in the terrible state of Russia', he continued to widen his knowledge of the arts and sciences, using everything, including his friendships, personal feelings and desires, which all interconnect his memoirs, diaries, drawings, theoretical essay and films, to form an integrated oeuvre, which an understanding of one element enriches and illuminates the others" (17). Eisenstein used his distance from the West, specifically from Mexico, as a time of reflection, and rather than succumbing to the discouraging reality of his environment, he leveraged the very thing in which he found inspiration and passion—Mexico.

Eisenstein's fascination with Mexico jumps off the page and answers the why in questions regarding the locations chosen for filming *¡Qué Viva México!*. Eisenstein says of

Mexico:

México es asombroso porque allí, palpándolo vives todo aquello que conoces por los libros y las concepciones filosóficas opuestas a la metafísica. Sospechas que el mundo en su mástierna infancia, en sus comienzos, estuvo lleno justamente de esta regia indiferente pereza y al mismo tiempo de esta potencia creadora, como las mesetas y lagunas, desiertos y matamorrales, pirámides que de un momento a otro esperas estallen como volcanes; palmeras que se incrustan en la cúpula azul del cielo, tortugas que no surgen de las entrañas de esenadas y golfos, sino del fondo del mar, inmediato al centro de la tierra. (Eisenstein 379)

(What is amazing about Mexico is the vivid sense that there you can experience things which you only know about otherwise from books and philosophical conceptions opposed to metaphysics. I imagine that when the world was in its infancy it was full of exactly the same indifferent laziness, coupled with the creative potential of lagoons and plateaus, deserts and undergrowth; pyramids you might expect to explode like volcanoes).²³

In reading this description, Mexico is remembered by Eisenstein as not only unique but as a snapshot of what the world was like at the beginning of time. He continues his vivid depiction saying:

Algo del jardín del Edén queda frente a los ojos cerrados de quienes han visto, alguna vez, las ilimitadas extensiones mexicanas. Y tenzamente te persigue la idea de que el Edén no estuvo en algún lugar entre el Tigris y el Éufrates, sino por supuesto, aquí, ¡en algún lugar entre el golfo de México y Tehuantepec! (Eisenstein 379)

(Something like that of the Garden of Eden remains in the closed eyes of those who have seen, the unlimited Mexican extensions. And tensely the idea follows you that the Garden of Eden is not some place between the Tigris and the Euphrates, rather of course, here, in some place between the Gulf of Mexico and Tehuantepec!)

I argue that more than this scenic narrative is his underlying argument that Mexico deserves the same reverence given to the Garden of Eden; as a fertile landscape for progress and the epicenter of artistic life and inspiration. Eisenstein capitalizes on this assertion, then, with *¡Qué Viva México!*, making it his mission to share his vision of Mexico with the world. It was

imperative that viewers not just see photographs or replications of Mexican artwork, rather that they would experience the people and practices in which Eisenstein found his obsession. Bergan quotes Eisenstein as he suggests his cinematographic intentionality in how he filmed *¡Qué Viva México!* saying “The reason for this is very simple (I would say tragically simple!): its shots have remained in my memory not as photographic pictures but as the very objects themselves as they were caught by the lens as they actually appeared in the front of the camera” (Bergan 198). Again, the filmmaker refutes that which his critics argue. Eisenstein reiterates that the objective of this film is to introduce the world to the Mexican people as they are and not as photographed, stagnant iterations. More than anything, Eisenstein wanted them to be seen as themselves.

Finally, in reflecting on his 14-month intensive stay in Mexico, the Russian artist turns to his pencil drawings; used to help him draft and block scenes included in the film. He states “It was in Mexico that my drawing underwent an internal catharsis, striving for mathematical abstraction and purity of line. This was derived directly from the Mexican landscape, and from the outlines- square and round- of the dress of the Peons” (198). Eisenstein’s word choice here should be carefully noted and emphasized. Firstly, the reference to his drawings undergoing a sort of catharsis, should not be considered coincidental. A mural of the same name *Catharsis* (1934) was painted by José Clemente Orozco for the El Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City only four years following Eisenstein’s time in Mexico. This is significant in that Orozco was not only one of the three world renowned Mexican Muralists of the time, but a friend to Eisenstein who held him in the highest esteem. Though Eisenstein’s stay preceded the creation of this mural, it is likely that he had familiarity with the artwork as Eisenstein openly and unashamedly claimed Orozco as the one inspiration that inspired him to write (De la Vega

48).

Secondly, Eisenstein's reference to the dress of the "peons" also is noteworthy. *Liberation of the Peon* (1923) painted by Diego Rivera was a mural that the filmmaker had indeed encountered. On the Russian's trek throughout Mexico, Roberto Montenegro, an artist in his own right, was assigned by the Mexican government to serve as Eisenstein's translator and guide, showing him all the important locations of murals by "Los Tres Grandes". This gesture by the Mexican government was not altogether pure in its extension but was a way to control exactly what Eisenstein should and needed to see in Mexico in order to create a film that promoted the vision of the new regime. Montenegro, then, made it his business to showcase Mexico's greatest artwork that may have otherwise remained a close-kept secret if not shown. His tour included El Antiguo Colegio de San Idelfonso, where the Mexican muralism movement gained traction, La Secretariade Educación Pública (SEP) as well as El Palacio Cortés in Cuernavaca, the location of Rivera's most notable panels during the Mexican renaissance, La capilla and Oficinas administrativas de la Escuela de Agronomía de Chapingo, and finally El Palacio Nacional of Mexico City (De la Vega 45). Eisenstein's choice of Tetlapayac, an old Spanish plantation, as the center for his filming, should not be a surprise as he had encountered similar imagery in Rivera's mural *Sugar Cane* (1931) at El Palacio Cortés in Cuernavaca, a mural depicting a plantation in Morelos, Mexico (Bergan 190). This mural and others not only aided in the choosing of filming locations, but also served as inspiration to the replication of said panels throughout episodes of *¡Qué Viva México!* De la Vega responds to Eisenstein's fascination with the artistic monuments he is exposed to on his tour of the country saying that they helped him conceive the film as a cinematographic mural that would integrate its history, customs, landscape, folklore and art (45). Furthermore, De la

Vegas supports the argument that the film is the visual representation of translation of murals by the Mexican muralists from wall to screen and can be seen explicitly in the film's diverse montages (46).

Aside from his admiration and obsession with the works produced by the big three, was the collegial and familial friendship he shared with each of the artists. Of Rivera, Eisenstein says in his memoirs "Diego y yo somos buenos y viejos amigos" and refers to their time spent in Eisenstein's home in Moscow as well as time spent in the painter's home in Coyoacán (De la Vega 48). What is interesting to note, however, is that as he references Rivera's home, as to relate to the reader their close friendship, he describes the aesthetic of the painter's home "su casa, atestada con gigantescas, indecentes, prehistóricas deidades de madera, piedra o terracota, de los aztecas y mayas" (48). This, too, should not be ignored as I argue that Eisenstein's mention of Rivera's chosen décor puts the filmmaker in close and authentic proximity to the culture of the Mexican people. It also suggests that Eisenstein recognizes that for artists like Rivera, the choice to incorporate prehistoric Mexican deities and the like is not just for stylistic value but are intentionally chosen to remind oneself of one's history and culture.

Diego Rivera was not the only member of los tres grandes with whom Eisenstein shared a friendship since the filmmaker had a relationship with all three artists. As mentioned previously, Eisenstein's admiration for Orozco was deep rooted and need not be restated again, only to say that Rivera and Orozco were, in his opinion, the greatest of los tres grandes. In regard to David Alfaro Siqueiros, Eisenstein went a step further becoming one of his greatest supporters for artistic exhibitions. Eisenstein said of Siqueiros:

Siqueiros es la maravillosa síntesis entre la concepción de las masas y su representación percibida individualmente. Entre el estallido emocional y el intelecto disciplinado,

Siqueiros lleva el golpe de su pincel con la seguridad implacable de un martillo de vapor sobre la meta final que tiene siempre ante sí. (De la Vega 52)

Eisenstein's view of not only Siqueiros' work as an artistic voice for the masses, but all of the muralists and artists of the time. His exposure to the events and cultural practices of Mexico, beginning from his youth and following him into adulthood, would catapult him into its proximity.

Sergei Eisenstein's esteem for his friends and colleagues was not just in word, but deed choosing to dedicate a portion of each of *¡Qué Viva México!* to the Mexican artists that inspired and befriended him. In the proposed outline of six novellas with a prologue and epilogue, Eisenstein would begin his film paying homage to Siqueiros through the exact reiteration of *El entierro de obrero sacrificado* (1925) and then follow it with a nod to Orozco's *Las soldaderas* (1926). He would sprinkle re-imaginings of Rivera's panels at the SEP throughout *Sandunga*, *Maguey*, and the Epilogue. Though the film would be cut short due to Upton Sinclair's financial severance, Bergan reports that "the 14 month sojourn in Mexico may not have produced a completed film, which, to make matters worse was mutated in other people's hands, but the country had a profound influence on Eisenstein as a man and an artist" (197). It is both the film and the artist who would receive harsh criticism and praise from filmmakers of the time and in the future as to his intentions for said film and would call into question how a soviet could receive the moniker as the father of Mexican film.

¡Qué Viva México! would garner the attention of other filmmakers and artists of the time and throughout history, opening the film up for both criticism and admiration. The aforementioned reference to Eisenstein being forerunner to all Mexican filmmakers that followed as well as the title given by De los Reyes and others as the father of Mexican film,

surely gives pause to readers, especially in the context of the foundations laid in Chapter 1 regarding Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP). In all the critiques, each point to the genius of Sergei Eisenstein and wastes no time in praising the Russian filmmaker for his originality crowning him the pioneer of Mexican film. Andrea Noble cites playwright Adolfo Fernández Bustamente's commentary of Eisenstein's impact on Mexican film stating

Ha sido 'el pionero'; el descubridor cinematográfico de todas estas bellezas. Detrás de él vendrán todos los demás, nacionales y extranjeros. Quiera el destino que siquiera sepan aprovechar la lección del maestro...que ha sabido seleccionar paisajes de embrujo. (Noble 173)

Though many can agree that Eisenstein had and continues to have a legitimate and influential place within Mexican film, it appears that film historians' critique of *¡Qué Viva México!* offer more variance than similarity. Cinematographic readings of Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!*, both past and present, have much to say about the film such as its overtly religious and ritual laden scenes. Additionally, there exist attempts to classify or categorize the film as Avant garde, socialist realism, or ethnographic cinema. Even Eisenstein himself, though unable to complete *¡Qué Viva México!*, offered his intentionality for how the film should be viewed which was as travelogue or cine chronicle and ultimately intellectual cinema. Inasmuch, reflection of these critiques will be addressed in their entirety and later considered when analyzing this film for beginning elements of CSP.

Attempting to read *¡Qué Viva México!* against any theory or analyzing it at face value poses problems for many researchers and film historians due to its incompleteness. All reviews of the work address this issue at the onset of their arguments detailing how their critique will overcome this deficit by including support texts and films credited to Eisenstein. Adding

complexity to the ability to critique this work are the various iterations of the film that exist, which cannot be considered entirely the work of Eisenstein.

Though Eisenstein was responsible for the idea, outline and directing of filming that took place while in Mexico in order to create *¡Qué Viva México!*, he never had the ability to piece his work together in the way he envisioned. Upton Sinclair, his main financial backer, is said to partly be to blame for Eisenstein's inability to complete the film after revoking financial support of the film and holding hostage thousands of film reels in the U.S. Upon returning to the USSR at the behest of Stalin, who believed Eisenstein's cinematic journey through Mexico was a cover-up for his intention to defect, Eisenstein would continually request, even plead, that Sinclair send the footage to the USSR so that he could complete the film. Though the novelist promised to do so, he did not fulfill this promise until after Eisenstein's untimely death. Additionally, in an attempt to recover monies lost and produce a completed film about Mexico, Sinclair sold parts of the footage and still photography captured by Eisenstein to other filmmakers of the time including Sol Lesser, who used these rushes to develop a Hollywood inspired piece called *Thunder Over Mexico* (1933).

To that end, it is important to note that the reviews to follow are in reference to Lesser's *Thunder Over Mexico* as well as Eisenstein's assistant Grigori Alexandrov's *¡Qué Viva México!* and will be identified as such wherever necessary. In reference to the versions of *¡Qué Viva México!* that exist, Noble argues that in order for critics to offer a worthy and thorough critique of the film, they would have to take into account these variations of the same or similar name created from the sequences Eisenstein shot in Mexico concurrently with the sketches of what he intended for the film. Salazkina supports this manner of critiquing *¡Qué Viva México!* adding that many researchers also consider Eisenstein's letters, writing on theory, diaries, notes,

sketches and other visual sources to support their critiques all for the purpose of connecting the social and textual realms of his work (4).

Using these resources as a form of empirical data, film critics took issue with Sol Lesser's *Thunder Over Mexico* stating that it failed to live up to Eisenstein's clearly outlined intentions. Furthermore, it completely eliminated the filmmaker's famous montage, replacing it with a singular narrative akin to mainstreamed films of Hollywood. This somewhat simple exclusion of a film technique, in Robe's estimation, changed the intended message Eisenstein was attempting to convey. He states, "Through its use of associational montage within and between all of its episodes, *¡Qué Viva México!* was to show how revolution depends upon the collective will of the people to join forces and transcend the constraining patriarchal, capitalist ideologies of Mexico" (22). Unfortunately, Lesser took a different approach to *Thunder Over Mexico*, isolating the episode entitled "Maguay" from the other five episodes which in Robe's opinion "individuates and dehistoricizes the entire Mexican Revolution, making it seem the result of personal grievances between individuals: an upper-class rapist, a peon, and his wife" (22). The absence of montage in a film whose very existence was only possible by the footage captured by the one who is known as the father of the montage, appears to be an attempt to distance *Thunder Over Mexico* from the Eisenstein. However, Eisenstein's mark in this version of the film as well as Alexandrov's would always be present leading critics to consider other prevalent elements as well as ways to categorize it. This all in an effort to bring a sense of closure and completion to Eisenstein's work.

The ritual and religious centered scenes captured in Alexandrov's version of *¡Qué Viva México!* gives room for much criticism by film historians both past and present. Robe identifies religion as an organizational strand that is enmeshed within the film and quotes other critics

such as Seymour Stern and Mary Seton who have taken an aim on the inclusion of such themes. Robe references an article written by Seymour Stern in 1933 in which he “emphasized the way in which religion was linked to death throughout the out-takes of *¡Qué Viva México!*” as well as “the countless ways in which religion was represented in the film as a life-denying force that subjugated the lower class to the oppression of the priests” (24).

Avant Garde Cinema

¡Qué Viva México! is often categorized as Avant-Garde cinema and is met with skepticism as the definition and aesthetics of avant garde have shifted throughout time, including during the production of *¡Qué Viva México!*. Building on the definition offered by John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich, Cavendish describes avant garde as experimental tendencies that began to emerge in the visual arts in the first decade of the twentieth century (8). Cavendish adds that “avant garde cinema in the Soviet Union during this time period is characterized by a radical assault on traditional modes of expression and the creation of new, hybrid genres” (6). The film’s situation in this time period alone does not quantify it as avant garde cinema rather the more definitive descriptions in relation to film that offer more substantiated support to this claim. Salazkina highlights the visceral and sensory attributes akin to avant garde cinema as elements present within Eisenstein’s film as well as his documented desire to ignite deep feelings about Mexico and its people (6). Olga Bulgakova through White acknowledges Eisenstein’s fascination with the possibilities of film’s avant garde approach to art, with the camera’s ability to “deform and segment reality” and later “reassemble it in every possible way” as well as alter the passage of time (411). Considering the episodic and disjointed nature of *¡Qué Viva México!* it is no wonder why some film historians would identify it as a form of avant garde artistry.

Strong support of *¡Qué Viva México!* as avant garde is often paired with the assertion

that rather than being avant garde in nature, the film lends itself more to the aesthetics often found in soviet artistry of the time—socialist realism. C.V. James describes socialist realism in terms of its overarching aims; to assist the masses, particularly the communist party, in creating a new society complete with a better man for a better world (89). Socialist realism at its core depends on the relationship between the artist and the formation of a new more perfect society of whom would depict the experiences of the working class in their struggle towards achieving socialism (88). This artistic genre preceded the avant garde movement and finds its origin in the Soviet Union, though it was pervasive throughout nations whose governments subscribed to communism.

Though Mexico during the time, had just achieved freedom from the Porfiriato regime, it was far from a socialist society. Nevertheless, some film critics argue that *¡Qué Viva México!*'s categorization of socialist realism is dependent on Eisenstein, a soviet born filmmaker whose film content support the characteristics of the genre. His six-part episodic film walks the viewer through the history of Mexico, beginning with pre-Colombian civilizations and working through and past the Mexican revolution. Some fictional storylines, like those included in “Maguey”, are offered as examples of *¡Qué Viva México!*'s socialist realism, specifically its depiction of those struggling to achieve socialism, as the characters are used as metaphors for the masses v bourgeoisie. Said to be set at the beginning of the twentieth century with the social conditions of Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship as the backdrop “Maguey” demonstrates very little subtly in Eisenstein's commentary of the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie. His narrative of María and Sebastian's romantic betrothal turned tragedy is the central focus of the episode. Betrothed to Sebastian, a peon working on an hacienda, Maria must be presented to the hacendado to gain approval for their marriage. In a sequence of events, María is captured,

raped and held hostage by the powerful hacendado while Sebastian attempts to avenge and rescue her. Sebastian and his comrades, although valiant in their efforts, are seized, buried to their necks in the Maguey field and trampled to death by the hacendado's horses. This episode's contents along with the fact that Eisenstein's other films, including but not limited to *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), have been considered as exemplars of socialist realism, it seems logical that critics would categorize *¡Qué Viva México!* as yet another work of this genre.

Other v Ethnography

Still others argue that Eisenstein's film was far beyond avant garde or socialist realism calling into question the various elements found within the film that could designate it as exoticism of the "other". Many turn to Eisenstein's own projects and words to get a better grasp of the filmmaker's intention for *¡Qué Viva México!* as well as how Mexican culture influenced his decision making for subjects included and scenes depicted within the film. It is those very depictions of both subject and landscape, however, that concern some researchers who suggest Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* is a perpetuation of stereotypes regarding Mexico and its people specifically Indigenous populations as other uncivilized exotic subjects. Noble supports this opinion calling the film a "glossy picture postcard with all its connotations of the tourist fetish- object" using not only the film itself but Eisenstein's diaries, reflections and notes regarding his fascination with Mexico as a basis for this assertion (174). Noble goes further stating that Eisenstein showcases Mexico as exotic other in landscape and people portraying them as "...clichéd, the stereotypical, and the reductive" (174). In her opinion, little room is given to see *¡Qué Viva México!* as anything other than a Soviet film director's obsession with Mexico played out on screen.

Salazkina disagrees with this reading of Eisenstein's film arguing that "*¡Qué Viva México!* is more than just another European's vision of the exotic land, but rather provides textual

evidences of an intense dialogue between the soviet filmmaker and some of the main figures of the Mexican art scene” (15). This dialogue can be seen through the visual intertextuality present within the film including the works of photographers Agustín Jiménez and Tina Modotti along with the works of the famed Mexican muralists of the time. In her opinion, Salazkina believes the only way to read Eisenstein’s film is through the context of the Mexican Renaissance and post-revolutionary Mexican ideology (15). Noble does admit that not all film historians see Eisenstein’s work as she does and offers that many view *¡Qué Viva México!* as “a process of intercultural exchange” as posed by Salazkina. This would suggest that the cultural Renaissance happening during the late 1920s in Mexico at the time of Eisenstein’s filming not only had an impact on the filmmaker, rather the filmmaker’s response through cinematography influenced the ongoing Mexican Muralism movement simultaneously (175).

As previously mentioned, the unfinished nature of the film and the juxtaposing fictional and nonfictional content matter, continue to make it difficult for critics to not only categorize this film but challenging to analyze. Noble explains why critiquing an incomplete film is problematic arguing that any and all interpretations of *¡Qué Viva México!* are wrought with issues as a result of its incompleteness and the fact that critics cannot decide whether to categorize this film as a narrative, a documentary or some type of ethnography; a description or display of individual peoples and customs on film (174). Based on this simplified definition of ethnography, it would appear that this film would almost certainly qualify as ethnographic cinema as Hershfield points to the overwhelming 170,000 feet of cinematic film, Eisenstein’s writings and drawings as forms that support this assertion. Agustín Leiva, Eisenstein’s assistant during the production of the film, praised Eisenstein’s “ ‘anthropological gaze’, namely his capacity to be simultaneously immune to both the ‘exoticizing clichés’, so common in the

discourse on primitivism at the beginning of the twentieth century, and to the documentary approach of ethnographical films” (Rebecchi 26) Cavendish admits that it well known that Eisenstein included not only sequences reflective of the Mexican muralists of the time but also various ethnographic artefacts in the form of statues of Aztec gods (64).

However, in Heider’s studies of ethnography, he asserts that a film cannot be categorized as entirely ethnographic or not, rather the amount of what he defines as ethnographicness is what critics should consider when evaluating films of this nature. To quantify a level of ethnographicness, key elements of ethnography must be found within the film. Those elements should reflect ethnography’s overarching goal of truth in that things, events, people along with their culture and behaviors are understood within the greater social and cultural context (Heider 5). Furthermore, and most importantly according to Heider, a film that possesses a high level of ethnographicness must reflect an ethnographic understanding on the part of the filmmaker from the onset.

This quantifying of ethnographicness would then have to be applied to each version of the film created according to Vassilieva who when reviewing Alexandrov’ iteration of *¡Qué Viva México!*, concludes that the “narrative consistently overrides history, religion and ethnography in favour of ideology, propaganda and realism. In accordance with socialist realism principles, the erotic, religious and mystical material in the film was cut to a minimum or eradicated altogether”(701). Again, it is important to reiterate that the final versions of the film in which all critics refer to are not Eisenstein’s entirely. Alexandrov was known to produce films that were exemplars of socialist realism and thus his involvement in the end product of *¡Qué Viva México!* is always met with criticism.

Be it avant-garde, a form of socialist realism or possessing even a fraction of

ethnographicness, it was Eisenstein's aim to produce a film that provoked critical thinking giving life to intellectual film. His film was to be used a tool to engage and expose the viewer to the history and people of Mexico in the same jarring and enlightening ways that he himself came to know of the country and its inhabitants. Considering these reviews of *¡Qué Viva México!*, this research takes into account Eisenstein's writings and drawings, the possibility of its socialist realism and ethnographic status while reading it for the possibility of beginning elements of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Similar to Heider, the intention is not to qualify *¡Qué Viva México!* as culturally sustaining pedagogy or not, rather it searches for tenets of the theory within the film that resonates with those found within muralism. It then charts the trajectory of these CSP elements within subjects and themes of muralism that passed through the filter of a European filmmaker and later may have influenced films in Mexican Golden Age Cinema to be discussed in Chapter 3.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in ¡Qué Viva México!

Though a definition of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, henceforth referred to as CSP, has been offered in chapter 1, it is necessary to reiterate said definition and tenets of the theory before attempting to analyze *¡Qué Viva México!* Django Paris and H. Samy Alim's asset pedagogy build on the work of its predecessors Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant teaching CSP then, focuses on fostering and perpetuating linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as a part of the democratic project of schooling and in response to societal and demographic change (85). At its core, CSP acknowledges that schooling or education has always been an extension of colonialism; seeking to assimilate, or as Vasconcelos asserted, to civilize, marginalize populations into white European culture. This would require that languages, histories, and cultural practices, though recognized as present within a society, are aspects of identity that

need to be shed in order to move a nation forward towards “modernization”. Paris and Alim’s theory intends to disrupt “the pervasive anti- Indigeneity, anti-Blackness, and related anti-Brownness... so foundational in schooling the United States and many other colonial nation-states” through the decentering of whiteness in curricular materials and teaching practice (2). What remains are multi-dimensional narratives told from the perspectives of marginalized populations that are absent of ontological distancing or othering. Taking into account Eisenstein’s essays, letters and rushes used by Alexandrov to create what is now the unofficial-official film *¡Qué Viva México!* and considering the intertextuality of Mexican artwork within the film, each episode will be examined for traces of CSP to determine if the content of *¡Qué Viva México!* includes examples of fostering and perpetuating the aspects of Indigenous cultural identities that has survived through colonialism and the revolution.

¡Qué Viva México! as Moving Mural and CSP

With the goal of a moving mural in mind, and having high esteem for the Mexican muralists, Eisenstein prepared to dedicate each episode to a Mexican artist from the prologue to the epilogue. The prologue was to honor the works of David Alfaro Siqueiros, and, according to Eisenstein “represent the death of ancient cultures before the coming of new times” (Karetnikova and Steinmetz 20). The epilogue, dedicated to José Guadalupe Posada would focus on El Día de los Muertos, festival celebrating life and death, as well as modern Mexico. Though the prologue and epilogue serve as bookends to the entirety of the film, they share similar characteristics and narratives that when read against CSP offer the viewer insight to Eisenstein’s purported visual symphony of Mexican culture.

Eisenstein begins with the existence of Indigenous men and women who inhabit that land using still photos of their faces alongside the stone carvings of ancient pre-Colombian gods.

Then, Eisenstein represents the death of these ancient cultures utilizing their own burial rituals to do so through the replication of Alfaro Siquieros' unfinished work, "El entierro del obrero sacrificado"; which, as described in chapter one, depicts three indigenous men carrying the coffin of a fellow worker with a fourth man, mestizo in appearance stands in the upper right-hand corner. The scene in the prologue captures the essence of this painting as the viewer sees a group of close-eyed men and women sitting around the coffin of a loved one; the deceased's face exposed. As the angle of the camera lens changes, the stagnant replicated mural begins to move with two men carrying the coffin only exposing the feet of the deceased.

Though it is said that this funeral ritual and its placement in the prologue was purely symbolic, without Alexandrov's narration, something that probably would not have been present had Eisenstein had the ability to complete his own work, the absence of the colonizers during these scenes is troubling as it appears that indigenous populations buried their own cultures as opposed to these cultures being white-washed or eradicated by force, of which often led to the death of indigenous populations. This interpretation, if accepted, would stand diametrically opposed to CSP while reaffirming what this theory acknowledges about the foundation of education; that schooling in any form is an extension of colonialism that requires the marginalized to put to death its own cultural identities and ways of being and replace it with European cultural practices.

Eisenstein's own statement encompassing his intention for the prologue should also be examined. Again, he states that the prologue should "represent the death of ancient cultures before the coming of new times" (Karetnikova and Steinmetz). I argue the words 'ancient' and 'new' are coded language that needs to be unpacked in order to determine underpinnings, or lack thereof of CSP. Both words are binaries for old or past and new or future. To understand

one is to give existence and define the other. In his phrasing, Eisenstein suggests that ‘new’ or future arrived with the departure of ‘ancient’ or old. Unfortunately, Eisenstein’s view of Mexican history is that the new or future of the country was not possible without the death of the ancient cultures.

The epilogue assisted in achieving this objective by featuring “whistles of work-plants”, “highways and dams”, and “machinery” that pointed towards the industrialization of the nation and its shift towards modernity (138). Included with this industrial landscape are the faces featured in the epilogue that were to resemble the faces present at the burial of the indigenous worker and reflect the stone carvings of Aztec deities presented in the prologue. With the integration of these images, Eisenstein hoped to illustrate the new Mexico; that was filled with its past and headed towards a modern future. However, Eisenstein’s notes regarding the epilogue solidify the interpretation of “new” and “modern” previously mentioned. Eisenstein describes the subjects in the epilogue as “The same faces—but different people. A different country, a new, civilized nation” (138).

From Eisenstein’s beginning sequence to the final scenes of the epilogue paired along with his own words, supports Vasconcelos’ theory of the indigenous’ need for civilization in exchange and required for Mexico’s modernization. Furthermore, his statement referring to the death of civilizations and the impending arrival of the new, which he utilizes to set the intention and give life to the entire film, ultimately ignores that these civilizations and their cultures, of whom he spends over a year filming and photographing, have not died, rather, they have been sustained and fostered. The filmmaker at the onset and the closing, ignores the very people he so proudly and publicly claims he will showcase to the world by erasing them from Mexico’s present-day historical narrative. In the prologue through the replication of Siqueiros work, he

buries these civilizations using their own hands while in the epilogue he praises “a happy little Indian” underneath a death-mask as finally attaining civility. Eisenstein silences an entire population in the first five minutes of his tribute to Mexico and continues to do so throughout every episode of his film.

However, a viewer may be blinded by the filmmakers’ landscape shots of the Yucatan complete with ancient pyramids and sculptures of deities that demonstrate the enduring Mesoamerican architecture throughout history. To start and end a film in this way, with an emphasis and connection to these ancient civilizations and their practices, could suggest aspects of CSP since the film takes the normally secondary subject of indigenous populations and sets them center stage. Here Eisenstein appears to agree that the metanarrative of placing Spanish conquistadors as the starting point of Mexico’s history is insufficient. As previously mentioned, CSP contends for plurality of perspectives and the elimination of metanarratives that aims to see marginalized, specifically indigenous, brown, black and other populations of cultures through the lens of whiteness a term referred to as “White gaze”. In shunning a metanarrative that perpetuates the inaccuracy of indigenous absence in Mexico’s history as well as denying that said history commences with the arrival of the Spanish amplifies the voices of marginalized individuals allowing them power to tell their own story.

Sandunga, the first of four episodes, shifts its narrative away from the rural landscapes and stone structures to the people of Tehuantepec. Eisenstein had spent considerable time in Tehuantepec at the suggestion of Rivera, who had dedicated several panels in his mural cycle at La Secretaría de Educación Pública to illustrating this community. In *Sandunga* the matriarchal society of Tehuantepec is put on display as the narration by Alexandrov explains the beliefs and practices of the village as well as its preservation throughout history. This

narration aligns with Eisenstein's detailed notes and outline for the episode and turns banking education²⁴ on its head by shifting the role of teacher to the indigenous subjects on screen, who, bringing a wealth of knowledge to the film, in turn impart said knowledge on the viewer. As the women in the community are captured conducting their daily lives, celebrations, and rituals, it is not them who are seen to be learning, rather the spectator who now learns from them.

More than being a passive spectator, Eisenstein's objective was to initiate an emotional effect within the viewer that would provoke an intellectual awakening (Herrera 432). Eisenstein, like Rivera had no qualms focusing on las Tehuanas, using them as a greater representation of Mexico's vast indigenous nations. Neither artist shy away from their way of life or dress, rather they home in on their ability to have survived time and trauma. By engaging the viewer both emotionally and intellectually through the demonstration of Tehuantepec cultural practices, Eisenstein uses *cine intellectual*²⁵ to document, as CSP asserts, the manner in which the people of Tehuantepec enact cultural practice in both traditional and evolving ways (Paris & Alim 90).

Eisenstein's approach to creating a film about Mexico on its surface appears to recognize that the knowledge of Tehuantepec and other cities alike are to be seen as assets to offer its country rather than deficits to be filled by its government. However, it could be argued that the exclusivity of one indigenous group, las Tehuanas, in the *¡Qué Viva México!* as a representative for all indigenous communities in Mexico can be considered yet another example of Eisenstein's erasure of ethnic and cultural plurality as well as support of the pervasive ideology of indigenismo in Mexico following the 1910 revolution. David Brading speaks to indigenismo in Mexico stating "The ultimate and paradoxical aim of official indigenismo in

Mexico was thus to liberate the country from the deadweight of its native past or, to put the case more clearly, finally to destroy the native culture that had emerged during the colonial period. Indigenismo was therefore a means to an end. That end was cultural mestizaje” (85). If we consider Eisenstein’s intentions for the prologue to “represent the death of ancient cultures before the coming of new times”, along with the influence of government officials assigned to monitor how he depicted Mexico it can be concluded that the prologue and following novellas contained remnants of this line of thought.

Specifically, in *Sandunga* the film places Mexican indigenous peoples as one unified group rather than unique peoples with varying cultural practices and perspectives, creating a metanarrative about these groups by lowering them to their most common denominator—Other. Filming the Tehuanas as a representative amalgamation of various indigenous groups promotes viewing said subjects through a lens of *double consciousness*²⁶ which encourages the viewer to measure indigenous communities’ ways of being and doing through European norms. This is also referred to as Othering, which as defined by Dominguez in relation to CSP, is “the process...through which the subjectivity, the humanity, the ways of being and knowing of non-White individuals and cultures, is rendered ‘Other’, and denied both agency and legitimacy. The result is an *ontological distance* between the colonizer and the colonized” (228). The resulting ontological distancing, though not said explicitly, is what film historians and critics were communicating in their analysis of Eisenstein’s work. Eisenstein’s constant referral to the landscape and people as “exotic” and “Eden-like” gives way to a fetishizing of Mexican people and culture that can be seen throughout the episodes of *¡Qué Viva México!* particularly in *Sandunga* at its opening and later in *Magüey*. Eisenstein’s notes regarding the beginning of *Sandunga* support this argument as he refers to Mexico’s landscape as “the Garden of Eden”

and declares that anyone who has visited Mexico surely cannot be immune to “Mexican-fever” or an obsession for all things Mexico (Began 188).

Maguey begins with a sense that elements of CSP may be present, and in Eisenstein’s notes, it would appear that his approach to this episode was to offer criticism in the mistreatment of indigenous peoples at the hand of the Mexican government. Similar to its previous episode and prologue, the viewer sees Eisenstein’s attempt to offer a more comprehensive historical narrative that gives life to minority perspectives.

This episode, filmed on the Hacienda de Tetlapayac in Hidalgo, is said to be centered around the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz at the beginning of the 20th century and refers to the large cactus that can be found in the arid regions of Mexico. With this historical and visual backdrop, Eisenstein develops a fictional narrative between an hacienda peon named Sebastian and his betrothed, María. Using this story, the filmmaker attempts to speak to the conflicts between Hacienda masters and their indentured indigenous servants as a consequence of the Spanish conquest. *Maguey* like the episode that precedes it, possesses a rich intertextuality of murals painted by Diego Rivera—specifically Rivera’s “Liberation of the Peon”. Whereas in Rivera’s painting the faces of the peasant workers are hidden from its viewer, Eisenstein, in *Maguey*, forces his spectators to look directly into the faces of those who are killed at the hands of their masters. With this minor alteration it can be argued that *Maguey* tells history through the perspective of the peasants rather than those in power thus, once again, intensifying the voices of this subaltern subject depicted in historical narrative.

Nevertheless, *Maguey* as mentioned previously, presents othering and otherness that create *ontological distance*. *Maguey* a staged and dramatized version of historical events that could lead viewers to see this as mere entertainment and not representations of historical events.

A distancing between Sebastian, Maria, and the peasant workers they represent could potentially result in their dehumanization. In order to possess underpinnings of CSP, Eisenstein would have first had to use an “inward gaze” in which he critically evaluated the effects on colonization within the communities he filmed as well as how that colonization affected how and what he chose to film (McCarty & Lee 117). In addition to what is seen on screen, one must consider Eisenstein’s own perceived lack of concern towards the subjects he filmed. While shooting *Maguey* a leading actor was bitten by a snake and another actor, upon stealing the assistant Eduard Tisse’s pistol, accidentally shot and killed his sister on set. Ironically, none of this information is even referenced in any letter written by Eisenstein, who continues to gush about his love for the Mexican people as well as his own personal maladies. It is logical to conclude that the ontological distancing revealed in Eisenstein’s own apathy towards the injury and death of the hacienda workers is also subconsciously present and translated in the footage of *Maguey*.

Fiesta continues in the same way as Eisenstein’s prologue and *Maguey*; attempting to showcase the richness of cultures on the one hand while visioning them through European cultural norms and gaze. It too, sets itself in the historical context of the Porfiriato of the early 20th century with the main themes of religion, rituals and celebrations of both pre-Hispanic and Spanish origin. *Fiesta*, unlike the other episodes, was the only one to be dedicated to an artist outside of Mexico, Francisco Goya, and ironically so as the majority of the novella features the invasion of Spanish culture on Mexico; much like the invasion of a Spanish artist in the feature length film dedicated to Mexican artists. Even still, this episode was to illustrate the syncretism of colonial culture in Mexico in syncretism with its pre-Colombian roots (Salazkina 98).

Eisenstein films the festival of La Virgen de Guadalupe including footage of men

reenacting the crucifixion and an intense pilgrimage of believers who are seen to be crawling on their knees in reverence to significant religious sites. In his outline he summarizes *Fiesta* with these words: “All the beauty that the Spaniards have brought with them into Mexican life appears in this part of the picture. Spanish architecture, costumes, bullfights, romantic love, southern jealous, treachery, facility at drawing the gun, manifest themselves in this story” (Karetnikova and Steinmetz 96). Eisenstein had a deep admiration for the way in which he believed Catholicism and pagan culture had collided during the conquest. Though Eisenstein was known to be vehemently opposed to any type of religion it is said by Adolfo Best-Maguard, who accompanied him throughout his travels, that Eisenstein was thrilled while filming the fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Robé 25).

Additionally, his biographer Marie Seton noted that though Eisenstein was “filled with hatred towards what he felt to be the false practices of the Church, he was yet irresistibly fascinated by the inner philosophic aspects of religion and the primary figures and symbols which men worshipped” (Seton 109). This fascination can be seen through the imagery recorded in *Fiesta* so much so that critics read this episode as Eisenstein’s commentary on Catholicism and the masses; that Catholicism was harmful if controlled by the few but potentially liberatory when used by the masses (Robé 26). Given Catholicism’s clear and longstanding connection with the colonization of the Americas, Eisenstein’s treatment of religion in *Fiesta* can be analyzed for elements of CSP.

Eisenstein ensures that viewers see the complexity of Mexico’s surviving religions and practices by filming them in conjunction with one another. He records the festivities of the celebration of the Virgen Guadalupe as well as people dressed as Aztec deities. Depicting religion in Mexico as complex, multi-faceted, with violent colonizing influences while

simultaneously demonstrating the survival of indigenous religious practices does invoke a sense of CSP. Eisenstein captures both the rejection and acceptance of Catholicism as well as its strong tie to the population's cultural identity and history. Though CSP centers itself around the fostering and promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism, it too considers how each generation both "...rehearses traditional versions of ethnic and linguistic difference and offer new visions of ethnic and linguistic difference" (Paris 95). *Fiesta*, then, gives the viewer a glimpse of the evolution of religion in Mexico and how it is being practiced during the last 1930s.

Unfortunately, the ties to CSP stop there in *Fiesta* and Eisenstein's own words are damning evidence of his Eurocentric aloofness. The remaining portion of this episode features staged and documentary footage of a bullfight. The narrator acknowledges that bullfighting is a tradition brought to the Americas by the Spanish, and, as this episode is dedicated to the Spanish artist Francisco Goya, it is not surprising that the art form most synonymous with the Iberian Peninsula would appear. It was this attraction that Eisenstein referred to as the greatest moment he experienced in Mexico. In short, Eisenstein had travelled across the Atlantic, through Mexico for over a year and the most impressive cultural practice he saw was European. This is not to minimize the unique characteristics of Mexican bullfighting; however, it is simply to highlight that throughout his 14-month sojourn in Mexico, Eisenstein chose a cultural practice whose roots are not Mexican.

The insult to Mexico and CSP does not stop there in *Fiesta*. Salazkina comments that unlike Sandunga where the subject focus is on the indigenous women of Tehuantepec, *Fiesta* emphasizes "the Spanish colonial traditions and rituals". She continues by stating that "Both the indigenous culture and women, consistently associated with the primitive, become the

background, while male figures in Spanish baroque settings take prominence” (97). This observation is not lost on the viewer as very few women are at the foreground of the narrative of *Fiesta*, and the indigenous subjects who do appear are hidden behind masks. Furthermore, Salazkina’s reference to baroque settings is troublesome in regard to CSP.

Eisenstein continually mentions the Baroque aesthetics of Mexico and attempts to capture them in the imagery of *¡Qué Viva México!* achieving this aim in both *Fiesta* and the Epilogue. Additionally, he refers to the visual aesthetic of the film as baroque though in his definition, Baroque does not refer exclusively to the historical time period nor geographical origin normally attributed to the Baroque movement, rather a set of specific traits found within Baroque art. Eisenstein subscribed to the idea that “...pre-Colombian Mexican culture exemplified baroque excess as much as the historical baroque itself” and that “the two merge and compete in scale, making Mexico the most monumental as well as most baroque visual culture” (Salazkina 93).

An argument can be made then, that Eisenstein’s definition of baroque and subsequent identification of *¡Qué Viva México!*’s footage as evidence of baroque, solidifies his understanding and appreciation of Mexico’s overwhelming and dense culture. Nevertheless, Eisenstein violates CSP’s refusal to view marginalized subjects through the lens of White norms. Again, seeing and defining Mexican architecture and now, a film dedicated to Mexico and its artists, through a European art form no matter if only through its traits is still a double consciousness that Eisenstein promotes throughout this episode.

Though *Soldadera* was outlined and slated to be filmed, Eisenstein never had the opportunity to do so. This is rather unfortunate, as *Soldadera* from Eisenstein’s notes, would be the missing link to fully realize and understand the entirety of *¡Qué Viva México!*. In his

own words Eisenstein describes *Soldadera*

It tells the story of the Soldadera, the women who, in hundreds, followed the Revolutionary army, taking care of their men, bearing them children, fighting at their side, burying them and take care of the survivors. The incomparable drama and pathos of this sequence shows the birth of the new country. Exploited and suppressed by the Spaniards, it emerges as a free Mexico. Without this sequence the film loses its meaning, unity and its final dramatic impact: it becomes a display of unintegrated episodes. Each of these episodes now points toward this end and this resolution. (Karetnikova and Steinmetz 134)

Due to the lack of information about this episode I only offer this observation: that a distinct pattern in Eisenstein's treatment of marginalized subjects is solidified at this part of the film outline. Eisenstein, seemingly with the best of intentions, attempts to celebrate and affirm a marginalized group, in *Soldadera* that would be women, yet his only depiction of these groups is of their oppression by the majority or their ability to endure their oppressors. As if the only justification in commemorating these peoples is for their aptitude for survival and not, they themselves. Chapter 2 bridged the muralism movement described in Chapter 1, its mission and values, with the reflected muralist imagery found within Sergei Eisenstein's film *¡Qué Viva México!*. Examining the relationships, collegial respect, and close contact between Eisenstein and the tres grandes offered an explanation and background to the filmmaker's fascination and albeit obsession with all things Mexico. Furthermore, the origins of a film about Mexico were discussed in order to analyze Eisenstein's original plans and intended outcomes for *¡Qué Viva México!* as a starting point for reading the film against Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.

Upon completing a brief overview of Eisenstein's background and origins of the film is I offered a literary review and common readings of *¡Qué Viva México!* by film historians and experts of Eisenstein's work. This resulted in the difficulty in categorizing this film as documentary or form of ethnography as well as the possibility of exoticizing of pre-Colombian cultures. This was then leveraged as a framework for later analysis of *¡Qué Viva México!* against

CSP as I, like other researchers before me, utilized Eisenstein's outlines, diaries and other works to reconstruct his plans for the film.

Examining each episode, from prologue to epilogue, *¡Qué Viva México!* is wrought with glaring opposition to CSP as one would expect given the prevailing thought within 20th century society. CSP being an asset pedagogy which “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain-- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation” is challenging to achieve even in a 21st century context as it confronts schooling as an extension of colonization and assimilationist practices, or in other words, an erasure and eradication of one's multi-ethnic, identity through education (Alim & Paris 1). Each episode passed carefully through this lens of analysis which resulted in small glimmers of CSP most notably with the placement of Indigenous and marginalized subjects, at the onset of the film and at the center of each narrative throughout the film. A noticeable pattern began to emerge in Eisenstein's treatment of said subjects. In reading his own words, viewing the footage and content in the film, Eisenstein continued to stoke his critics' claim that he only sought to fetishize and exoticize Mexico and her people. Othering and ontological distancing of subjects perpetuated through *Sandunga* and *Magüey* while the prologue and epilogue used imagery that pointed to the imminent yet necessary civilizing of the indigenous populations as a gatekeeper to Mexico's bright “new” and “modern” future.

These elements were difficult to surmise when considering that each episode was dedicated to or contained artwork by Mexican muralists. In drawing comparisons between images and subjects found within Rivera's SEP (Secretariat of Public Education) mural cycle specifically, “Las Tehuanas” and “Liberation of the Peon” as well as Orozco's “El entierro del obrero sacrificado” it is hard for a viewer to imagine that replicating these works

would not result in CSP.

The episodes, indeed, possess some superficial possibilities of CSP through the intertextuality of Mexican murals as it attempts to pick up where the muralism movement left off by informing and showcasing the value of indigenous peoples of Mexico throughout history. Additionally, it points towards Eisenstein's cinematic influence on the increased and improved quality of films about Mexico that would appear in the early 1930s-1950s as well as become the example of how didactic art mediums dialogue with their audience and fellow artists.

To this point the critique of Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* from the lens of CSP is almost unfair. Applying a 21st century theory upon a 20th century film undoubtedly will result in a failure to deliver the promised characteristics of CSP. However, it is important to acknowledge that the intention of the film's analysis and those that will follow is to demonstrate an evolution of images, subjects, and themes around Indigenous peoples and culture, an internal tension in communicating these messages between the artist and subjects as well as a public dialogue with the audience viewing these works of art. It is not nor will the following films conclude that they embody all of CSP. The filmmaker's perspective and depiction of Mexico, especially its Indigenous populations, was considered and will serve to understand and track its influence on future films created about and within Mexico by Gabriel Figueroa and Emilio Fernández in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3. Mexican Cinematic Golden Age through the works of Emilio “El Indio” Fernández, Gabriel Figueroa and Luis Buñel

Chapter 3 bridges the work of Sergei Eisenstein in *¡Qué Viva Mexico!* as a moving mural reflective of Mexico’s societal views regarding its indigenous populations and their need for rescue through educational civility to the groundbreaking work of Emilio “el indio” Fernández , Gabriel Figueroa and Luis Buñel; three directors and cinematographers of whom are credited for ushering in the Mexican golden age of cinema which spanned from 1930s to the late 1940s and early 1950s. Inasmuch, this chapter much like its predecessors, considers these directors in the same way as the muralists—with a close look at how their bodies of work are reflective of their perspectives regarding the nation and its marginalized populations. Furthermore, I draw on parallels and disparities with regard to content, subjects and themes found in muralism with those present in the medium of film during the golden age in order to chart the evolution of these matters on screen. In doing so, this chapter examines the messages being communicated by filmmakers, both implicitly and explicitly, and analyzes them against Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in an attempt to quantify elements of the theory in the films representative of the time period.

To achieve this end, the films *Flor silvestre* (1943), *María Candelaria* (1944), *Río Escondido* (1945) and *Los olvidados* (1950) were chosen, not only because their directors and cinematographers are well known and influential in the golden age of cinema in Mexico, but also for their intentionality in presenting the messages to the masses regarding the successes and failures of the revolution, the impact of the revolution on the nation’s indigenous populations as well as offering a definition of *mexicanidad*²⁷. Each film is then dissected and examined through

noteworthy scenes that are reflective of the aforementioned messages and are later considered for their CSP tendencies.

Mexican Golden Age Cinema

The Mexican Revolution of 1910, the result of uprisings against the Porfiriato dictatorship, was said to have been so significant that it impacted every area of Mexican culture. Hernández-Rodríguez asserts that this historical event catapulted Mexico into rapid change emphasizing “...fast and improvised industrialization, return of civil government, revalorization of ethnic and economic minorities, [and] rethinking gender roles” to name a few (75). This also included a shift from a predominately agrarian to an industrialized economy which incited the migration of rural habitants to urban centers (Tuñón 129). In short, the 1910 revolution resulted in the Mexican government holding the shards of a fragmented nation of whom coveted unification and leadership.

Additionally, the swift changes in both the economy and government left gaps in the fabric of Mexican society and political groups were all too eager to fill them and exploit them for their own political and ideological gains (75). In order to unify the nation, government officials and theorists like Minister of Public Education, José Vasconcelos, homed in on the causes of divisiveness and threats to its unification. In Vasconcelos’ estimation, it all boiled down to what he deemed “the Indian problem” which cited the backwardness and ignorance of Mexico’s indigenous population as the largest threat to Mexico’s modernization.

This led to the creation of the Revolutionary Nationalism project²⁸ which included Vasconcelos’ three-pronged approach to transform the nation, particularly the indigenous

population, through education. As emphasized in chapter 1, this included the production of artistic representations of the Mexican landscape, working classes and indigenous peoples as well as projections of Mexico's future through the murals of Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco. As cinema was becoming a legitimate and more accessible art form, it too became the next tool leveraged by the Mexican government to reach the uneducated masses. Hernández-Rodríguez asserts that cinema "became the mediator between the illiterate masses and the citizens of the modern nation" (79). Upon reflection this was the original purpose and desired impact of the murals commissioned by Vasconcelos; to draw in the illiterate and educate them on what it meant to be Mexican. This purpose identified here by Hernández-Rodríguez sets the foundational intention and structure of Mexican cinema with a binary; citizens and illiterate masses. When deconstructed, this underlying intention exposes the belief system held by the government and society that to be a true Mexican citizen one must know how to read and write in a standard language—Spanish. This eliminated all those who to this point in Mexican history, had not received "formal" or "traditional" education and completely ignored other ways of knowing and education. It essentially characterized any knowledge or language outside of Spanish as not valuable, worthless and invited the masses into nationhood only through assimilation.

At the same time, Mexican melodramas and urban comedies in the 1940s and 1950s often reflected the city and mimicked the speech, being highly critical of both through chosen language and exaggerated melodramatics, while also depicting way of life of diverse social groups as well as their social and political interactions as (Hernández-Rodríguez 80). It is imperative as I approach

the analysis of the forthcoming films that this commentary is kept at the forefront especially when examining them for elements of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP).

Also, as mentioned previously, with more migration towards urban centers, places like Mexico City became the epicenter for cultural exploration for intellectuals, artists and campesinos who were all in search for the meaning of “lo mexicano”. As an artform similar to muralism, cinema became another medium for those explorations to take place through storytelling (Hernández-Rodríguez 79). Unlike murals, however, cinema functioned as an art medium with the ability to document and record, in real-time, the chaos of a nation evolving at warp speed as well as spread that content beyond the nation’s borders. The impact of the murals fell short of the grandiosity of the educational initiative as it was only effective to those who were in proximity to consume its themes and subjects. Cinema differed then not only for its ability to move beyond the city centers and educate en masse, but also because it played a vital role in the actual modernization of the nation (De la Garza 416).

Sergei Eisenstein’s travels through Mexico to film *¡Qué viva México!* became the catalyst that inspired Mexican cinematographic artists such as Emilio Fernández, Gabriel Figueroa and later Luís Buñel to do film as he did; capturing and centering the Mexican landscape and its people (Bergan 13). Along with the increased volume of Mexican made films during this time, came improved cinematic quality and, more importantly, a consistent national identity narrative akin to those found in the works of “Los Tres Grandes”; Rivera, Siquieros and Orozco whose goal was modernization through the unification of ideals and ethnicity. Unlike the muralism movement, though, films saw success and impact beyond Mexico’s geographical borders, as they had the

ability to reach both international and national audiences simultaneously. As a result, what once served as a tool to educate solely Mexico and its indigenous populations, now functioned to inform the world on who Mexico was and who she intended to be.

Films produced during this era have been categorized on the basis of discourse, which, according to Daniel Chavez aide in reflecting and examining how Mexico's history continued to appear on the silver screen as they did during the Mexican Muralism movement. Similar to the discourses of indigenism and *mestisazje*, found within each muralist's work, filmmakers created movies that reflected their perspectives regarding Mexican society and people. Chávez divides Mexican film into four major discourses: Mystifying-indigenista, picaresque-folkore, reflections of the authoritarian state, and demystifying or dark humor. Hernández-Rodriguez also offers clarity in regard to recurring themes found within Mexican golden age cinema. Of the recurring themes, Hernández-Rodriguez names peasantry, revolutionary success and failures, government corruption socioeconomic class struggles and more as those prevalent in film produced during the 1940s-1950s. For the purpose of this research, and, in consideration for the films chosen for later analysis, the themes identified by Hernández-Rodriguez and their placement within mystifying- indigenism will be explored.

Chávez points to *Río Escondido* (1948) as an exemplar of the mystifying-indgenista discourse of the 1930s to early 1950s. However, when examining the films *Flor Silvestre* (1943), *María Calendaría* (1944) and *Los Olvidados* (1950), the viewer can trace elements of this same discourse and its evolution throughout each one respectively. The details of those films will be reserved for later analysis. According to Chávez, cinematic material produced during this time

period were both societal and economic reflections of Mexico, and thus possessed distinctive characteristics all of which pertained to the imagery of indigenous peoples and their relationship to government or societal entities. More specifically, films within the mystifying indigenista discourse are said to contain images that are “committed to the recuperation and mystification of the indigenous and mestizo roots of the nation” (Chávez 119). This is logical when considering the societal climate in relation to indigenous populations during this time frame.

Ethnic minorities were experiencing a significant reevaluation following the Porfiriato which encompassed the value of their physical presence and cultural contributions to the newly forming national identity. While indigenism was a source of great pride for Mexico, one that was neither ignored nor shunned, it appeared to present itself as an obstacle to overcome in relation to a unified national identity. Chávez points to the storylines and characters of film during this time period as evidence of the nation grappling with this very issue. In his definition, mystifying indigenism showcases the “...associations of race and land with an indomitable and atavist identity with physical strength, and with primitive beauty derived from Aztec or other indigenous heritage” (119). Hernández-Rodríguez supports this claim stating that the cultural revolution taking center stage in Mexico in the 1930s and 40s “...led to films with a romanticized view of indigenous populations” and an “over melodramatic sensibility based on honor and traditional bourgeois values” (76). He continues to describe the 1930s as a time period where portraying the revolution realistically was of equal importance to idealizing the indigenous populations (77).

Lastly, mystifying indigenism placed “emphasis on a symbolic closeness between everyday people and government” of which Chávez notes reflect a romanticization of government

activities and entities (119). Chávez offers the example of Emilio Fernández' *Río Escondido* (1948) as evidence of this and other elements of mystifying indigenism. He begins by pointing to the film's initial sequences to support his claim. As the main character, Rosaura approaches El Zócalo, Mexico's national mall, she is met with the symbols of the nation-state including the flag and, upon entering El Palacio Nacional, the famed murals of Mexico's history as envisioned by Diego Rivera. This moment is when the discourse of mystifying indigenism comes into full view as "Rivera's frescoes 'speak' in voice-off to the teacher who in awe admires the monuments declared by the voice (of the nation?) as belonging to her and the people as 'true inheritors of Mexico's history'" (121).

The murals themselves act as a reminder of the mestizo roots of the nation. Following this moment, the audience is made aware that the teacher has been summoned by President Alemán himself to go to a rural village and help to bring the progress of the revolution to a remote indigenous and impoverished region. This serves as yet another nod to the mystifying-indigenism discourse in two ways; it reflects the Bonapartism²⁹ rampant within the era as well as the belief that the Mexican government and the everyday person operated in a zone of proximity in which the latter was of genuine interest to the former. By the end of the 1950s, viewers saw a decline in this discourse in response to increased modernization efforts towards urbanization. This assertion, though not mentioned by Chávez, is demonstrated through the content and narrative found in *Los Olvidados* (1950) where the effects of the Revolution and Mexico's race towards modernity leaves many of its people wanting.

Hernández-Rodríguez refers to this type of film as *social cinema* or movies with “political undertones that directly support the official attempts to educate the masses and to bring justice to all by promoting an end to centuries of servitude” (78). This style of art form, one with political and social undercurrents, was not new and can be found in the murals examined in previous chapters as well as the episodes analyzed in Sergei Eisenstein’s *¡Qué Viva México!*. While Eisenstein replicated the imagery portrayed in the murals in a way only an outsider could, the Mexican cinematographers and filmmakers were able to not only reflect these themes and societal issues, they were able to interpret them and present them to an audience for their consideration. Movies allowed the public to participate in the social and cultural debates that affected them, their families and communities while provoking “...immediate (and often visceral) response to the issues derived of such debates” (Hernández-Rodríguez 80).

Others, like Dominguez-Chávez, have turned their attention to the subjects, themes and elements of films produced during this era and the messages they conveyed; some of which are reminiscent of those referenced when describing the styles of muralism. Issues with modernization, both infrastructurally and ethically, the corruption of government at local and national levels, religion’s deep roots in Mexican identity and its frequent overreach into the everyday lives of citizens were themes integrated in the muralled works of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros and the exact motifs filling the screens in films of the time, according Hernández- Rodríguez. Similar to murals, Mexican golden age film showcased and worked through the feelings of change happening within Mexican society from their agrarian past to the urbanization

of the future which resulted in films whose backdrop were *ambiente rural* or ones that contained haciendas in small rural villages (Dominguez-Chávez 1).

Furthermore, he emphasizes the persistence in the attempt to define “mexicanidad” and highlights the work of famed filmmaker and cinematographer Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa in their efforts to do so through their films. According to Dominguez-Chávez “Gabriel Figueroa and Emilio Fernández looked to define ‘mexicanidad’ through its own landscapes, visions of couples and other social relationships and a specific version of national history” (1). Hernández-Rodríguez calls Fernández’ films “...marvelous examples of national cinema happily and proudly embraced as such because of its sensibility” as they “represent the happy marriage of a popular, if not populist, susceptibility and an official ideology that sought to summarize a concrete moment in the history and culture of the country” (78). Additionally, he cites that their films, became the symbol and staples of national identity with their imagery of “sombbrero wearing men galloping on horseback all below open blue skies” (77). The imagery in Mexican film was recognized for the duo’s “integrated images of desolation, isolation, characters in distress, lives in conflict all captured in the Mexican landscapes and skies with their captivating sunrises and sunsets” (Domínguez -Chávez 2). The artists’ films incorporated the aforementioned themes but also incorporated *virtudes campiranas*³⁰ as a binary to the evolving values in the nation alongside *bigotones bravios*³¹ and *agresivas señoritas latinas*³²(2). More importantly, Fernández and Figueroa pushed the character representation of indigenous peoples as protagonists rather than extras in the background as exemplified in *María Candelaria* (Garza 417). Their intentionality of the portrayal of indigenous figures secured their films as canon with Mexican golden as cinema.

The inclusion and emphasis of the indigenous subject and pueblo was not done haphazardly. Fernández strongly believed that each film needed an argument, or thesis of sorts, that centered itself around moral and social content. In his own words he stated

un argumento sin tesis no tiene ninguan significación para mi, puede ser una cosa muy bienestructurada, dinámica, puede ser muy bella, pero si no tiene un contendio social, un contenido moral, un mensaje o una expression que demuestre un dolor o una situación delpueblo, para mi no tiene significación. (Tuñon 67)

(an argument without a thesis has no meaning for me, it can be something very well structured, dynamic, it can be beautiful, but if it does not have social content, moral content, or a message or expression that shows a pain or small town issues, for me it has no meaning).

This strong conviction is evidenced in films that feature issues of the pueblo with indigenous subjects as the protagonists such as in *María Candelaria* and *Flor Silvestre*. Dalton calls Fernández a “remarkable director who used film to both challenge and disseminate statist doctrines on the silver screen” and cites that “on the one hand, his films celebrated an autochthonous national spirit inherent to the rural (indigenous) Mexico; on the other hand, he often regurgitated officialist perspectives that places a ‘backward’ rural periphery in tension with a modern and industrialized center” (Dalton 101). In fact, Fernández has been criticized for his award-winning film *María Candelaria* for its portrayal of indigenous subjects. Carl Mora notes that “the film has been faulted for presenting a ‘tourist’s’ Mexico, an image of stoic, attractive Indians patiently paddling their flow-laden dugout along the scenic canals of Xochimilco, and for creating a stereotype of them that subsequent cineasts would perpetuate” (65). However, this was not Fernández’ intention and his films were not to be interpreted in this

way. In contrast, María Candelaria's thesis according to Fernández was the "pureza de la tribu o raza"³³ and "lo que surge a través de la vida de estos personajes que se ven victimados por otros personaje: no viven su vida como pajaritos sino que no provocados a desviarse o a sufrir" (Tuñon 67).

Having been heavily influenced by the muralism movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Fernández was inspired by the artistry and content Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros put in their works. Specifically, Fernández was drawn to the content of Rivera and his focus on the pueblo stating

Cuando yo vi el sentimiento que él tenía por el pueblo, el pueblo que yo amaba y [con el que] había convivido y había sido parte de mi vida, yo vi que se podía hacer cine, por eso hice María Candelaria, por eso hice yo Maclovia, por eso hice cine con gente indígena (Tuñon 65)"

(When I saw the feeling that he had for the village, the village that I loved, that I had lived in and had been a part of my life, I saw what film could be, for that reason I made María Candelaria, that's why I made Maclovia, and that's why I made film with indigenous people).

From his own estimation, there was no desire to present indigenous people, Mexican landscapes and customs as anything more than what they were; a part of the Mexican experience. Of all his aspirations, making film that was truly Mexican in nature was of the greatest importance stating, "Yo soñaba en un cine, todavía sigo soñando en un cine distinto, ¿no?, pero mexicano, puro" (72).

However, to ignore that Fernández's films exhibited some type of nationalism and subscription to the cosmic race theory propagated by the SEP would be naïve. Just as Rivera,

Siqueiros and Orozco's earlier works contained government prescribed themes and subjects, so too did many films produced at the onset of the Mexican Golden Age as they too were heavily financed and influenced by the government through its Banco Cinematográfico. Fernández's films were no exception. Both *Río Escondido* and *María Candelaria* were funded with monies from the SEP and, as a result, many scholars believe that Fernández was complicit in disseminating post-revolutionary doctrines (Dalton 101).

However, others, such as Dolores Tierney, propose that Fernández's films be read through a more nuanced lens in which viewers consider the interconnectedness and influence of various presidencies' ideologies that coincided with Fernández's career (101). Therefore, while Fernández believed that film was meant to "educate, orient, elevate, and guide" one must ask themselves what content was being used to inform and position as well as which ideologies were being promoted to the masses through his films? However, similar to the evolution of content and subjects in the muralist's works, Fernández quickly abandoned these ideologies, replacing them with his own convictions and perspectives of Mexico and its people.

Fernández was well aware of his responsibility in making Mexican films and dedicated himself to telling meaningful stories that showcased the Mexican landscape and customs (Tuñón 72). With the help of Gabriel Figueroa, they created films that would not only reflect the artistry of Mexican muralism but would become synonymous with quality Mexican cinema (Mora 59). Fernández viewed himself as a photographer under the influence of muralism stating "Esas cosas las plasmó Diego en pintura, yo en cine" (Those things that Diego captures in painting, I do in film) (Tuñón 65). In the three films examined in this research, I search for evidence of this declaration by analyzing the transference of subjects and themes found in muralism in *Flor Silvestre*, *María Candelaria*, *Río Escondido* and *Los olvidados* and trace the

elements of CSP that were absent or underdeveloped in Einsentein's *¡Qué Viva México!* in these cinematic works.

Flor Silvestre (1943).

Flor Silvestre, released at the onset of the Mexican cinematic golden age, tells the story of Esperanza, a poor campesino woman and her elopement to José Luís, a man from a wealthy well-known family. Their relationship is not only controversial for the town and times, it destroys the relationship between José Luís and his family resulting in his disinheritance. The narration of the story is told in the form of a flashback, with an older Esperanza speaking to her son about his birth and the heroics of his father. Esperanza reaches back into the recesses of her mind, starting with the initial reaction to the news of their secret marriage and continues to the abrupt killing of José Luís' father Don Francisco by bandidos. She does not shield her son from the unpleasantness of the narrative, including her own kidnapping and the murder of her husband in his attempts to save both her and their son.

In an early scene in the film, Esperanza is visited by Doña Clara, José Luis' mother. In this visit, she begs Esperanza to consider how their relationship threatens José Luis' livelihood and connection to his family. When she feels that she is not making any headway in convincing Esperanza, she resorts to insulting her saying that they are ill-matched socioeconomically; Esperanza being a peasant and José Luis birthed into a family of both wealth and status. She attempts to manipulate Esperanza's feelings for José Luis by challenging her love for him. Doña Clara suggests that if Esperanza really loved José Luis, she would release him so that he can achieve the hopes and dreams his family has for him and maintain his socioeconomic status.

I argue that Fernández uses this scene as a metaphor for Mexico and its indigenous populations with Doña Clara representing the nation state and government who desire to push

Mexico into modernity with international weight and presence. Doña Clara's pleading to Esperanza to leave José Luis can be viewed as those who longed for indigenous groups in Mexico to abandon their individual and varied cultural languages and practices in exchange for a unified mestizaje that could be explained to the world and accepted by all. Much as Doña Clara believed that her son should not and could not waste his time with peasants and campesinos, so did Mexico's rhetoric and propaganda reflect the same sentiments through the educational initiatives pushed by the Ministry of Public Education. Esperanza, like these marginalized peoples, was viewed as a threat to her beloved's advancement, and if her love were true, she would stay out of the way of his divine purpose.

Using the relationship parallel between Mexico's indigenous groups and José Luis and Esperanza's marriage, Fernández emphasizes the permanent presence of the nation's autochthonous civilizations in the identity of Mexico. Much like the secret marriage between the two lovers from different backgrounds, so has Mexico been married to its people from the beginning. It cannot be undone no matter the disapproval, the coaxing and prodding of those in power. However, Fernández does not let this metaphor continue without inserting his own critique and perspective in the scene between José Luis and Coronel Panfilo. Upon his surprise visit to their home, Panfilo says "it makes me happy to see you all married. It's good that our generation doesn't have the same prejudices as our fathers". Before interpreting this declaration, the viewer should bear in mind that *Flor Silvestre* sets its time period before the revolution of 1910.

While the character of Coronel Panfilo does suggest that socioeconomic and racial prejudices no longer exist in his generation as they did in those who came before them, this is not completely accurate. The country continued to struggle with prejudice towards indigenous

groups and rural populations, viewing them as threats to the advancement of the nation and its modernization. This is evidenced in the targeted educational initiatives which sought to strip the “native” from their uncivilized practices and customs, replacing them with mainstreamed ideologies that ignored their rich differences and heritages. The subject of prejudice in this scene is broached with the careful wording of the character. By acknowledging that the prejudices are “not the same”, it suggests that the prejudices have not disappeared. They still exist, but have transformed.

Another poignant scene worth mentioning features Esperanza fleeing her first encounter with Don Francisco and Doña Clara in a horse drawn carriage. The carriage tips over and Esperanza is thrown to the ground suffering serious injuries that render her unconscious and in grave condition. José Luis arrives to her bedside where the priest who married them and Esperanza’s father, Don Menchor, sit vigil. As José Luis rushes to Esperanza, the camera pans to the priest who says to Don Menchor, “Don José Luis’ presence will help Esperanza”. While this short snippet of a scene could be glanced over as miniscule, I offer this interpretation. If we continue with the metaphor of José Luis, his socioeconomic position and ethnicity as being representative of ideals, values and even racial makeup that Mexico desired to become during the post-revolutionary period, and, if Esperanza is viewed as an allegory for all indigenous peoples of Mexico, this scene can be viewed at a much deeper level. José Luis’ presence will heal Esperanza of what ails her which is her uncivilized indigenous roots or that which is preventing her from being whole and well. Shortly after José Luis’ arrival to her side, Esperanza does indeed awake and appear to slowly come to herself. Later, the viewer sees that she has fully recovered and is with child. I ascertain this scene and those that follow, function to communicate what could happen to indigenous and rural peoples if they only let the presence of

Mexico's new values, ideologies, education along with their place in mestizaje over individualized autochthonous groups influence them, they will be healed of their uncivilized ways and be rewarded with the abundance a modernized nation can offer.

Lastly, the theme of bandidaje³⁴ is ever-present throughout the Fernández's film. The idea of ridding Mexico of its bandits and banditry functions as a secondary storyline of José Luis and Esperanza. Within the film it is clear that bandidos are anti-Mexican and their presence in society are an additional threat to the advancement the country was making following the revolution. In various scenes, characters address the need to expel bandits from the country if they want a fighting chance to become a modernized nation. Early on in the film, Don Francisco declares that it is "banditry that is everything wrong with the revolution as they have a habit of getting into the heads of the poor and lead them astray" (Fernández *Flor Silvestre* 1943). Later during his visit with José Luis, Coronel Panfilo shares the post-revolutionary agenda of President Madero with the following statement: "El señor presidente Madero quiere que se establezca la paz en el país y como la revolución ha triunfado, ahora viene lo difícil: hay que acabar con el bandidaje" (Fernández *Flor Silvestre* 1943).

It is important to note that banditry at this time could be synonymous with anything not in line with the official national agenda which involved moving Mexico towards modernization with a legitimate international competitive presence. I assert that *bandidaje* as Fernández presents it in this film is a metaphor for the state of indigenismo and indigenous people within Mexico at the time following the revolution. Indigenism remained an issue that, from the perspective of the Mexican government, needed to be dealt with or corrected because it did not fit in with the vision for a new unified national identity. Although it remained an acknowledged element of the Mexican identity and historical narrative, the revolution had spurred the need to

abandon any form of disjointedness, replacing it with one nation and one cosmic race.

Fernández's *Flor Silvestre* addresses the outliers that did not comply with the unified visioncast by José Vasconcelos and reiterated through the arts in the form of banditry and calls on the coincidentally equally named character, José Luis, to be the one who led the charge. It is not only his name that shares commonality with the Minister of Public Education, but the similarity in José Luis' social standing—as a respected member of society with influence. Though José Luis has some misgivings about his ability to help, Coronel Panfilo argues that his background as a son of a rich and upper-class family will aid in the visioning of Mexico's future. Fernández is clearly making a statement towards individuals who, like José Luis, use their pedigree and wealth as justification for the power to create and edit national culture.

Flor Silvestre ends with Esperanza's continued monologue from the beginning of the film and concludes the history of José Luis. In it, Fernández offers his final commentary about the identity of Mexico. Esperanza says to her son:

Y ahora ya conoces la historia de la tierra. Que es la historia de toda la tierra de México. En ella duermen nuestros muertos, mis muertos que son también tus Muertos. La sangre derremada en tantos años de lucha por miles de hombres que como tu padre creyeron en la fe y la justicia. Sobre ella se levanta el México de hoy. La que palpita una vida nueva.

(*Flor Silvestre* 1943)

(And now you know the history of the land. That is the history of all the land in Mexico. In her sleeps our dead, my dead, which is also your dead. The shed blood of so many years of fighting of men, who like your father, believed in faithfulness and justice. Out of it the Mexico of today rises up. That which palpitates new life).

Using the last words in the film from the character of whom spoke the least speaks to Fernández

deliberate use of both character and content. Esperanza, being both a woman and a peasant has the final say in the film and offers its overall message; that Mexico could not and will not be the Mexico of today or the future without the contributions of its most faithful inhabitants who gave their lives fighting for the justice of all its people. Serving as a representation of indigenous peoples in this film, it is as if Fernández is declaring through Esperanza, that it is the ones those in power choose to silence and overlook who will get the final say and who cannot be ignored because they are part of the land both metaphorically and literally.

When viewed through the lens of CSP, *Flor silvestre* embodies themes displays the ongoing back and forth of the emergence of the pedagogical theory. The structure of the film, with Esperanza as the narrator at the beginning and at the end would suggest an attempt by Fernández to place the narrative power in the hands of the minority figure—a campesino woman, thus potentially allowing a history to be seen from another perspective. However, although Esperanza serves as the narrator, the story remains focused on her husband, José Luis; a male of high social standing and wealth and representative of European cultural influence. Esperanza remains a secondary character throughout the film and though she is the lone survivor in the story, her history is set as nonessential unless it serves to bolster the story of José Luis. This is in direct opposition of CSP as it only sees the minorities character and story through a White gaze. Though José Luis is by no means white, his character represents the European standard of doing and being. Esperanza's storyline only exists when filtered through his presence.

Though Fernández attempts and fails to decenter whiteness with Esperanza as the narrator, he does address and critique the deficit mindset that CSP opposes through the same character and the tension between her mother-in-law, Doña Clara. Fernández presents

Esperanza as a metaphorical stand-in for minority populations, but rather than caving to the demand to reject her heritage and culture which is viewed as “backward”, “uncivilized” and “uneducated” by Doña Clara, Esperanza refuses to relinquish her identity and outlives her husband, José Luis. In essence, Fernández showcases that which has been sustained; both the cultural identity of Esperanza but also Esperanza herself. Not only does CSP seek cultural plurality, it also seeks to perpetuate and emphasize that which has survived or has been sustained throughout the centuries (Paris & Alim).

Paris and Alim refer to CSP’s objective of eliminating the colonization that occurs so frequently through education which is to say a manner of replacing one’s culture with the dominant anglosaxon culture. In doing such, the student would be saved from their uncivilized ways or that which has prevented them from progressing towards *mexicanidad*. Fernández appears to address this attempt of education in the previously described scene of which Esperanza falls ill. Esperanza’s unconscious and grave state is only resolved by José Luis’ presence, again, speaking to the idea that in her essence she is sick and in need of healing. This scene may be interpreted as a representation of those like Esperanza who are thought to be in need of the healing that standardized education and assimilation can offer. While it could be argued that this was not Fernández’s intention, to present a minority group as ill in need of curing through the presence of a dominant culture, when viewed through CSP, it appears that this scene leans in the opposing direction of one of the theory’s principle objectives.

However, the film has redeeming qualities in the eyes of CSP at its conclusion. As stated previously, Esperanza being both woman and peasant speaks the final words of the film. Her words communicate the sentiment that though she was overlooked through the entire film, the story would not have been able to be told had she not survived. In essence, Mexico could not

exist without the presence and contributions of the historically marginalized and ignored. Fernández's *Flor silvestre* begins to pivot the direction of films in relation to elements of CSP. It is clear that while the film in its entirety does not embody all of CSP, which would be difficult to achieve as it had not been theorized to this point, much like Eisenstein, the viewer can appreciate the tension that appears in its successes, which include the recentering of narratives, cultural pluralism and celebration alongside its misses

María Candelaria (1944)

María Candelaria was released only a year following *Flor silvestre* (1943) and continued the narrative surrounding indigenous and marginalized groups; fighting for their right to remain of Mexico's past and future. Unlike *Flor Silvestre*, however, *María Candelaria* avoids naming a definitive moment in history and puts more emphasis on the storyline's location; Xochimilco, Mexico. The narrative, told from the perspective of a European painter, is the story of an indigenous woman who has been ousted by her village as a result of her mother being a "woman of the street". Though her mother is no longer living, *María Candelaria* continues to feel the repercussions of her disgraced actions and struggles to earn a living selling her flowers as she is prevented from doing so by fellow villagers. Together with Lorenzo Rafael, *María Candelaria* seeks help from the local priest asking that he do anything to help protect her from her hateful neighbors.

Following a sequence of events, which will later be discussed in detail, *María Candelaria*, finds herself in a situation where she needs money to release Lorenzo Rafael from prison. Her only hope in earning the money is to accept the request of a painter who wishes to paint *María Candelaria* for his collection of indigenous women paintings. *María Candelaria* hesitantly agrees but leaves halfway through the session after being asked to pose nude. Another indigenous stands in for *María Candelaria*, disrobing completely, and allowing for the painter

to impose María Candelaria's head on the anonymous woman's body. The painting is discovered by a few villagers who corner María Candelaria and stone her to death for shaming their village in the same way they had done her mother in the years prior.

Fernández continues to incorporate similar themes and approaches to discussing the nation's so called indigenous problem in the film *María Candelaria* (1944). Among those themes apparent in this film are the writing of Mexico's official history, the church's attempts and failure to intervene in matters related to indigenous peoples and majority v. the minority. The opening of *María Candelaria* embodies the theme of official Mexican history and the power of those who narrate it. As the painter sits in his studio, a female journalist probes him to discuss a painting of an indigenous woman that was never sold stating

El mundo le gusta saber lo que ha hecho sus grandes hombres maestros. Además, nadie ignora la existencia de ese cuadro. Anda en boca de todos en México y en el extranjero y para mi libro es indispensable que usted me hable de él. (*María Candelaria*)

(The world likes to know what the great artists have done. Also, no one can ignore the existence of that painting. It's on the lips of everyone in Mexico and beyond and for my book, it is invaluable that you tell me about it).

In this opening scene, Fernández uses the journalist's insistence on knowing the story about this painting as a metaphor for the writing of Mexico's history from the beginning to the present. Like her book, leaving out the indigenous populations of the nation and their contributions would render Mexico's history incomplete. The painter's initial reaction upon being asked about the artwork was to reject the request immediately, following it up with commentary that to discuss this work of art "grieves him to talk or even think about it" (*María Candelaria*). In the same way, eliminating the cultural diversity of indigenous nations within Mexico through assimilation or

through the vision of mestizaje, which pushed for a melting down of plethora of cultures present within indigenous groups in order to form one group that represented them all in the form of mestizo, would be to leave out integral portions of Mexico's makeup. This parallels with this scene, a journalist attempting to capture the history of a people who is aware there is more history to include but prevented from doing so because the person with the power to tell the complete story refuses to do so. As grievous as it may be for the painter to recount the history of his painting, it could suggest that the possibility of Mexico confronting the totality of its history, especially in regard to its mistreatment of indigenous peoples, would be equally painful to confront. to completing her

Furthermore, the fact that it is the painter who controls whether or not the story is told can also carry metaphorical significance. Though it is the journalist who desires to know, she can only be informed when the person who survived tells the story. Unfortunately, not all autochthonous groups survived colonization or the wars that followed. In their death, they leave absences of the Mexican historical narrative, which relies on those who have survived or have the power and position to share the stories of those who are not there to tell their own.

Fernández also incorporates themes of the church and religion as entities intended to protect the defenseless and seek justice¹¹ for the marginalized. I interpret the priest's frequent appearance throughout the film as representative of both the church and religion. The priest in several instances is the barrier between María Candelaria, the angry villagers and Don Damian. Specifically, on the Día de la Bendición de los animalitos, María Candelaria with Lorenza Rafael come to the church to have her piglet blessed. When the village sees that María Candelaria has arrived to such an important occasion, they complain that her sinful nature will prevent God from blessing their animals and bring curses to the pueblo. As they begin to close

in on her, the priest jumps in front of María Candelaria, rebuking the crowd in a moment reminiscent of the biblical story of Jesus and the adulteress woman. The crowd retreats and just as the piglet is about to be blessed, Don Damian and his henchmen encroach on the event sending everyone into chaotic running. Don Damian confronts Lorenzo Rafael and María Candelaria for their failure to pay their debts and, once again, the priest steps in to condemn Don Damian telling him that María Candelaria will not pay a penny more than what she owes when she can afford to pay it.

Upon first glance, this continuous scene may appear that the priest and the entity he represents, have successfully protected and defended María Candelaria. However, Fernández's continued storyline of Don Damian and his assistant creeping into María Candelaria's land and killing her piglet soon after the encounter communicates a different message to the viewer. Though the priest did stand in between Don Damian and María Candelaria, which are both metaphorical representations of the church and indigenous peoples, they were only words that when it counted, left her unprotected. It is possible that this scene may be interpreted as a critique of the church and its standby attitude as it has overseen the genocide of indigenous civilizations since the conquest and continued on powerless to defend the mistreatment and seizure of both land and people of their surviving descendants.

As if this was not clear enough evidence to suggest Fernández's critiques, the director and writer uses both Lorenzo Rafael and María Candelaria on separate occasions to call out in distress or anger. Lorenzo Rafael seeks help and influence from the priest, asking him to reason with Don Damian on behalf of María Candelaria for the medicine she needs and requesting that he marry them so that Lorenzo Rafael can help assume some of her debts. While the priest agrees to marry the two, he admits that forcing Don Damian to give María Candelaria the

medicine is outside of his reach. María Candelaria calls out for help from La Virgen de Guadalupe herself. While attempting to release Lorenzo Rafael from prison and seeking the priest's help, she looks upward to the statue of La Virgen and asks "¿Por qué usted no nos oye? Nos ve y no usted no hace nada!" ("Why do you not hear us? You see us and you do nothing!"). Again, the multiplicity of scenes in which those in need first seek the church's help but are met with silence or an inability to help, suggests the church's failed attempts to protect the most vulnerable populations in Mexico throughout history.

Lastly, Fernández's theme of the pueblo versus *el individual* carries through the film and serves as a metaphorical representation of a larger entity, such as the nation state, and a smaller more vulnerable other, which for the sake of my argument I suggest represent the indigenous populations of Mexico. This is exemplified at the onset of the narrative in *María Candelaria*. María Candelaria, in an attempt to earn money and pay off her debts to Don Damian loads her canoe with flowers to sell and begin to row down the river. As she rows, her song to sell flowers is heard by villagers who board their canoes and block María Candelaria from passing. With no other choice, she turns her boat around and returns to her home.

The same image of pueblo versus *el individual* is repeated towards the end of the film when the portrait of María Candelaria's face and alleged naked body is discovered by a village rival. A group of the village people return to the maestro's studio where Don Damian identifies the portraits as being María Candelaria who has undoubtedly brought shame to their village as her mother had before. The town bell is rung, torches are set ablaze and groups of people gather to set fire to María Candelaria's home. María watches from nearby and swims ashore, running through fields only to be cornered in the heart of the town and stoned to death.

I argue that these scenes in particular metaphorically speak to the attempt to sequester

and squelch indigenous languages, cultures and identities by the Mexican government through their educational initiatives. Through the character of María Candelaria and her incessant harassment from fellow villagers, Fernández showcases the insurmountable obstacles that indigenous groups faced at the hands of the government. With every new directive from the seat of power, indigenous people, their language and practices were identified as threats to Mexico's progress. Rather than allowing the indigenous nations to be who they were, the state was determined to channel them towards mestizaje; a nod to indigenism mixed with a blanketing of oneness.

Fernández through the character of the painter addresses the nation's success and failures to snuff out indigenism in the country. At the refusal to pose completely nude for the portrait, María Candelaria leaves abruptly. A woman who is watching as he paints asks how he will complete his portrait with the subject having left to which he responds: "Los indígenas son así. Y por eso, no han logrado arrancarle sus virtudes, ni el dinero, ni la civilización" (*María Candelaria*). (That is how the indigenous people are. And for that reason, they have been unable to take away their virtues, nor their money, nor their civilization) Fernández with the help of Figueroa delivers a striking image of María's body floating down the Canal de los Muertos in her canoe with the painter's words still hanging in the air. Though *María Candelaria*, which as mentioned previously represents indigenous groups, has been killed physically, her story has become a part of the pueblo's history. To talk of the pueblo is to talk of *María Candelaria*. In the same way, Fernández's *María Candelaria* is a greater statement that to speak of Mexico, its history and its identity is undoubtedly to include the multitude of its Indigenous civilizations whose legacies are enmeshed in the histories of small towns like the one represented in the film.

María Candelaria has similar starts and stops in regard to CSP but shows Fernández evolution towards a more CSP film. Another attempt at narrative power is taken by Fernández, and much like his first film, fails to succeed in completely shifting that power to the marginalized character, María Candelaria. Rather than putting María Candelaria in charge of her own story, the male painter who is presented as a more European figure tells the story of the indigenous woman from Xochimilco. This may have been excused by the fact that unlike *Flor silvestre*, the protagonist of the story is not a male from an elite social class, rather an indigenous woman from a working class. However small, this demonstrates an effort to decenter the narrative from the dominant culture to the minority culture in both gender and ethnicity which does support CSP.

Furthermore, the effort to deconstruct metanarratives appears more obviously in this film than its predecessor, a clear nod to a tenant of CSP. In the previously described scene where the female journalist is attempting to persuade the painter to discuss his most controversial yet hidden work, she states that though he would like to ignore the work, it would be impossible to do so. I argued that this served as a metaphor for the writing of Mexico's history and the attempt, through *mestizaje*, to homogenize the indigenous peoples and cultures thus erasing them. The storyline of the film becomes the less told histories of Mexico, particularly from and about indigenous peoples and places and their ability to complete and fill the gaps left by metanarratives told from a singular perspective.

Fernández takes a bold aim at celebrating that which has survived and will be sustained in María Candelaria's refusal to pose nude for the painting. He comments that the indigenous peoples of Mexico have not only survived complete eradication, but they have emerged having maintained their cultural richness as a result of their refusal to relinquish their values and

virtues. Maria Candelaria's death comes at the hands of the villagers who believe she has brought shame on their pueblo. Though she is innocent, the extreme nature in which the village attacks her highlights the sense of dignity placed on the indigenous image and community. At the heart of the film, though tragic, these values remain the center of the storyline. They are sustained even in the absence of the main character.

Río Escondido (1948)

In *Río Escondido*, Rosaura Salazar, is a trained teacher who has been commissioned by the president himself to travel to Río Escondido to bring both education and health to the rural town. Though she suffers from a grave medical condition, she accepts the position and ventures to the remote village. Upon her arrival she takes note of the municipal president Don Regino Sandoval who takes advantage of his power and position, exploiting and oppressing the most vulnerable inhabitants of the town for his own gain. Soon after Doña Salazar's arrival, a sickness begins to spread through the town, killing the indigenous people who live there. In addition to serving as the pueblo's teacher, she must help Doctor Felipe, El cura and Don Regino enact a plan to inoculate all the townspeople.

The problems in Río Escondido do not stop there. After fighting the sickness pervading through the village and its people, the well located in the plaza, the town's main source of water, runs dry leaving the villagers desperate and dying of thirst. This could prove deadly for all of Río Escondido had Don Regino's perfectly filled well not be discovered. Rather than sharing with the town, he puts restrictions on his well and denies anyone from retrieving water from it. In an act of despair, a young boy attempts to gather water for himself and his family only to be shot and killed when caught by Don Regino. Rosaura takes a stand after several incidents continue to expose Don Regino's deep seeded corruption and abuse of power. Using the gun gifted to her by Doctor Felipe, Rosaura shoots and kills Don Regino in the schoolhouse while

the pueblo chases and attacks his remaining overseers mob style.

Whereas *María Candelaria* centered itself on a well-known and actual city in Mexico, Xochimilco, *Río Escondido* does not. The film begins with a statement that the storyline of the movie is to be considered fictional and not representative of Mexican history. Though this may have been expressly communicated, the narrative is representative of a part of the post-revolutionary educational initiative to send trained teachers to the most rural parts of the nation to instruct its uncivilized citizens. The entirety of the film, then, functions as an imaginative glimpse into what life may have been like for educators who were sent to the remote recesses of the nation on behalf of the Mexican government.

Beginning with the opening scene of the film is the personification of iconic objects representative of Mexico's nationhood. Rosaura is seen to be hurrying through el Zócalo, or La Plaza de la Constitución, the main square in Mexico City and the home of the most notable monuments including La cathedral metropolitana and El Palacio Nacional; the official seat of Mexican government. As she passes by, each object commences to speak to her directly beginning with La campana de Dolores, El patio de Cortés and, finally, Diego Rivera's mural La historia de México. It is Rivera's mural that captures Rosaura's attention and delivers a monologue detailing what he states is "...la historia de tu pueblo, la historia del pueblo de México" (Mural, *Río Escondido*). Through the personified mural, the paintings describe to Rosaura the depth of her roots saying

Volcanes extintos que remedan altares y una vieja raza cobriza que encontró el secreto de la vida entre los ritmos de la tierra, la danza y las estrellas. La raza que hizo la flor y cultoy levantó pirámides al Huizilopochtli y Quetzacoatl. Ella aquí nuestros orígenes. Sangre y lumbre. Genio de España y genio de Cuauhtemotzín. Una boda que por cruel parece expresar la fatalidad que todavía requiere fincar los raíces de la patria. (*Río Escondido*)

(Extinct volcanos that imitate altars and a copperish ancient race that found the secret of life between rhythms of the land, dance and the stars. The race that made and

cultivated the flower and raised pyramids to Huizilopochtli and Quetzacoatl. Here are our origins. Blood and fire. Spirit of Spain and spirit of Cuauhtemotzín. A wedding that through cruelty seemed to express the fatality that is still required to build the roots of the homeland).

Narrating its images, the mural speaks first of the nation's indigenous roots by touting the pyramids built for the Aztec god Huizilopochtli, the god of sun and war often depicted in the form of an eagle, and the Mesoamerican god Quetzacoatl--a feathered serpent. He then goes on to identify the Spanish roots that intermingled with the roots of the last Aztec ruler, Cuauhtémoc before acknowledging that the fusing of these two races, born through violence, are what makes the land the nation it is today. The location of the beginning of the movie should also be noted as Mexico City is known to be seated on top of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec world.

In using both the mural and Zócalo as personified characters to the movie, Fernández presents the viewer without equivocation the undeniable origins of Mexico's people and the nation. It is almost as if the movie cannot begin with the recognition of the actual roots and foundation in which the country stands--it's indigenous heritage.

Immediately following Rosaura's history lesson by way of the talking mural, she meets with the President of the Republic of whom has summoned her to his office to send her on assignment to Río Escondido. As stated previously, the film, though not intended to be an exact recounting of Mexican history, does indeed reflect the educational initiative of deploying trained teachers to remote villages of Mexico to help educate them in peninsular Spanish language and literature. In his conversation with Rosaura, the President says

Nuestros campos que deberían producir lo que el país consume están improductivos. El terror implantado en muchos rincones de la república por políticos e inmorales es una de las causas del abatimiento de nuestra economía. Por otra parte, mientras los grandes núcleos humanos no salgan de las tinieblas del analfabetismo no podremos levantarnos de este letargo de siglos. (*Río Escondido*)

(Our countryside, which should produce what the country consumes are unproductive. The terror implanted in many of the corners of the republic by politicians and immoral

people is one of the causes of the decline of our economy. Moreover, while the largest human settlements do not leave the darkness of illiteracy, we will not be able to raise ourselves from this lethargy of centuries).

Fernández utilizes this one-time interaction with Rosaura and the President to continue to set the film's narrative trajectory while giving a snapshot of the post-revolutionary administration's challenges in moving the nation towards unification. The word choice used by the President should not be overlooked in this short yet poignant monologue. The words "improductivos" (unproductive) "tinieblas" (darkness) and "letargo" (lethargy) all carry with them negative connotations and are used to refer to citizens in rural areas of the country. In *Río Escondido*, the villagers are not just campesinos, they are also indigenous. While this scene will be referenced later when discussing elements of CSP, it is important to note presently, that Fernández, simultaneously sets the story's plot into motion while indirectly critiquing how the government viewed its autochthonous populations: unproductive individuals whose lack of standardized education has contributed to Mexico's inability to shake off the past and press towards the future.

If the scene between Rosaura and the President serve as Fernández's critique of the nationstate and their disdain for indigenous groups, Rosaura's subsequent classroom scenes are representative of those same group's response to their government. On her first day of class, Rosaura gives her students their educational objectives. She says:

Vengo a enseñarles para que mañana sean hombres y mujeres útiles y puedan luchar por la regeneración del Río Escondido de México y del mundo. Cada letra y cada número que aprendan será un escalón en el camino que habrá llevarnos a la verdadera libertad. La libertad del miedo, de la miseria y extorsión en Río Escondido y en todos los pueblos de México. (*Río Escondido*)

(I'm going to teach you because tomorrow you all will be useful men and women and can fight for the regeneration of Río Escondido and the world. Each letter and each number that you will learn will be a step on the path that will bring us to true freedom. Freedom from fear, from misery and extortion in Río Escondido and in all the villages

of Mexico).

Rosaura's statement appears as a call to arms to not only her students, but to viewers who identify with Río Escondido's littlest villagers. Her presence as their teacher will educate them as the government wishes but will also equip them to advocate for themselves and others like them across the nation. Fernández through Rosaura helps to cast another vision for Mexico—true freedom for its most vulnerable and marginalized individuals which originates from within.

As the film progresses, the viewer observes the growing oppression and overreach of the local government towards the townspeople. Don Regino rules the town with *carte blanche*, taking a home from the previous teacher and giving it Rosaura, restricting the villagers use of the only working well and water source and shooting and killing a young boy for attempting to access it. Don Regino has no recompense for his actions and becomes increasingly irritated at the prolonged vigil services taking place in town. That evening, in an effort to exert his power over the outspoken Rosaura, Don Regino enters the school to violate her as his henchmen stand outside listening to her screams and calls for help. A gunshot rings out and Don Regino emerges from the school having been shot by Rosaura. Rosaura follows, releasing another four shots and killing Don Regino in the streets. The townspeople with torches lit, descend and envelope his remaining supporters in moblike fashion as Rosaura sulks away and collapses in a nearby home.

These last minutes of the film including this scene and others, brings the viewer full circle to the moment that Rosaura was summoned by the President to be deployed to Río Escondido. Not only is the viewer reminded that, although Rosaura is strong, her illness has been lingering just below the surface, but also that it was the government's intention through education to save the people of remote areas in Mexico. Symbolically, Rosaura represents this educational initiative and through her actions in killing Don Regino, saves the townspeople from his abusive reach of power. In killing him, though, she sacrifices herself to save the town; yet

another metaphor included by Fernández. Much like the message being communicated at the time, in order for Mexico to be saved from its abhorrent, disunified and unknown past those who did not fall in line with Mexico's newly formed national identity, must sacrifice themselves, their cultures and languages to ensure that Mexico would survive.

Formal education including literacy in standardized Spanish, would become the only manner in which the sacrifice was executed. Fernández appears to confirm this argument with Rosaura's declaration while in a state of hysteria and sickness. Upon overhearing her prognosis, she screams: "¡No! ¡No me quiero morir! ¡El niño! Tengo que cuidarlo. Tengo que salvarlo. No puedo dejar solo. ¡Este niño es México y tengo que salvarlo!" (*Río Escondido*). No! I don't want to die! The child! I have to take care of him. I have to save him. I can't leave him alone. This child is Mexico and I have to save him!

Rosaura makes it known that it's she who is responsible for this child even though he is not hers biologically. I argue that Rosaura is a representation for education as it was intended for marginalized and indigenous populations in Mexico during the post-revolutionary era. Being commissioned, much like the muralists of the same age, to the far reaches of the nation to influence, transform and, ultimately, effect change on those in most need of it. Much weight was placed on education as the answer to what José Vasconcelos considered the biggest problem facing Mexico, the Indian problem. In *Río Escondido*, the character of Rosaura becomes the silver bullet; she educates the village while simultaneously eradicating local government corruption.

Río Escondido achieves what *Flor silvestre* and *María Candelaria* could not—a significant recentering of the narrative that places indigenism and history at the forefront of the story before any main character begins to speak. Rather than a person taking on the onus of

narrator, Fernández uses iconography to welcome the viewer into the film and set the context. In the aforementioned description, Diego Rivera's mural *La historia de México* featured in El Palacio Nacional is personified and informs Rosaura Salazar of Mexico's history. Not only does this capture the audience's attention, but Fernández delivers another subtle yet effective nod to CSP as his protagonist is female. Unlike the other films where the protagonist may or may not have been female, their storylines were always muddled by a dominant male figure. In *Río Escondido*, Rosaura is not only the main character, she is portrayed as the savior of the village. These efforts in and of themselves point to an evolution to move towards a multiplicity of perspectives which offers the possibility of varied histories and cultural pluralism.

Overall, the film functions as an effective CSP dialogue between the Mexican government's educational initiatives and those who were contracted to enforce them. The CSP dialogue that Fernández presents begins with the conversation between the President of Mexico when he summons Rosaura to his office. He describes the need for teachers like Rosaura to go to the remote areas of Mexico to cure the people there of their unproductiveness in an effort to wake Mexico from its sleepy and lazy state. Her teaching the newly identified values and curriculum approved by the nation would be the cure for what ails the nation, a group of non-conforming and ignorant inhabitants.

In the same way the Mexican muralists were commissioned to educate the nation of true mexicanness and history, Rosaura was deployed to restore and revitalize *Río Escondido* and its people through her teaching. However, in similar fashion to the muralists who strayed from the purported objectives of José Vasconcelos, so does Rosaura stray from the President's assignment. Rather than encourage her students to assimilate to the standards of *mexicanidad* desired by the government, Rosaura takes a CSP approach to teaching and encourages additive

learning. In short, she does not deny the cultural and experiential knowledge that her students bring to the classroom. Instead, she explicitly tells them that in educating them they will be equipped to advocate for themselves and others like them across the nation. There is no pressure by Rosaura to have students cast off their cultures and blend into the national identity. Rosaura does the opposite by reminding students of who they are and utilizing the education she will deliver to create freedoms for others like them.

Los olvidados (1950)

Los olvidados, directed by Luís Buñel, is known by various names in English; *The Forgotten*, a direct translation, as well as *The Young and the Damned*. No matter the title, Luís Buñel's intention for the film is presented in the opening credits stating "This film is based entirely on the facts of real life and all the characters are authentic". During Buñel's three-year sojourn throughout Mexico it was said that the director was "impressed with the misery of many of its inhabitants" which resulted in a film that "...visualized poverty in a radically different way from the traditional forms of Mexican melodrama" (Mora 95). Rather than being "enobled" by their struggles in the slums, they are viewed as "predators" The film's introduction is the complete antithesis of the opening in Fernández's *Río Escondido*, of which the director made a disclaimer that his film was to symbolize the drama of the pueblo without being in direct historical reference to Mexico. *Los Olvidados* was said to "visualize

The film's plot centers itself around a group of young boys ranging in age from adolescent to teenager, who spend their days in the streets of Mexico. Again, in direct opposition to the previous films discussed, *Los olvidados* locates itself in the urban center of Mexico City, rather than the rural regions of Mexico. It is clear through the antics of the children that they are not only fending for themselves, they are starving, and it is this fact that puts them into

mischievous and dangerous situations. To curb their appetite, the boys smoke as many cigarettes as they can scrounge up, however this temporary suppressant is short lived.

Their hunger leads them to securing underpaying jobs like pushing the carousel during the local fair, working as an apprentice in a metalworking shop or, in dire situations, robbing and stealing from vulnerable people and places. It is through these antics that the group of misfits are introduced by Buñel, specifically its oldest character, Jaibo. Jaibo, having evident influence and power to coerce the younger boys to carry out his wishes, wreaks havoc on anyone and anything in his path with his sidekick Pedro. With no sense of conscience, the main plot is set into motion after Jaibo is released from juvenile prison and confronts his supposed informant. The confrontation turns tragic at the hands of Jaibo who proceeds to bludgeon Julián to death and then robs his lifeless body. Once Julian's body is discovered, an entire search for the killer consumes the city and a chain of reactionary events ensues. Both Jaibo and Pedro evade the police, hiding in various places throughout the slums of the city.

Pedro, unlike Jaibo, has a family, however, has been left to fend for himself as his mother struggles to care for his younger siblings. Pedro obtains a job as an apprentice in a shop, making knives and other metal objects. A visit from Jaibo spoils Pedro's ability to make an honest living when he pockets an expensive knife from the shop bench. Pedro is accused of stealing said knife and, reaching the tipping point of her frustration with Pedro, his mother forfeits her parental rights to the state. Pedro is sent off to a farm school for troubled youth, but later escapes to clear his name. In an attempt to do so, he encounters Jaibo, who kills him and dumps his body at the bottom of a hill. Jaibo is eventually caught by authorities and killed before he could be detained for the murder of both Julián and Pedro.

The film itself has been characterized as containing a discourse prevalent within the

1950s to 1960s in Mexican cinema-- picaresque-folklore. In this genre of film, the narrative focuses on what Daniel Chávez refers to as “the shortcomings and the gradual erosion of the revolutionary legacy” (117). Buñel solidifies and amplifies this discourse in strategically timed scenes and sequences of which the youth represent those who have been failed the most. Though the majority of scenes depict the victims of unfulfilled promises by the post-revolutionary government, one scene in particular summarizes, what I argue, is Buñel’s strongest conviction and critique of the nation state in the entire film. Following the bludgeoning of Julián at the hands of Jaibo, Pedro, who was present and watched Julián be killed, returns home and has a dream. In his dream, Pedro awakens to sound of noisy chickens. As the chicken appears to land underneath his bed, he goes to check on it only to discover a bleeding and laughing Julián. His mother awakens asking him what he is doing and floats over to comfort Pedro as he recovers from his gruesome discovery. She whispers “Oye mi hijito. Tú eres Bueno. ¿Hiciste eso?” (Son. You’re good. Did you do that?) After laying Pedro back in bed, she turns her back only to return with a piece of meat. As she offers it to Pedro, a hand and arm emerge from underneath the bed to grab the meat. It is Jaibo attempting to steal the food from Pedro’s grip. His mother walks away. A gunshot rings out and Pedro falls back in his bed asleep.

This scene is not only reflective of the ongoing plot, it also contains an element of foreshadowing in the film. Pedro, an ignored son seeks the approval of his mother whilst he starves. Meanwhile, his secret witnessing of Julián’s death lurks just below the surface. Finally, it sets the trajectory of Pedro and Jaibo’s future as opponents through the illustration of Jaibo fighting with Pedro over the meat. The fighting only ceases with the sound of a gunshot which sends both Jaibo and Pedro falling backwards. Towards the end of the film, both Jaibo and Pedro are killed; Pedro with the stolen knife and Jaibo with a gunshot.

Metaphorically speaking, the three characters present in this scene can be read as several entities or themes. First Pedro, the overlooked everyday Mexican citizen, more likely than not marginalized and from a lower socioeconomic class. Jaibo can be representative of the economic and social realities plaguing Mexico following the revolution which include poverty, government corruption and overreach, and those individuals who were ignored as the nation charged towards modernization. Lastly, Pedro's mother could represent post-revolutionary Mexico; an overseeing parent trying her best to care for all her children but unable to do so, relinquishing those children who in eyes is the most troublesome of the household to education to civilize and train him into a productive citizen.

Buñel's approach to the film is, I argue, a critique towards the government's handling of all its citizens, in the area of education particularly consistently marginalized populations. In an effort to create a singular national identity, Mexico developed and implemented educational initiatives that saw citizens as blank slates needing to be filled with knowledge, thus deeming the practical and cultural experiences they embodied as less than valuable or an obstacle to overcome. In doing so, they ignored the histories and experiences of these groups both during the pre- and post-revolutionary time period. Through his narrative in *Los Olvidados*, Buñel demonstrates the consequences of ignoring and devaluing an entire group of individuals when creating a national identity. Not only do they suffer as individuals, they struggle to value the lives and bodies of those from the same circumstances and backgrounds they share. Simultaneously as Buñel rebukes their approach by doing the opposite; he integrates a key practice of CSP by valuing and centering the histories of Mexico's overlooked area, the slums of Mexico City. The story of these ruffians is one that would naturally be hidden from view as it directly conflicts with the desired narrative—one that highlights the successes,

advancements and social development of “uncivilized” groups as a result of the Revolution rather than its failures.

Additionally, Buñel’s unpopular post-revolutionary narrative of impoverished youth living in an unsavory area of the city, suggests that he deems this and other similar stories as imperative when considering the nation’s history. This is done not only to present a history that is comprehensive and inclusive but is required if history aims to be accurate. CSP is defined by not only the perpetuating and fostering of linguistic and cultural plurality, but also viewing cultural dexterity as a necessary good which in turn results in educational outcomes that are additive rather than subtractive (Paris & Alim 13).

Furthermore, Buñel demonstrates in *Los olvidados* the various forms of education that take place outside of the traditional classroom and still have influence on the identity of youth. Jaibo, Pedro and the rest of the young boys have learned to survive without stepping foot into a schoolhouse. When Pedro’s mother surrenders her guardianship to the state and he is taken to the farm school for troubled youth, Pedro nor his counterparts arrive having zero experiential knowledge. On the contrary, the young boys possess a wealth of knowledge on how to make their way through the lives they live. Even though the farm school is featured for a short time, its inclusion serves as another element of CSP. CSP is a response to the ways in which traditional education perpetuates schooling as an extension of colonized oppression. This is to say that the presence of a dominant culture or the culture of power’s tendency to eradicate the “cultural ways of doing and being” that exist in minority communities be they defined by their ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status and replace them with the culture of power. (13).

Though many films followed *Los olvidados*, Buñel’s most notable film marked the near

end of the Mexican Golden Age of cinema. In viewing *Flor silvestre* (1943), *María Candelaria* (1944), *Río Escondido* (1948) and *Los olvidados* (1950) the viewer observes Fernández and Buñel's attempts to shift the historical narrative presented on screen by offering varied perspectives and protagonists without the fetishizing tendencies so apparent in Sergei Eisenstein's

¡Qué Viva México!. From *Flor Silvestre* to *María Candelaria*, we see a shift from indigenous women, only in the portrayal of the character and not in María Felix herself, playing a secondary supporting role to a dominant male.

Río Escondido, however, takes the plunge of centering the female voice and experience in a remote village, completing the efforts to change the narrative perspective of the films before it. Furthermore, Fernández boldly attacks assimilationist educational initiatives creating a dialogue between the former and the minority populations through the voice of its protagonist, Rosaura. Placing Rosaura in the driver's seat of the storyline serves as a starting point for 21st century Mexican films like *Roma*, of which Chapter 4 discusses at length. Additionally, Buñel's *Los olvidados* gives way to stories that do not ignore the most unattractive facets of a society of the heels of post-revolution. *Roma*, again, does the same by paralleling a nation on the brink of civil unrest with the experiences of an indigenous woman.

Again, when considering the definition of CSP is to perpetuate, foster or sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as a part of schooling for positive social transformation, one can look to the murals created during the post-revolutionary era to find small glimmers of CSP as well as ongoing narrative discourse of three different revolutions befalling the nation and affecting multiple groups of Mexican citizens. However, it is important to acknowledge that the intention of the film's analysis and those that will follow is to

demonstrate an evolution of images, subjects, and themes around Indigenous peoples and culture, an internal tension in communicating these messages between the artist and subjects as well as a public dialogue with the audience viewing these works of art. It is not nor will the following films conclude that they embody all of CSP. From los tres grandes whose murals were commissioned to convey an education message of national unification void of distinct indigenist cultures, yet painted imagery that appeared to reveal internal dialogue regarding their convictions resulting in murals that showcased all of the above and more, to Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* which repeated and reiterated that same struggle but from the perspective of an European outsider, the Mexican cinematic golden age bore a heavy task of pushing the needle a bit further in recounting a comprehensive national history and identity. Indeed, all artists faltered to completely embody the elements of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, with its lofty aims to destroy metanarratives, encourage cultural pluralism and celebrate that which has survived and been sustained culturally. However, they succeeded in serving as a bridge to the 21st century and demonstrate how an artist may grapple with its tenets so that directors like Alfonso Cuarón could explore the fullness of a film that sought to not only decenter whiteness in storytelling and perpetual cultural pluralism but also do so through an indigenous woman, Yalitza Aparicio.

CHAPTER 4. Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*: The cinematic catalyst of Mexico's Fourth Cultural Transformation

Chapter 4 focuses on Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning film *Roma* (2018) and its attempt at recentering marginalized voices through actress Yalitza Aparicio while revisiting Mexico's past. The timely release of this film coincides with Mexico's political shift at the federal level with the appointment of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador marking the beginning of his proclaimed fourth cultural transformation. In examining *Roma* and its impact on present-day viewers, parallels are made to support this film as the starting point of the fourth cultural transformation by way of cinema.

Analyzing this film will be approached in the same manner as the films discussed in Chapter 3; with consideration given to the foundational characteristics and qualities of Cultural Sustaining Pedagogy as well as its place on the continuum towards CSP and that effect on cinema and culture in the 21st century. Inasmuch, Cuarón's *Roma* receives the same analytical treatment and descriptions by scenes as those films highlighted in the Mexican Golden Age. Furthermore, a brief look into Alfonso Cuarón's every growing body of work and consistent focus on amplifying often silenced groups will provide support to the argument that *Roma* is a groundbreaking film in Mexican cinema that reflects the evolution of indigenous representation in the arts.

From the moment *Roma* was introduced to audiences in 2018, it equally sparked positive dialogue and criticism. Various film experts inside and outside of Mexico had their own opinions on how the film should be read and what its writer, director and cinematographer, Alfonso Cuarón, intended to communicate in its 135-minute running time. Before engaging in an in-depth analysis of the film, reviewing commentaries surrounding *Roma* and the varied perspectives on how it

should be viewed will serve as a point of reference when examining it alongside CSP. Additionally, as done in previous chapters, recurring themes in *Roma* are explored, again, for the purpose of identifying its place on the CSP continuum.

Roma appears to have more critics than supporters in both content and delivery. The overwhelming majority of literature dedicated to discuss the film does so in a negative manner. The critiques presented all address similar issues. First, the lack of Cleo's character development including a surprisingly absent dialogue usually found in a protagonist. Secondly, the perpetual stereotypical Indigenous domestic trope ever-present in Latin American cinema, and the continued profit and exploitation, now through streaming services like Netflix, of Indigenous people like Cleo. Lastly, the film was not the only victim of such harsh criticism, *Roma's* leading actress, Yalitza Aparicio, has also faced scathing reviews surrounding her performance and lack of experience that read more like outward racism than critique of her acting ability. No matter the source, *Roma* is attacked from beginning to end. Of its most outspoken critics, Robert Brody takes centerstage offering scornful reviews of Alfonso Cuarón's Academy Award winning work.

Most of Brody's critique centers around the character of Cleo, portrayed by Yalitza Aparicio. As the film is semiautobiographical in nature, focusing on Cuarón's family nanny and maid Libo, Brody criticizes the lack of depth in Cleo's character with statements like "Cleo remains a cipher; her interests and experiences—her inner life—remain inaccessible to Cuarón. He not only fails to imagine who the character of Cleo is but fails to include the specifics of who Libo was for him when he was a child" (2). Brody supports his opinion with the evidence that there are "no in-depth details about Cleo's life outside of her employer's family" and that she

“hardly speaks more than one of two sentences at a time” saying nothing of her life, her family or home (2). Richard Morgan also elevates this absence of speech stating that “When *Roma* gives any voice to any character it’s a kind of ventriloquism: Cuarón’s impression—his projection—of how women, workers, wives, and children act, talk and feel” (1). He points to one of the few scenes in the film where Cleo expresses her feelings to support his theory of ventriloquism in which Cleo stands in the kitchen singing a song. The lyrics to the song seem to express Cleo’s inner feelings about her station in life although she never outwardly discusses them in the film. Cleo sings “When I tell you I’m poor, you won’t ever smile again. I long to have it all and lay it at your feet. But I was born poor, and you’ll never love me” (Morgan 1). Morgan suggests that Cleo is never given the ability to speak on her own behalf, making Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak* a useful and relevant perspective to consider when analyzing *Roma* later against CSP. He continues by calling *Roma* “visually stunning” yet “emotionally stunted” with “...as script that allots very little space for her—or any characters—to express an opinion”(Morgan 1).

There is truth to this assertion and, as others too address the lack of dialogue Cleo has throughout the film, though there are other interpretations as to the reason and impact for the absence of her speech which will be discussed later. However, striking these initial critiques may be, it is Robert Brody’s commentary regarding Cleo as a representative of indigenous people that cut Cuarón’s work to its core. In short, he identifies the director’s protagonist, Cleo, as a stereotype of working class often indigenous maids. He describes Cleo as “a strong, silent, long-enduring, and all-tolerating type, deprived of discourse, a silent angel whose inability or unwillingness to express herself is held up as a mark of her stoic value” (2). He follows this statement but digging

deeper into his critique of her character stating “That effacement of Cleo’s character, her reduction to a bland and blank trope that burnishes the director’s conscience while smothering her consciousness and his own is essential and crucial failure of ‘*Roma*’ (3).

Many others agree with Brody’s strong dislike of Cleo’s character development or lack thereof. Sophie Lewis criticizes Cuarón’s *Roma* and sees it as “ideological violence” which is accomplished through the repetitive narrative “...that glorifies the sacrifice and exploitation of a colonized Mixtec woman for a privileged ‘white settler’ and makes Cleo responsible for so much in the family, constructing a deeply constricted vision of love and servile devotion” (De la Mora 51). Joseph M. Pierce shares in this feeling of *Roma* using “hate” as his initial reactionary description of the film. His disdain for *Roma* stems from what he believes is the film’s “naturalization of Indigenous labor and erasure of Indigenous futurity, for its extraction of ‘emotional value’ and for its inability to imagine Indigenous life other than in relation to serving settler colonialism” (50). He further explains why he hates *Roma* stating “I hate *Roma* because it turns Indigenous pain into the condition of possibility of our existence as objects of a history that will never be ours” (50). This absence of “emotional value” that Pierce suggests is also mentioned by Robert Brody who describes the scenes in *Roma* as having “a detached, distanced imprecision, which suggests the checking-off of a scene list rather than an interest in the specific thoughts and demands of the work at hand” (5). This detachment of lack of emotional value as Pierce entitles it results in Cleo’s reduction into a “bland and blank trope that burnishes the director’s conscience while smothering her consciousness and his own” (3).

The critiques of *Roma* seem to be limitless and do not exclude Yalitza Aparicio's casting and performance. When it became apparent that *Roma* would receive Oscar level recognition, Aparicio's counterparts had no qualms in sharing their disapproval of her performance. While some acknowledged that Aparicio should be celebrated for being one of very few Indigenous women nominated for an Academy Award, others argued that this celebration should be noted with an asterisk since her "performance insufficiently challenges stereotypes" as her portrayal of a maid and servant prevents her becoming a "full person" (Cotte 3). Unfortunately, the success of the film, its global reception, impact and history making status were in competition to the negative commentary surrounding Yalitza Aparicio's appearance in the film.

Aparicio was found in the middle of arguments of whether or not she could be called a "real actress" among a group of Mexican actresses who lobbied the Mexican Academy of Arts and Cinematographic Sciences (AMACC) to purposefully exclude Aparicio from the Ariel Awards (4). Even more disturbing were the anti-Indigenous remarks spoken by Sergio Goyri, a well-known telenovela actor, who unbeknownst to him, was being recorded while discussing Aparicio's Oscar nomination. In short, he condemned the cinematographic community for nominating a "pinche-india que dice 'sí señora, no señora'" (A fucking Indian that says 'Yes, ma'am. No ma'am') (Cotte 4). Of course, once his remarks were denounced for being anti-Indigenous, Goyri offered a full apology saying that he did not truly mean what he said and that his statements surfaced as a result of a heated argument (Cotte 4). Even still, Yalitza Aparicio has taken every criticism in stride, be they of her performance, her inexperience or her ethnicity. She continues to boast with pride her Oaxacan roots whenever interviewed about *Roma*.

Aparicio's pride in her portrayal as Cleo is celebrated by other film critics whose sees *Roma* for all that it is over what it is not. Each positive critique of the film addresses those discussed previously; from the lack of speech assigned to Aparicio's character, Cleo, to the stereotypical portrayal of indigenous domestic workers. Every criticism is turned on its head to offer the viewer an opposing perspective of how to interpret Cuarón's work. Marcantonio begins his analysis of *Roma* by recognizing the intentional decisions made by its director, writer and cinematographer Cuarón. The film is shot in black and white; a color scheme usually associated with fond memories of the past. However, Marcantonio notes that Cuarón's choice was for just the opposite effect stating that "He [Cuarón] chose black and white in such a way to avoid endowing the film with a patina of nostalgia" (40). This included the eliminating of the "graniness" that is present in black and white nostalgic films. Rather, Cuarón's black and white *Roma* is represented on film as moving photography. Futhermore, Marcantonio suggests that this film is more than just a retelling of Libo, Cuarón's family maid and nanny, through the story of Cleo. In his estimation, *Roma* is a commentary of Mexico's present through the recreation of its past. Specifically, he suggests that "the film quietly proposes that one of the legacies of the 1970s period is the path on which it set Mexico: toward a violent present and potentially still unviable future" (40). In my interpretation, this critique recommends that *Roma*'s viewer sees the movie in its entirety—from the historical social unrest that forms the backdrop of the film to observing the parallel in how its key characters live out the unsettled issues in their own lives.

In response to Robert Brody's critique about the lack of words that Cleo speaks in *Roma*, Marcantonio has this to say: "the spoken word is not cinema's most powerful tool. As anyone in

the field knows all too well, cinema developed originally as a mute medium dependent on images and editing to convey meaning” (41). It is cinema’s rapid technological progress that invokes a sense of entitlement and expectancy in dialogue heavy film. In reality, if one considers that murals were completely absent of sound and movement, yet through placement of subjects, brush technique and the use or absence of color that could suggest movement as well as convey a deep rich narrative, this argument that the lack of spoken word by Cleo’s character becomes a moot point itself. Additionally, the assertion of “ventriloquism” of characters in *Roma* made by Richard Morgan could also be argued. While some may call this a criticism, that Cuarón does not have these characters dialogue to express their feelings explicitly through his written words, it could be viewed that Cuarón was being intentional as to not assume, to insert or project any inauthentic feeling onto these characters through his perceptions of the events that occurred. In an interview with Cuarón, this film was to look back at the events of his childhood and specifically his maid and nanny Libo and to do so not interpreting them as the adult that he is now, but as the child he was then (Evans 2).

Then, there is Joseph M. Pierce and Sophie Lewis’ harsh criticism of perpetual tropes and stereotypes of Indigenous domestic workers and their exploitation and emotional devaluing in the film. De la Mora offers the opposing viewpoint of these critiques by mentioning how this film does the opposite of most stereotypical Mexican cinematic works that feature domestic workers. De la Mora states that Mexican cinema usually portray female domestic workers “as comical and gossipy or as erotic objects, or they remain marginalized in the narrative” (48). *Roma* avoids this at all costs by “powerfully centering and visualizing how Indigenous domestic and intimate labor

has been racialized and gendered in Mexico” (47). In each description of *Roma*, all film critics describe *Roma*'s cinematographic intentionality of “following” Cleo incessantly and often refusing to move until she appears on screen. Hastie goes so far as to say that “Throughout the film, Cleo is part of every scene. When she doesn't appear in a shot, the camera seems to wait for her, and with the camera so does the viewer. She gently and insistently drives this film and, in turn, the way one sees it” (54). With Cleo constantly part of the narrative and visual of the film, it becomes easier to observe how she is brought “closer to the family and to the viewer” (De la Mora 48).

As exploitation of Indigenous domestic workers is a critique of *Roma*, its inclusion elicits dual responses of which the negative was addressed previously. However, De la Mora argues that even though the film presents Cleo's exploitation by both her lover Fermín and her employers, it is Cuarón's obvious use of this emotional manipulation that serves as “acknowledgement that he and other middle-class Mexican enjoy live that are built on the exploitation of poor Indigenous or mestiza women” like Cleo (49). It is in *Roma* that Mexico's ‘darkest secret’ is exposed—that it is not the mestizo nation it imagines itself to be and that in the words of Marcela Garcia its “...caste system is omnipresent and we have not reckoned with it”(49). It is Cuarón's transparency and acknowledgement of Mexico's failures and mistreatment of marginalized groups, be they Indigenous or otherwise, through time and his avoidance to portray them through colorful nostalgia or coverups that I believe allows *Roma* to successfully resonate with global audiences. It is a moving mural for public consumption without being directed to any one group. It is for everyone to see and grapple with its content. It is not intended for the education of only one group and yet

it triggers a guilt that functions “as a kind of prelude to an overdue reckoning” (De la Mora 50). Or, as I would suggest a cultural transformation impacting Mexican people and society.

Furthermore, and most importantly, what is not recognized by the naysayers of this film, is *Roma*'s global reach and social impact. Marcantonio speaks to the fact that “The film served as a lightning rod in the call for domestic women’s right, which is fueling legislation campaigns both in Mexico and the United States and perhaps an even broader campaign that Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) aims to pursue globally” (41). De la Mora also references the film’s inclination

towards positive social transformation stating that what makes *Roma* different from its predecessors and others alike is that it has “a social action tie I, its local/global reach, the reputation of its director, and the eloquence with which (his) camera portrays domestic labor” (48). The social impact and dialogue created by this movie, as well as other commentary mentioned by critics, will be revisited later in conjunction with elements of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy within the film.

A synopsis of *Roma* will precede its analysis for a broader foundation when analyzing the film for both its cinematic and thematic complexities. As mentioned previously, *Roma* has been categorized as the semiautobiographical story of Alfonso Cuarón’s childhood. More specifically, the narrative focuses on Cleo, the young Indigenous family maid and nanny, who lives and works with a White middle-class family living in Mexico city’s Colonia Roma neighborhood. *Roma* is set in 1970s Mexico and casts a backdrop of social and economic unrest while exploring the lives of Cleo and her employers, Antonio and Sofia.

The movie begins with buckets of water being doused on the outdoor patio and the sound of Cleo sweeping in the background. The camera follows her from her sleeping quarters to the

main house where she begins her day; picking up dirty clothes throughout the house and preventing the family dog, Borrás, from escaping and retrieving the youngest child, Pepe, a stand in for Cuarón, from school. When they return, the narrative commences and Cleo is seen continually balancing her personal life alongside of her nonstop work life. She prepares meals for the family, washes their clothes and cares for their children as if they were her own.

Sofía announces that her husband, Antonio, a doctor, is planning to go away for a medical conference and asks for Cleo to prepare for his departure. Later that evening, Antonio arrives and spends, unbeknownst to his children, his last night with his family. It is later revealed that Antonio has actually left his wife and family for his mistress. However, this storyline plays second fiddle to that of Cleo and her relationship with Fermín. On her day off, Cleo and Adela meet up with their boyfriends, Pepe and Fermín. Rather than going to the movie with Adela and Pepe, Cleo and Fermín get a hotel room and spend the afternoon in bed together, an encounter that results in Cleo's unplanned pregnancy.

After confirming her pregnancy, Cleo first shares the news with the father to be during an afternoon at the movies. His initial reaction is positive and Cleo is relieved, however, Fermín's next action demonstrates otherwise. He leaves her in the theater holding his jacket after claiming he needs to go to the restroom and never returns. Cleo must later search for him by contacting his cousin only to find Fermín at a military training facility. When she again mentions her pregnancy his reaction is of contempt and disgust. He calls her a "pinche gata" and threatens to hurt her if she ever contacts him again. Luckily, Cleo's fears of rejection and dismissal from her job are

misplaced. Upon sharing her news tearfully with Sofia, Sofía reassures her that not only will she not be fired, but that she will receive the best care possible.

From this point forward, Cleo's pregnancy takes center stage of the plot and the viewer watches her grow bigger and bigger never slowing down on her work responsibilities. As she approaches her due date, Teresa, Sofia's mother, takes Cleo to a furniture shop to buy a crib. Meanwhile outside the store a student protest turns violent and gunshots ring out in the streets with people screaming and running. Teresa and Cleo along with the other shoppers rush towards the windows to see the origin of the commotion only to be redirected to the violence that has entered the store behind them. A young man and woman are chased into the store and attempt to hide but they are followed by another an armed man who belongs to Los Halcones; a group of young men trained by the government. In front of the entire store, the armed man shoots and kills the other sending shockwaves through the store as everyone screams around them. Cleo is stunned not only by what she has just witnessed, but by the man who is holding a gun to her face—Fermín. Once the shooter runs away from the scene, Fermín looks around noticing the crib nearby, still holding the gun to Cleo's face and then runs away. Immediately after, Cleo's water breaks and she enters into labor.

Teresa, the driver and Cleo all try to take cover and escape the store to get Cleo to the hospital. All the while they crouch behind cars they notice the dead bodies of young student protestors in the street. The camera whisks the viewer away to a tunnel filled with cars not going anyways and horns honking for people to move. Cleo lays in the back of the car with Teresa, thrashing, screaming and crying in pain while Teresa prays the rosary. They all arrive at the

hospital and Cleo is taken back to labor and delivery. The baby girl is born in distress and the doctors perform CPR all while Cleo watches helplessly from her bed. The doctors are unsuccessful and inform Cleo that her daughter was born dead. They allow Cleo to hold her baby but then remove her from Cleo's arms to prepare her body.

The film does not stop there. The viewer follows Cleo through her physical recovery and grief while she continues to work and serve the family with whom she lives. A trip to the beach, a supposed vacation, for the entire family including Cleo sets the stage for the final moments of the film. Sofia reveals to her children at dinner that their father is not in fact in Canada as previously mentioned, but he has left them. Their trip is not really a vacation, rather an opportunity for Antonio to retrieve his personal belongings from their home. The children are all shocked, some begin to cry, and Cleo is there to comfort them. On their final day at the beach, two of the children (put their names here) go into the water. The tide takes them out further than they can swim. Cleo, not being a swimmer at all, jumps in and saves them both, bringing them to shore. When Sofia returns with the other child, she thanks Cleo through tears for saving her children from drowning. It is then that Cleo, who has been predominantly silent since the loss of her stillborn daughter, confesses that she never wanted her baby. The family surrounds her with hugs and kisses before returning back home. *Roma* ends in the same manner it began, with Cleo cleaning. This time, the camera follows her upstairs with a basket of clothes as she retreats the rooftops to do the laundry.

Roma is replete with various themes that offer it a layered complexity that resonates with a global audience. Here, this research aims to focus on only those themes that will help support later analysis of the film alongside Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. Those themes are matriarchy

in the absence of paternal figures and metaphorical representation of the Mexican government's abandonment of Indigenous peoples and issues, the irony of advancements and progress, the visible invisibility of domestic workers, unspoken yet embodied inequality presented by Cleo and ill-fitting objects and subjects.

Marcantonio identifies matriarchy in the absence of paternal figures and their lingering effects as an overt theme that is interwoven throughout the film (40). The effects of their absences, chosen or otherwise, result in the development of a matrilineal household—led by Sofía and managed by Cleo and Adela. Marcantonio's argument is presented as a foundation to explore how this theme of matriarchy serves as a metaphor to the abandonment experienced by Mexican Indigenous peoples as a result of the state's continued failure to acknowledge them and their needs as part of the national identity and agenda following the Mexican Revolution.

Roma begins and ends with the absence of the father, Antonio, and alternatively, relies on a strong feminine presence found in Cleo and her employer, Sofía. Throughout *Roma*, men are virtually absent either by choice or by force. For example, Antonio, after only being in the home for one evening, leaves his family for his mistress. Sofía and the family walks Antonio out to his car where he is preparing to “leave for Canada” and as he opens the car door, Sofía is seen to embrace him from behind in a way that suggests she is begging him to stay. He kisses her goodbye and drives away. His absence is thus created by choice. Antonio extends his absence after a few weeks communicating through Sofía that he must stay longer in Canada due to his research. Sofía, attempting to make any type of emotional connection to Antonio, encourages her children to write

letters and cards expressing just how much they miss him and want him to return home. This becomes another failed attempt at reintroducing a patriarchal narrative into the film.

The audience only gets two additional glimpses of Antonio throughout the remainder of the film: in the streets leaving the cinema with his mistress and in the hospital elevator when Cleo has gone into labor. This highlights the argument that paternal or male absenteeism occurs in *Roma* by both choice and force. *Roma*'s contextual time frame presents a clear barrier for males to have access to birthing rooms. These spaces were generally reserved for women. This fact is alluded to by Antonio himself and an exchange between Dr. Vélez and Antonio occurs that, again, demonstrates men's ability to be present but choice to abstain.

Antonio: "Hasta aquí me deja pasar la doctora Vélez." ("Dr. Vélez won't let me go in.")

Dra. Vélez: "Por mi no se preocupe. Si quiere, puede pasar." ("Feel free to come if you like")

Antonio: "No puedo, tengo consulta." ("I can't. I have an appointment.")

Antonio is offered the opportunity to accompany Cleo due to his medical status as well as his closeness to her, and even though he is aware that Cleo is alone and distressed, both physically and emotionally, he declines the invitation and offers a what is perceived as a weak excuse to be absent, again. His absence, as well as that of Fermín's, which will be discussed hereafter, adds an intensity to the tragic stillbirth of Cleo's baby. Not only must Cleo enter into the delivery room without a companion, she must do so as she confronts grief.

In a similar manner Fermín rejects a permanent presence in Cleo's life as well as that of his future child. In the beginning of the film, the audience along with Cleo, is led to believe that

Fermín has a strong interest in Cleo and their child. The viewer arrives in their relationship in media res, already in progress but still sensing that it they have caught them at the beginning stages. Their relationship is thrust forward when the Fermín is seen completely naked with Cleo in her undergarments in a hotel. It becomes clear that the feelings between the two are much stronger than flirtations. However, as Cleo is left waiting for Fermín in the movie theater after telling him of her pregnancy, the audience's fear of the worst comes true; Cleo has been duped to believe that Fermín is excited about her pregnancy only to find out that she has been left holding the consequences of an intimate afternoon.

Cleo, like Sofía, makes multiple attempts to reconnect with Fermín and appeal to his heart. She first leans on Adela, her best friend and fellow housemaid, to make contact with Fermín through her boyfriend. When that fails, Cleo goes further and travels to Fermín's home using the excuse that she still has Fermín's jacket and only wants to return it. This ruse is quickly dismissed when the cousin accepts the jacket, leaving Cleo empty handed and still needing to speak with Fermín. Fermín's cousin, after Cleo's petitions, reluctantly discloses Fermín's whereabouts at a local military training camp and when Cleo finally meets Fermín face-to-face, she is met with hostility. It is important to note that Cleo never asked for anything from Fermín, she only wished to communicate that she was pregnant, a statement already shared at the movie theater and did not require repeating. This statement, though, serves as an invitation for Fermín to be present in both Cleo and their baby's lives. Unfortunately, Fermín rejects this invitation and threatens Cleo in the process. The viewer encounters Fermín only once after this scene and in a jarring way. Fermín enters the furniture store brandishing a gun at the same moment that Cleo happens to be shopping

for a crib. Though the camera focuses on the young man who is shot and killed by one of Fermín's militant counterparts, when it pans back to where Cleo stands, the audience realizes that Fermín has been pointing the gun directly at Cleo the entire time. Fermín looks down at her belly, then around him, noticing the crib. He lowers his weapon and runs away. These small yet intentional details offer more support when examining Fermín's violent abandonment of Cleo and paralleling this abandonment to that of Mexico's Indigenous peoples by the government.

The matrilineal household as a result of paternal absences in Roma connects to another dominant theme present in the film—the irony of advancements of progress for some in Mexican society but not for all. Marcantonio elevates this theme by bringing awareness to the inclusion of planes throughout the film. Planes are present in three moments through *Roma*; each time unexpectedly appearing in stark contrast to their surroundings. The opening scene of *Roma*, static in nature is disrupted first by waves of soapy water from Cleo's bucket. It is in the reflection of this water that a plane comes into frame and flies across the small section of mirrored sky. Only after the plane has finished its journey across the screen does the camera break away from the ground to reveal the protagonist of the film. Later, a large plane descends behind Professor Zovek as he welcomes and encourages the trainees about the possibility of becoming a great warrior. As Professor Zovek finishes his introduction, the plane leaves the frame but its engines can still be heard in the background. Lastly, in the final scene of *Roma*, as the camera follows Cleo up to the rooftop and out of frame, a plane flies overhead in the longest appearance of the three.

The inclusion of planes cannot be considered coincidental, rather intentional and purpose-driven by director Cuarón. Planes are not only means of travel, they embody the metaphorical

representation of movement and progress. Their inclusion in *Roma* creates spaces that disrupt the static imagery often found within the film that reorients the viewer's perceived historical context. Without their inclusion and in conjunction with the black and white nature of the film, it is possible for the spectator to become disoriented as to the historical backdrop of the film. Their steady and continued appearance serves as a reminder that technological advances in travel has occurred, and that mobility to far-reaching locations and environments are possible.

However, their appearance in *Roma* goes further than historical orientation, it also showcases that this advanced technological mobility is reserved for a select few—those with the financial means to take advantage of this form of travel. This then gives way to the argument that Cuarón's inclusion of planes in these scenes are to intentionally mark moments in the narrative where the characters desire progress but are grounded in the reality that they are unable to do so in their current situations and environments. Furthermore, it emphasizes that this feeling of immobility for the characters during this time period continues to transpire in modern day Mexico for people in the same socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Marcantonio comments that "...though people today live in an era that is capable of great advancements, as evidenced by the technological marvel of the airplane, they have been in incapable of solving human scale problems such as those that pertain to the equitable treatment of the domestic working class" (43). Part of the film's success has been attributed to its social impact and the heightened awareness of the lack of rights for domestic workers. Pérez comments on the parallels of the time period in which *Roma* sets its, the 1970s, with and to the current socioeconomic crisis faced by Indigenous migrant workers in Mexico. She states:

Today, as in 1970s Mexico, it is still young, mostly Indigenous migrant women of color who are providing the domestic care work that makes it possible for other people to go to work, to educate their children, and to move ahead. Yet instead of enjoying the full gamut of rights, the idea that workers like Cleo are part of the family continues to persist as a sort of reciprocal currency that does little for their socioeconomic advancement. They do not share the same rights as their employers, neither in legislation nor in their social positioning. (53)

Pérez goes on to highlight that “Only in 2019 did Mexico grant social security and paid vacation to domestic workers” (53). The imagery of planes at distinct points in the narrative and viewed through this lens offers a subtle yet powerful message from Cuarón about family maids like Cleo in his childhood and currently: they have continually been subjected to continued impoverishment while having intimate proximity and aiding in their employers’ upward socioeconomic status.

Cuarón, himself, reflects on this and other memories from his childhood that have surfaced as a result of *Roma*. Cuarón in an interview stated “I was not interested in the nostalgic approach to memory. I was interested in the past from the standpoint of the present. Meaning the past from my understanding of the present and also what makes that past relevant, at least for me. How that past shaped who I am for good and for ill” (Hastie 57). Though the film ignites a sense of nostalgia for some of its viewers, Cuarón’s approach to the film is to examine the ways in which he benefitted and progressed socially as well as economically from the sacrifices of his maid Libo. Cleo, a stand-in for Libo, in dedicated service to a middle-class family, continually suppresses her thoughts and feelings about her station, life and body throughout the entirety of the film. Pérez supports this assertion stating that “Cleo’s agency as a human being with her own plans and critical thoughts of her station in life takes a backseat to her role as a cleaner and caregiver who pillars the social station of the family for whom she works” (53). Again, returning to the imagery of planes, while a small percentage of people are able to fly, it

is the manual domestic labor of the people on the ground who make it possible for those people to do so.

Cuarón plays with the idea of domestic workers as foundational characters that support the Mexican White-middle class. They are visible and present yet their bodies are often ignored leading to a visible invisibility. Cuarón illustrates this theme again and again using the camera to home in on domestic workers but overwhelming the frame with either their employers or extras. Domestic workers are everywhere in *Roma*. Aparicio's leading role is evidence of this as she is rarely not captured on screen. However, although domestic workers, like Cleo are ever present in the film they are perceived as invisible, almost as if creating a backdrop of extras. They go unnoticed until they are called forward by a character from the dominant class. In the beginning of the film, Cleo is seen to be washing and hanging laundry. The camera initially focuses on her work, and then on the little boys who are playing among the sheets. It is not until the camera zooms out and the viewer gets a glimpse of the rooftops of other homes in the town that you see dozens of maids, Cleo, engaging in the same chores. They were always there as background subjects but were not visible until absolutely necessary to see.

This scene plays out again in a different location during the family Christmas and New Year's Eve parties. All the employers are playing cards, laughing, drinking and talking with one another. The camera angle remains at the middle third of the screen. As it pans the room, the viewer observes, almost too late, that all the employer's children are seated on the floor, playing with their toys while being cared for by their nannies. It is as if Cuarón intentionally shifts the camera upward and fills the scene with chatter so that the audience almost misses, no is distracted, from the domestic workers who are present and scattered on the floor. Finally, when the woods are on fire and the families are alerted, the most striking visual is of the workers

moving with urgency to squelch the flames contrasted with the malaise of their employers who continue to smoke, drink and chat while their employees save the land.

According to literary scholar Alison Light, servants are both everywhere and nowhere in history (Páramo 55). This is to suggest that while it is known that servants and domestic workers were present in history, their lives and work were rarely the focus of historical documentation. They played the supporting role to the histories notable figures but received zero attention in literature. This, along with other attributes, is what differentiates *Roma* thematically from its counterparts. As Vázquez describes, “the film spotlights the physical toll, and the emotional laboremployers expect of domestic workers living at the margins of their homes” (56). Even in this statement, Vázquez’s reference to domestic worker’s places on the outskirts of the historical narrative is juxtaposed with Cuarón’s insistence that Cleo, an Indigenous housemaid, be at the center of the film. Vázquez continues with his commentary related to the theme of visible invisibility stating “The film is a social dialogue about the invisibility of her job, the isolation she experiences, and the complex relationship she has with her female employer, Sofia”(56).

However, the film does more than reveal her station’s invisibility, Cuarón goes further and shows how even Cleo’s being has become invisible. In multiple scenes Cuarón repeatedly returns to the fact that Cleo, herself, is not viewed as a person worthy to be seen and known. Cleo is ignored on three fronts; because she is an Indigenous person, a female, a domestic laborer and a single parent. Cleo is considered “other” in these three varying categories and it is the marginalization she experiences at these intersections that pushes her towards the margins of otherness. For example, it can be concluded through a poignant scene at the emergency room, that she is viewed as “other”. Little is known of her family, her childhood or village and no

effort is made on her employer's behalf to inquire about them. In attempting to complete paperwork for Cleo's admittance to the hospital no identifying information can be given about Cleo including her full name, her age or next of kin. It is clear to all at this point, that Cleo is just an "other" who has occupied space in their home and supports their well-being. Cleo knows the intimate details about the family she serves but virtually nothing is known of her.

Visible invisibility as a theme shares space with two correlating themes of fit and embodied inequality. In *Roma* Cuarón plays with the idea of oversized and out of place objects to relate metaphorically to his character's misplacement or inability to fit within the narrative. Cuarón's first play on ill-fitting objects is seen at the beginning of the film with Antonio's entrance. The audience observes as Antonio attempts to park his extremely large Ford Galaxie in the very narrow patio garage. He adjusts, and readjusts several times before just barely getting the car to a place that doesn't damage the walls of the patio. The car's gargantuan size is referred to again when Sofía drives Cleo to her doctor appointment and cannot fit in between two cars in traffic. The sides of the cars are scratched from hood to trunk, an assumption made by the high-pitched scratching sound and Sofía's embarrassed smile and later confirmed in a wide angle shot of the car in the hospital parking lot. Later, Cleo watches the same damaged car, now driven by a drunken Sofía, ram into the sides of the garage wall; small chunks of plaster falling to the ground and scraping the side of the car. The Ford Galaxie is eventually exchanged for a small car that Sofía can maneuver and drive without damaging anything of her surroundings. However, it is clear that with the Galaxie's presence, Cuarón wants to establish this car does not fit no matter its location.

Here, it is suggested that Antonio's presence as a male and paternal figure, in the film is not welcome. The narrative has no space for him, and it is represented in his oversized, ill-

fitting Ford Galaxie. At Antonio's initial entrance into the film, his car barely makes it into the carport, signifying that while he may try to fit into the narrative of the story, he can only stay for so long before his presence does not make sense for the context of the story. Cuarón, then, begins to use the Galaxie as a stand-in for Antonio and his relationship with Sofia, and continually depicts how ill-fitting he is in the lives and environments of Sofia and the children. The damage the Galaxie causes to the carport represents the pain Antonio has inflicted on his family and those around him with his choice to leave them. Even still, Sofia, knowing that the Galaxie will no longer fit her and her family, she continues to attempt to make it fit which is evidenced in the scene where she parks and reparks the car while everyone in the family watches her fail. It is not until Antonio finally communicates that he will not be returning from his fictitious trip that Sofia accepts that the Galaxie needs to go. Cuarón symbolizes the end of their relationship with the purchase of a new car that fits perfectly and easily in the carport. The Galaxie is seen outside of the home on the street away from the house, representing that Antonio no longer has a prioritized place in the family and is distanced from the home.

The theme of fit in *Roma* does not always refer to an oversized object, rather, it also includes overcrowded spaces in which adding more characters would be viewed as highly unlikely and uncomfortable. Cuarón uses the most critical places to receive or get to help as being overcrowded; the tunnel leading to the hospital, the emergency waiting room and labor and delivery rooms. It is in these places where life and death hang in the balance. To see them overcrowded creates in the viewer a sense of anxiety that Cleo will not receive the help and medical attention she needs in the time she needs it. Cleo is seen writhing in pain in the back seat of the car, Theresa praying as she supports Cleo and then as the camera pans out, their car is seen surrounded by other cars in bumper-to-bumper traffic with no signs of movement. The

student protest turned violent massacre that Cleo and Theresa find themselves while shopping for a crib is likely to blame and now floods the streets and hospital with injured patients. Even after Cleo is prioritized to pass through the overflowing emergency waiting room, she enters yet another overcrowded space—labor and delivery. Cleo is tended to alongside a plethora of other women in active labor. Only when the doctors cannot find her baby's heartbeat is Cleo removed from the jam-packed space and ushered into an operating room where she is the only patient. In this room, the audience begins to feel the effects of the previously congested spaces. As if the emptiness of Cleo's current environment has magnified the fullness of those prior. Here, the viewer is able to breathe, but also begins to sense that the result of being in this room will lead to an undesired outcome.

The metaphorical meaning behind these overcrowded spaces, brimming with life, act as foreshadowing for what Cleo will experience with the loss of her child. Not only do these spaces have a visual impact on the audience, the sounds that are present alongside the visual gives the viewer a sense of business and activity which can be representative of life. From the furniture shop to the labor and delivery room, the viewer is bombarded with visual imagery and audio input. These sights and sounds indicate that life is present. However, the moment that Cleo enters the operating room, the audience is robbed of that constant stimuli that has been present for over ten minutes signaling that life is about to come to an end. Cuarón removes the quantity of people in the frame which in turn eliminates the amount of sound leaving only the voices of two doctors as they attempt to resuscitate Cleo's baby. Following the announcement that the baby has been stillborn the room is virtually silent, save the short dialogue between doctors and Cleo's heavy breathing. Life has ended only after Cuarón hinted at its impending arrival.

Additionally, the fact that the most congested spaces in the film create distance between the help that the most vulnerable populations need is not coincidental. The implicit message Cuarón communicates to his audience and that weaves through the entirety of the film, is that those in need of the most help are faced with visible and invisible barriers to receiving assistance. In the same way that the blocked tunnel prevents Cleo from arriving to the hospital to deliver her baby, so does Mexican legislation and lack thereof, serve as blockades to the progress of marginalized groups, specifically Indigenous domestic workers. Vázquez comments that “By speaking through Cleo, he [Cuarón] offers the working elite a narrative to ease their own anxieties around class instability” (56). *Roma* stands as a critique on the societal impediments that continue to act as barriers between those in need and those with the ability to help those in need and also the growing chasm in Mexico’s socioeconomic classes. Cuarón goes a step further by showing the audience the consequences of delayed assistance, the death of the most vulnerable.

Cuarón’s theme of fit connects with the subtlety of the theme of embodied inequality. Maside Casanova describes embodied inequality as the management of distance between social classes that does not require explicit communication or direction but is enforced and embodied by those from the lower classes (51). In embodied inequality “employers do not dictate these strategies and so are symbolically released from the responsibility of oppressing their workers” as workers enforce their own oppression in a panopticon-like manner (52). She argues that domestic workers like Cleo have a unique physical closeness with their employers but are expected to maintain a professional distance by behaving in a way that is appropriate to their status and do so without having to be explicitly reminded. In *Roma* the audience bears witness to incessant reminders of Cleo’s place, regardless of her access and exposure to the intimate

details of her employer's lives. Cuarón repeatedly brings the viewer's attention, through subtle unspoken gestures or moments where major events occur, to the inequality between Cleo and her employers. The director writes Cleo reactions in the same way; with complete silence or attempting to physically distance herself from the situation.

However, in the times where Cleo forgets her place, her employer reminds her with a request that thrusts her back into her domesticated role. For example, when the family is watching television the last night that Antonio is seen with the family, Cleo sits down on the floor next to the children and is seen to be enjoying the show. This does not seem unnatural given Cleo and the children's emotional attachment to one another. Just as Cleo settles in the frame, Sofia takes notice and asks Cleo to get a cup of tea for Antonio; a request that Antonio never uttered. Cleo is seen to immediately shift back into her role as the maid and not part of the family.

Cleo's character while being privy to intimate situations, must uphold the farce that she, like the children, are unaware of what is happening. For example, in the scene where Cleo overhears a phone call in which Sofia reveals Antonio has left with his mistress, Cleo looks up towards the bathroom door, but then immediately returns to cleaning the table as if she does not hear Sofia sobbing in the background. Even in her best efforts to remain aloof, distanced from the situation and in her place as the housemaid, she is drawn in closer when Paco descends on the stairs and approaches the bathroom to listen in on the conversation. Cleo calls his name and tells him to come away in an attempt to shield him from the knowledge of the true reason for his father's absence and at the same time, she stays as far as possible from both Paco and the bathroom door. Unfortunately, her efforts fall on deaf ears and Paco's eavesdropping results in Sofia slapping Paco and scolding Cleo for allowing her son to hear such unpleasant truth. Though

Cleo tries to preserve the social distance required between employer and employee, Sofia views it as Cleo's failure to maintain her place and remember her role as a domestic worker.

Even more than this, is the small yet intentional gesture of Cleo wiping the telephone mouthpiece before passing it to Sofia. Masi de Casanova highlights this movement in her argument of embodied inequality stating that "The employers don't need to tell Cleo to do this: "she has internalized social messages about her body as less-than, as a contaminant in the upper-middle class spaces that she works to keep pristine" (51). This argument is supported throughout *Roma* starting in the opening scene where Cleo is seen using the restroom, but not in the family home. She must return to her private quarters to do so. Also, though they do share a closeness to the family, Cleo and Adela both eat their meals in the kitchen apart from the family so as not to mingle. However, Masi de Casanova notes that this rule is relaxed when Cleo joins the family on vacation, and she eats with them at a restaurant.

This embodied inequality of a domesticated worker who happens to be an Indigenous woman displayed in *Roma* is not new. The repetitive narratives of place and expected behavior of Indigenous people are rampant throughout literature of the 20th century; the same time period where Indigenismo was both present in plastic and literary arts. During this era, Indigenous people were depicted as either "noble salvaje"³⁵, "buen salvaje"³⁶ or "victima inocente"³⁷. Cuarón through Cleo sees her pass through each trope cyclically in *Roma*. Cleo is the noble salvaje when she saves the children from drowning in the ocean, the buen salvaje when she does not share that she has seen Antonio out with his mistress in the city or when she goes the extra mile to wipe the mouthpiece of the phone to make it as clean as possible for her employer, and finally she, and her baby girl, are the victima inocente to Fermín's abandonment and her delayed medical treatment due to the student demonstrations turned violent while she shopped for a

crib.

More than internalized equality is the visible ethnic and social inequality that Cuarón addresses in *Roma*. Masi de Casanova elevates the theory that “Cleo’s attachment to a well-off family means that her body receives a better level of care and attention” (52). This argument cannot be denied when from the announcement of her pregnancy to Sofía, Cleo is taken to Doctor Valdez, an experienced obstetrician who has a working relationship with Sofía and Antonio. Furthermore, the audience sees Cleo bypass the overcrowded waiting room of severely injured people to be taken personally by Doctor Valdez to labor and delivery. These examples in conjunction with the previously mentioned result in Masi de Casanova’s conclusion that “Embodied inequality in *Roma* means devaluing bodies both in private and public” and that “Poor people’s bodies are stigmatized in the larger social world, as we see in the hospital courtyard where bodies deemed worthless suffer immense pain. Discrimination in healthcare emerges from assumptions about poor or nonwhite bodies—as impervious to pain, or hopelessly damaged—even as it perpetuates their poorer health status” (52).

Alfonso Cuarón’s body of work in the past decade sees women as the cornerstone of his films. *Gravity* (2013) features a female astronaut lost in space, *Children of Men* (2006) depicts the story of the only known pregnant woman and her infant daughter and *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001), also features a plot that is equally dependent on the female character of Luisa as it is her male co-stars. (Hastie 54). Even Cuarón’s film adaptations are based on books by female authors; *A Little Princess* (1995) and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004). To develop a film that is semi-autobiographical in nature, that tells the story of his live-in maid/nanny Libo, should not be surprising.

However, unlike the films and murals discussed in previous chapters, *Roma* is unique

in that it is the only piece of art that was created after the introduction of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) and the only film in which Cuarón received such harsh criticism. As discussed previously, these critiques are encapsulated by De Mora who states that criticism was derived from “The different ways of perceiving its representation of Mexican history, and race and class relations...” in addition to “The film’s depiction of domestic work as racialized servitude” at the heart of the debates. With this critique and the fact that the film was produced in the same time era as CSP, it is not assumed that Cuarón was aware of CSP and thus incorporated elements of the theory intentionally within his film nor is it dismissed that Cuarón may subscribe to some of the tenets of CSP without explicitly identifying the theory. Although produced in the same era as CSP, the scenes in *Roma* will undergo the same scrutiny of analysis as the previously discussed films and murals to evaluate the presence or absence of CSP elements. With this in mind, it is important to establish that scenes may or may not be discussed in a chronological order, rather, may be presented by connecting theme or idea.

When considering *Roma* in its entirety, it can be viewed in a similar manner as Diego Rivera’s *La historia de México*; filled from wall to wall with subjects, themes, concepts and replete with historical context. Rivera’s mural captures key moments throughout Mexico’s history beginning with Indigenous civilizations followed by the arrival and subsequent conquest of the Spanish and marching through to Mexico’s Independence and Revolution. Cuarón’s *Roma*, as if to extend this massive mural, continues where Rivera’s muralled narrative stops, permitting the viewer to look beyond the Mexican Revolution to its outcomes and effects on the first subjects Rivera paints—Indigenous Mexico.

From the standpoint of CSP, *Roma* serves as an exemplar of offering a more comprehensive telling of history by allowing it to be viewed through the eyes of Cleo, an

Indigenous woman working as a housemaid. More than that, and where other films such as *Flor Silvestre* and *María Candelaria* had fallen short, is that Cleo is an Indigenous woman played by an Indigenous woman—Oaxacan actress Yalitza Aparicio. While the films of the late 1950s may have captured a snapshot of what an Indigenous protagonist-led film may be, it failed to fully blossom into an exemplar of CSP because the stories were always portrayed by non-Indigenous actresses. Cuarón achieves a re-centered narrative through Cleo's story but also his cinematography. The camera, from the beginning of the film, is glued to Cleo's every movement. It follows her and waits for her resulting in often awkward silent periods where the audience is made to wait until she reappears. The expectation and premise that Cleo is the driver of the film and that the camera will not move unless she is on screen is set at the onset as the viewer is kept waiting on the patio while Cleo uses the restroom. If and when the camera does move without Cleo, it is to read the room from left to right, like a book or a blank canvas, only moving in the opposite direction if Cleo moves that way first. By using this technique of panoramic scanning and subject centered movement, Cuarón implicitly communicates that this story's leading character is Cleo. This trains the viewer to always seek Cleo out among the crowd no matter how overcrowded the scene may be. The viewer purposefully looks to engage with Cleo, her movements and expressions, often times losing sight of what is happening around her. Again, this points to a re-centering narrative that is upheld by CSP, not just to offer another perspective of events, but in doing so, creating a more comprehensive approach to a shared history.

More than Cleo, and Indigenous maid played by an Indigenous actress, being the center of the film and decentering the often White-gaze³⁸ in which many films situate themselves when including Indigenous characters, is the fact that *Roma* centers and elevates women within its

narrative. Very few men make appearances on screen in prominent ways or to the narrative save the effects of their absences felt by the women on screen. In essence, women are in control and dominate the entirety of *Roma*. Sofía and Cleo, having been left by the men they love, take care of one another—Cleo in continuing to do her job as both nanny and maid and Sofía in ensuring that Cleo receives the best medical care possible while continuing to employ her. Cleo is surrounded by women, her best friend Adela who also works for the family, and her doctor, Dra. Valdez. Throughout the film, Cuarón strategically sends the message of women taking care of women.

At the same time, an argument can be made on a metaphorical level of what Cuarón may also be communicating to his audience. A marginalized group, in this case women, are left to fend for themselves and care for one another after a dominant group has exerted their lack of care and power over them. This may also speak to ethnically marginalized groups such as Mexico's Indigenous populations of which Cleo represents. Sofía says to Cleo in one particular scene “Estamos solas. Siempre estamos solas. No importan que te digan.” (We're alone. We're always alone. No matter what they tell you.) While this could be interpreted to mean that women are always left to survive on their own, there is no coincidence that this statement is said to an Indigenous woman. The message that Cuarón may be sending is that, historically, Indigenous people remain the group that constantly must fend, advocate and rely on themselves for their survival.

This idea is repeated in the scene of the military training camp where Cleo finally makes contact with Fermín to tell him, once again that she is pregnant. After uttering the words “Es que estoy encargo” (“I'm pregnant”) Fermín responds “¿Y a mí?” (What's it to me?) before threatening her to leave him alone and hurling a racist and sexist slur at her saying “¡Pinche,

gata!”. Again, interpreting this scene with the understanding that Cleo is representative of Indigenous Mexican citizens, the viewer assumes that Fermín is the Mexican government. Who, upon hearing that a group of their people is in need of support and care, proceeds to ignore them, mistreat them by exploiting their land’s resources or seizes them altogether for the economic gain of the nation state, refers to them as uncooperative “other” who have brought their suffering upon themselves.

Another scene that supports this idea can be found in Sofia’s phone call detailing how Antonio has left her for his mistress. Sofia says:

Sí, se fue a Acapulco con la piruja esa. Desde que se fue no ha mandado un quinto. Y ya van a ser seis meses. Dice que está muy corto, que no tiene dinero para mandarles. Ah, pero ahora le dio por bucear. Se está comprando todo el equipo. ¿Cuánto crees que cuesta eso? Pero para eso sí tiene, ¿no? Les manda cartas. Dizque desde Quebec. Nada, puras babosadas que les inventa. Que el paisaje está muy lindo que hay muchos animalitos. Que los extraña mucho pero que no puede venir porque su investigación se está retrasando, que tiene...no tiene pantalones para decirles... ¡Puras mentiras! (*Roma*).

(He went to Acapulco with his mistress. He hasn’t sent a dime and it’s been six months. He says he’s short on money and doesn’t have any to send. But now, he likes diving and is buying all the gear. You know how much that costs? He sends letters to the kids pretending he’s in Quebec. He invents such bullshit. That the landscape is beautiful and there’s so many different animals. That he misses them, but he can’t come back home because his research is delayed. Lies!)

Interestingly, the conversation can only be heard from Sofia’s responses and, when listened to carefully, actually sounds like a letter to Mexico on behalf of its Indigenous people. In this dialogue with Mexico, the claim is made that the government has shifted its priorities from the ones to which they promised to include in their national vision of progress to another, more attractive initiative. At the onset of the Post-Revolutionary agenda was the improvement of the welfare, livelihood and education of Mexico’s Indigenous populations. The government shifted from being all consumed with the incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the national identity to giving up on them completely, as if to deem them a hopeless case in their pursuit for

modernity.

Mexico may have viewed Indigenous groups as requiring too much attention and economic investment to handle during the post-revolutionary period, and as a result, the autochthonous populations of the nation were ignored at the federal level, much like Sofia and her family. While Sofia speaks these complaints to her friend, which can be metaphorically representative of issues Indigenous populations have faced in the post-revolutionary period, Cleo, the actual representative of Indigenous people, does what this group has done throughout time, she continues to work. At the same time, much in the way that Antonio describes the beautiful landscapes of a place he is not really visiting, Mexico promoted itself as a tourist destination, a paradise filled with beautiful scenic views and exotic animals for the world to recognize as not only modern but desirable to be seen. Meanwhile, not all of its citizens were living in paradise.

In examining this scene from this angle, the viewer is able to see elements of CSP's emphasis on the amplification of issues burdening marginalized groups. Furthermore, this scene, and as well as the scene in the furniture store leave viewers considering if these groups have experienced any progress as time moves forward. As Cleo shops for a crib she and Teresa hear the commotion from the streets and approach the window to see what is happening. Suddenly, their attention is redirected back inside the furniture shop, where a young man and woman have run inside to hide. Immediately they are followed by members of the militant group, los Halcones, who find the man and shoot him at close range. For the first time in the entirety of the film, Cuarón shifts the audience's perspective from onlooker to participant; assuming a gaze that situates them as having accompanied Cleo to the furniture store and witnessing what is occurring alongside her. Only, as the camera pans away from the executed

individual, the viewer realizes that Cleo has been transfixed on the man who stands before her—Fermín. Fermín points a gun directly at Cleo for a few seconds and the viewer is thrust outside of the story back into the seat of observer, rather than present participant.

According to Paris and Alim, “CSP must be willing to seriously contend with the sometimes problematic aspects of our communities, even as we celebrate our progressive, social justice-oriented movement and approaches” (12). So, while it is clear that the Revolution had created some unification within the nation, and that many may have benefitted from the advancements that it provoked, the backdrop of military training and student protest turned Corpus Christi massacre demonstrate that the country was still very much disjointed and in need of more work. Cuarón both celebrates the progress of Mexico while admitting that they have a long road ahead. Progress has been felt by some, but not all.

Considering the reviews of *Roma*, which were discussed previously, the film gave momentum to human rights legislation already in the works for domestic workers. Conversations and discussions surrounding the character of Cleo as an amalgamation of many Indigenous domestic workers in Mexico who continue to serve in White-Middle class family’s homes, yet do not own their own were sparked as a result of seeing this film. Additionally, it returned the focus to AMLO’s promises during his presidential campaign; to address the socioeconomic gaps among Mexico’s disenfranchised and forgotten populations—specifically, its Indigenous citizens.

In the same breath, it is important to note that even *Roma* is not CSP personified in the area of storytelling. Though the storyline centers itself on an Indigenous woman and is played by an Indigenous woman, the story itself is told by Alfonso Cuarón, a now upper-class White Mexican man. This fact, as alluded to previously, brings reminiscences of Spivak’s argument

*Can the Subaltern Speak?*³⁹ of which her concluding thought is ‘no’, they cannot. Instead Libo’s story is filtered through Cuarón’s memory of her and written in Cleo’s character, begging the question of whether this Indigenous woman’s story passed through the White gaze that CSP so vehemently abhors.

As highlighted by multiple film critics, Cleo’s dialogue and speech are virtually absent throughout the entire film. Even when Cleo is given the room and space to speak, Cuarón deprives her of the words to do so. In Cleo’s first visit to the doctor, Dr. Valdez asks Cleo direct questions about her medical history. Rather than offering details of her sexual past, Cleo is tight lipped, her eyes moving up and then down, but never offering more than a few words. The viewer is left to fill in the blanks, assuming that this pregnancy may be the result of her first sexual encounter. The power of the narrative is given to the viewer, which can be dangerous according to Ngozi Adichie, whose *Danger of a Single Story* highlights the risks of storytelling from a single angle. If the viewer subscribes to inherent biases of Indigenous women or stereotypes of those from the lower-working class, like Cleo, due to the perpetuated narrative of women like her in cinema, the assumption may be made that Cleo is promiscuous and that the few words she offers are no more than tall-tales. On the other hand, those same biases and stereotypes of Indigenous working-class women as gullible or lacking intelligence could result in a viewer concluding that Cleo is a victim of her naivety, and as Adichie points out may result in “a patronizing, well-meaning pity” (Adichie, “Danger of a Single Story”).

However, the fact that Cleo is depicted as an unwed expectant mother, based on the life of Cuarón’s childhood maid, the criticism regarding the lack of dialogue is more than Cleo’s absent voice. It, unfortunately, continues to add the single-story narrative that Adichie discusses in which she states “show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that

is what they become” (Adichie, “Danger of a Single Story”). Though Cuarón assigns Cleo as his protagonist in *Roma*, casts an Indigenous woman to play her and forces the camera to focus solely on her throughout the film, the result is another film about an Indigenous domesticated worker who is abandoned during an unwanted pregnancy turned stillbirth without hope of escaping her tragic life.

The imagery of an Indigenous domestic worker bound to tragic outcomes with little hope is again seen in the poignant scene at the beach where Cleo saves two of the children from drowning. Although initially viewed as a heroine moment for Cleo, the audience is quick to assess the situation that Cleo is placed in as unfair from the onset. Cleo announces that she is unable to swim and, even with this knowledge, Sofia still allows the children to play in the ocean while the current and waves are strong. She then leaves Cleo in charge and walks away to handle some unfinished business. When the children begin to drown, Cleo enters the water, threatening her own life in the process to save them. Afterwards when they are recovering on the beach, the family gathers around Cleo as she sobs about not wanting her baby in the first place. The image of Cleo being surrounded in the embrace of the children, which became the still shot for the film’s official poster, appears to exude comfort and love for Cleo. Considering the events that take place on the beach, the viewer begins to wonder if this is representative of the weight in which Cleo must carry, for herself but also for the family for whom she works. *Roma* indeed goes farther than its predecessors in both narrative and casting, however, it is left to be seen how the storyline would have been different had it been told by Libo, Cuarón’s Indigenous maid in which the story is based.

Even still, that the film is centered on Cuarón’s maid and the retelling of her story from her vantage point still embodies a major tenet of CSP. As stated by Paris and Alim “CSP, then,

is about sustaining cultures as connected to sustaining the bodies—the lives—of the people who cherish and practice them” (9). In writing a film about Libo, her interaction with Cuarón’s family, her pregnancy and stillbirth, Cuarón sustains Libo’s life and others alike through the character of Cleo. *Roma* informs its audience that there are many Libos and Cleos whose stories are often overlooked, however are worth returning to, as Cuarón has done in this film, to ensure that histories are comprehensive and to evaluate our current progress against the past.

Alfonso Cuarón’s 2018 Oscar Award winning film *Roma* appeared on screen at a pivotal moment in Mexican history. At the same time that newly elected President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador alluded to the fourth cultural transformation that sought to bring support and aid to the socioeconomic conditions of Mexico marginalized citizens, *Roma*’s story of Cleo helped spearhead social change. It’s themes of patriarchy as metaphorical representation of the Mexican government’s abandonment of Indigenous peoples and issues, the irony of advancements and progress, the visible invisibility of domestic workers, unspoken yet embodied inequality presented by Cleo and ill-fitting objects and subjects permeated through the black and white imagery captured by its director and cinematographer. In doing so, it received harsh criticism and skepticism from film historians inside and outside of Mexico.

Some critiqued Cleo’s lack of character development as a severe flaw in Cuarón’s work pointing to the absence of dialogue and inability of Cleo, and those like her, to tell their own story. Others, pointed to the perpetuation of stereotypes surrounding domesticated workers, who may happen to be Indigenous. Still others, found a problem with the film’s leading actress, Yalitza Aparicio—an Oaxacan woman whose starring role became an overnight and international success. No matter the critique, *Roma* reflects on the memories of Cuarón’s childhood live-in maid and nanny Libo, as he sought to understand his present state as a result

of her overwhelming sacrifice.

These critiques and other observations from the film make it difficult to identify elements of CSP. The story, though about Libo at its core, was told through the words of someone other than herself opening the script and events of possibly being filtered through a White gaze. At the same time, the effort that Cuarón makes to ensure that Libo's story, and others she represents, is told without relying on the standard nostalgic cinematographic qualities, demonstrates a seriousness in the elevation of otherwise ignored subjects. The attempt to insert Libo's story, through Cleo, in Mexican history also establishes the film's quality of comprehensive and pluralistic history—yet another tenet of CSP.

Differing from murals and from films in Mexico's cinematic golden age, *Roma* experienced global reach that incited social impact. Marcantonio points to "...the direct alliance that the *Roma* team (including Cuarón) forged with the NDWA" as one of the most interesting and influential outcomes of the sociopolitical discourses provoked by the film. This societal impact resonates with the definition of CSP which "seeks to perpetuate and foster [sustain] linguistic, literate, cultural pluralism as a part of schooling for positive social transformation". *Roma* explores 1970s Mexico with its social and political unrest and how they collide with those at every level of the Mexican economic class. Furthermore, it goes deeper into the life of an Indigenous woman, who speaks Mixtec with her best friend Adela in the kitchen, all while working to provide for herself and her baby in as a live-in housemaid and nanny to a Middle-class White Mexican, Spanish-speaking family. In doing so, *Roma* helped to bring more awareness to the need for domestic women's rights, fueling legislation in Mexico and the United States, as well as putting a fire to AMLO's promise of a fourth cultural transformation; which aimed to focus on the marginalized members of Mexican society.

CONCLUSION

The proposal of a potential fourth historical transformation by Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador seeks to address the issue of social inequality and injustice for all Mexican citizens; especially for those who throughout Mexico's history have been disenfranchised. Healthcare, economic stability, and educational opportunities find themselves at the forefront of a Mexican political agenda that appears to be not only unoriginal for its history, but a challenge to rectify. Mexico's Minister of Education from the years 1921-1924 Jose Vasconcelos' choice to chase after educational reform following the 1910 Mexican revolution brought with it an awareness to the overwhelming percentage of illiterate individuals and urgent need to address it.

Through a reformed educational system that reached even the most rural regions of the nation, Vasconcelos expanded access to public libraries and offered extensive training to teachers through the establishment of vocational and rural schools. In order to meet the immediate need for historical knowledge while acknowledging the country's illiteracy, Vasconcelos took advantage of the Mexican muralism movement already in progress commissioning murals by three of Mexico's most notable artists. The effects of these murals would span farther than Mexico's post-revolutionary educational reformation. With its purpose set to educate the public, the masterpieces painted by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siquieros impacted and influenced artists around the world. As they painted, their murals served as educational tools to inform the nation and those beyond its borders of all Mexican people, indigenous and otherwise, about the richness of their culture and landscape.

However, Vasconcelos' intention to reconstruct a crumbling educational system while simultaneously educating the nation of its history was not the sole purpose of his agenda. Based

on his purported theory of “mestizaje”, Jose Vasconcelos aimed to fully incorporate indigenous communities into the nation. This would require the repackaging and re-telling of pre-established narratives⁴⁰ about the Mexican conquest in order to further bolster his idea of the national place in “la Raza C6smica”. While this may have been the hidden agenda of Vasconcelos, Diego Rivera’s work depicted a much different approach. Rather than turning a blind eye to the contributions of identity and culture of indigenous groups on Mexican civilization past and present, Rivera made the marginalized his main subjects.

The murals, being a result of Mexican post-revolutionary educational reform, and films serving as a reflection of those images are viewed against a pedagogical theory developed by Samy Alim and Django Paris known as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP). The theory is used as a framework to identify elements already existent in artforms before it’s conception in order to support the argument that approaching, creating and implementing cultural artifacts of this kind deepen and enrich Latin American Cultural studies programs providing scholars of the field a more comprehensive and inclusive account of Mexican history and culture.

In murals painted in the early 1920s, the content and subjects represented in the work were a reflection of the chaotic time in which the post-revolutionary Mexican society lived. The artists, though instructed by Vasconcelos to paint murals that captured the nation’s unified identity, absent of the plurality that Indigenous populations personified, the muralists incorporated Indigenous subjects and imagery within their work as they illustrated the three revolutions that affected all of Mexico but especially its most disenfranchised groups. Rivera attempted to represent Indigenous civilization with historical accuracy, opting to illustrate Mexico’s past from an idealistic point of view while Jos6 Orozco’s work would capture Indigenism through mythological themes and

characters. Alfaro Siqueiros took a path less travelled trading archeological accuracy for metaphorical representations of Mexico's post-revolutionary society and national identity. The outcome were paintings that both critiqued and questioned Mexican society, that confronted the very seat of government that commissioned their works and that recommitted their dedication to the masses as civil servants.

The theory of CSP was used then to analyze the artistic dialogue present within Mexican murals painted at the height of the Mexican Muralism movement. In applying this 21st century theory on 20th century art, some instances, though inconsistent, of the theory were found in the recurring indigenist images and themes including those found in Siqueiros' *El entierro de un obrero sacrificado* (1923); a mural depicting indigenous burial rituals that invites the viewer to consider their own death practices without suggesting one superior over another. Along with Siquiero's work, José Clemente Orozco's *La trinchera* was an artistic nod to the Manifiesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers signed by all three muralists and illustrated the deadly impact of the revolution on countless campesinos and indigenous men. Rivera's *La creación*, though some interpret suggests indigenous people as beings awaiting to be filled with knowledge and in need of civility through traditional Eurocentric education, would still lead the artist to elevate indigenous subjects at the forefront of his works. Later, his mural cycle at the SEP would allow Rivera to revisit his commitment to the masses as outlined in the previously mentioned Manifest offering imagery that inspired artists beyond the Mexican border.

At the same time Mexican muralism hit its stride, so cinematography arrived on the scene depicting themes and subjects reflective of those included in the still imagery of murals. Sergei Eisenstein, an established filmmaker from the Soviet Union, having become enamored with the

works of the big three and specifically Diego Rivera, began a collegial friendship with the muralist and spent a little over a year with him being guided through Mexico. It was during this time that *¡Qué Viva México! (Long Live Mexico!)* was imagined and Eisenstein, with the help and inspiration of Rivera's murals began to film scenes for the iconic film. Eisenstein's fascination and deep infatuation of Mexico's indigenous cultures and landscapes took center stage as panels from Rivera's murals at the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico City came into motion. As a result, Eisenstein's film took a national artform along with its people, culture, and land, and shared it with the world through the silver screen.

Sergei Eisenstein, a Soviet filmmaker, became enamored with Mexico having encountered photos of the murals which later led to establishing a mutually respected friendship between himself and "Los Tres Grandes". The inspiration he received from close contact with the artists and their work resulted in dreams of a film about Mexico. Eisenstein through a series of trips beginning in Europe and the United States ended in a two-year sojourn throughout Mexico of which he filmed rushes that directly replicated panels from Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros' work. Unfortunately, Eisenstein would never see his film come to fruition. His montages and notes were later used to create an episodic structured film entitled *¡Qué Viva México!* that was intended to celebrate all of Mexico beginning with its pre-Hispanic civilizations in the prologue.

The categorization of this film fell to scrutiny upon its release as some historians argued that it exemplified characteristics of a documentary and others some form of ethnography. No matter the distinction, the content of each episode would be critiqued down to the last scene by film historians who claimed his work created a sense of "otherness" in the representation of Mexico's Indigenous people. From beginning to end, Eisenstein, like his esteemed friend Rivera,

would center Mexico's ancient civilizations from the beginning of his film to the end suggesting that aspects of CSP were present even during this time frame. The filmmaker's choice to avoid the popular metanarrative that sees the history of Mexico as equivalent to the arrival of the Spanish points to a core characteristic of CSP to ensure that narratives have been decolonialized. Additionally, Eisenstein's montages like those found in *Sandunga*, an episode that frames the pueblo of Tehuantepec, specifically its matriarchal society, not only replicates the panels of Rivera's mural cycle at La Secretaria de Educación Pública, but also demonstrates Eisenstein's acknowledgement that indigenous practices found in Tehuantepec have added value to the national identity. Eisenstein depicts Tehuantepec and other indigenous villages that it represents as national assets to offer their country rather than problems to be corrected by the government.

However, Eisenstein's cinematic choices did not always reflect the elements of CSP. In *Fiesta*, an episode dedicated to Spanish painter Francisco Goya, the filmmaker depicted a bullfight of which he acknowledged is a tradition known to Spain but brought to the Americas during the conquest. Though filmed in Mexico with Mexican actors, Eisenstein spent much of his film reels capturing and celebrating a European practice in a film that was intended to be his love song to Mexico. Furthermore, his continued reference throughout the film to the glory of the Baroque aesthetic and imagery seems to contradict his previous musings and devotedness to the indigenous people and culture of Mexico.

These findings were thought-provoking as the research moved into the era of Mexican Golden Age Cinema and Eisenstein has been referred to as the "father of Mexican film". His montages and artistic eye have been said to have inspired Mexico's most notable filmmakers of the Golden Age; Emilio "el indio" Fernández, Gabriel Figueroa and Luís Buñel. The collaboration

of the three cinematographers saw the boom of films created by Mexican artists about Mexican society and people. The filmmakers included societal issues of modernization, religious overreach into matters of state and lives of everyday citizens as well as Mexican identity as cornerstones to their cinematic narratives and this messaging was leveraged as a way to quantify elements of CSP in films of the time.

Although many films were released during this era, the films *Flor silvestre* (1943), *María Candelaria* (1944), *Río escondido* (1945) and *Los olvidados* (1950) were chosen for examination with CSP expressly for their inclusion of the aforementioned issues. *Flor silvestre* told the story of a poor campesino woman, Esperanza, and her marriage to an aristocrat, José Luís. Using the narrative and imagery provided by Fernández, the film functions almost as an allegory, using the storyline of the unapproved romance between the main characters along with José Luís' fight against banditry to communicate a message about the state of indigenismo and indigenous people in post-revolutionary Mexico. In the eyes of the government, indigenous people indeed had a place in the historical narrative of the nation, however following the revolution, they would be viewed as a group to be dealt with and civilized in order for Mexico to walk into its promising future.

María Candelaria shared a similar narrative with its titular character fighting against the shame of her mother's past actions. Taking place in Xochimilco, it is one of few films of the time that sets its background in a region known to be the home of indigenous peoples. *María Candelaria*, though played by a non-indigenous woman, is the protagonist of the story, a step further towards giving marginalized figures a voice than in *Flor silvestre*. *Río Escondido* of all the films discussed charged full steam ahead with a female voice at the heart of the narrative. Fernández through the character of Rosaura boldly critiques assimilationist educational initiatives pushed in small

villages like Río Escondido and explores the consequences of abuse of political power exerted on minority groups. Buñel's *Los olvidados* continues to push critiques of government agendas that saw those on the lower end of the socioeconomic classes suffering from the failure to deliver on broad sweeping transformation in the nation. A narrative with visceral imagery of crime and murder at the hands of starving children in the heart of Mexico City, *Los olvidados* creates a space for future stories of those who are often ignored because their economic or social status makes them unattractive.

Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* in 2018 having been released at a pivotal moment in Mexican political history, and at the announcement of a potential fourth cultural transformation in Mexico, takes the essence of *Flor silvestre*, *María Candelaria*, *Río Escondido* and *Los Olvidados* and pours them into the retelling of his childhood nanny, Libo's story. It would also portray similar mural-like images found in Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* With the 1970s as its historical backdrop, Cuarón sets his subjects against a black and white canvas. The protagonist of this deeply personal narrative is Cleo, a woman of indigenous roots, in-home maid and nanny played by freshman actress Yalitza Aparicio Martínez. By examining *Roma* with the same lens as *¡Qué Viva México!*, as a mural in motion, this work intends to understand films such as the aforementioned as didactic artforms to educate the masses through the perspectives and stories of the underrepresented and marginalized people of Mexico.

Cuarón's *Roma*, although addressing similar issues, differs from the films before it in that the protagonist is interpret by an indigenous woman rather than an actress who portrays an indigenous woman. Cuarón's choice to have Oaxacan newcomer, Yaltiza Aparicio, interpret the role of Cleo speaks to the evolution of film in regard to indigenous representation in both narrative

and in acting. While following the events of Cleo's life including her abandonment by her baby's father, the stillbirth of said child and never-ending responsibilities of her job as a nanny, Cuarón gives attention to the civil unrest happening in the 70s in Mexico. Like the muralists, he intertwines several revolutions occurring all at once: that of Cleo's life, the life of the family by who she is employed, and the student revolution happening outside of a neighborhood furniture store.

The film, while possessing strong instances of CSP with its decolonialized narrative spearheaded by an indigenous woman faced harsh criticism on all sides. Some believed the Cleo's character lacked depth and was a reiteration of stereotypical cinematic tropes befallen to indigenous women consistently depicted as domestic workers. Still others highlighted that although Cleo was the main character, she had little to no lines begging the question if she even how narratological power. These and other critiques made it challenging to categorize *Roma* as an exemplar of CSP, especially given that the story of Libo was still being told through the eyes of Cuarón and quite possibly filtered through a White gaze. However, Cuarón was insistent that Libo's story, told through the character of Cleo, and others she represents was done so in a way that honored and elevated the gravity of ignoring subjects like her. With this state intention by Cuarón himself, the filmmaker establishes the importance of including narratives such as Libo into history making it comprehensive due to its plurality of voice—a tenet of CSP.

Even more encouraging are the findings that *Roma's* impact had global reach and societal impact. The story of Cleo resonated with audiences and led to public dialogue about the treatment of domestic workers and their rights. Cuarón himself forged a partnership with NDWA to continue conversations and legislative action for domestic workers in both Mexico and the United States.

Having sparked real-world action, *Roma*'s influence points to CSP which identifies positive social transformation as a result of perpetuating and fostering cultural pluralism.

As critical as the examinations of muralism and film were in this research and given that the evaluative tool used to deliver the analysis was that of a theory developed years after these artistic products were conceived, the findings of CSP and more were similar. All exhibited glimpses of cultural plurality while also demonstrating the artist's evolving struggle to illustrate said plurality. Images and representations of indigenous people, their culture, the history of Mexico all converged on either a wall or screen in static or moving narrative form. All artists from *los tres grandes* to the three filmmakers of the Golden Age communicated messages while opening public dialogue with their observers.

The aim of this research was to establish a correlation between Vasconcelos' 1920 educational initiative and the films produced and released in the mid 20th century with *Roma*. In doing so, connections are made firstly with the transference of mural images and themes like those of Rivera's to Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* and follows their replication through the Mexican Cinematic Golden Age in Figueroa, Fernández and Buñel's *Flor silvestre* (1943), *María Candelaria* (1943), *Río Escondido* (1948) and *Los Olvidados* (1950).

This research explored the history of representation of Mexican Indigenous peoples in art forms beginning with the Mexican Muralism movement of the 1920s through 21st century film. To follow this trajectory, it chartered the transference of themes and subjects found within Mexican Muralism to films at the beginning of Mexico's Cinematic Golden Age such as Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!* and later with Figueroa and Fernández' *Flor Silvestre* and *María Candelaria* among

others. Observing the art forms, the artists and filmmakers that created the work was not the only lens in which these historical and cultural products were viewed. Django Paris and Samy Alim's 21st century pedagogical theory of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, a theory that "seeks to perpetuate and foster or sustain linguistic literate and cultural pluralism as a part of schooling for positive social transformation" was chosen to examine how the art forms identified in this research may serve as a way to provide a more culturally comprehensive look at Mexican history. The theory was selected purposefully, as the Mexican Muralism movement was the result of an educational initiative prescribed by Minister of Education José Vasconcelos. Since the image found in murals painted by *los tres grandes* was duplicated and reimaged in films like Eisenstein's *¡Qué Viva México!*, and this film heavily influenced the films created by Gabriel Figueroa, Emilio Fernández and Luis Buñel, it seemed appropriate to view the films in the same way as the murals; as a artistic product with the intention of educating and informing its audience. Of the outcomes uncovered throughout the analysis of all the murals and films discussed, the objective in the examination of each product was the same—to search for small appearances of CSP at the start of the educational initiative and observe its imminent evolution as time drew closer to the theory's development in the early 2000s. What I uncovered in the analysis of post-revolutionary Mexican murals and films are not only examples of how artwork can be used as educational tools, nor only small instances of CSP that can be used to construct a more comprehensive historical narrative. Including the study of murals and films through the lens of CSP offers any scholar the ability to see the journey of implementing CSP in educational reform. As each artist was discussed and their work alongside them, a continued element of inner tension was consistently displayed in their work. The observer witnessed contradictions between their

words and their illustrations, their intentions and their impact. The evolving journeys of each of these artists along with their work should be studied for their contribution to the historical narrative of Mexico, but also as a way for those seeking to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism to ascertain what the journey to do so may look and feel like; an ongoing internal struggle requiring artists to examine their biases, decolonize their perspectives around histories regarding their identities and accepting that the failure to do so shapes how they view the world and those in it.

Given the time constraints, not all areas applying to this research could be explored. For example, while four major films from the Golden Age were explored, many with narratives related specifically to indigenous peoples were excluded. If more time was available, I would have included Fernández's films *Maclovía* (1948) and *Enamorada* (1946) which also dialogue with indigenous and revolutionary narratives. Continuing in the area of film, analyzing the films produced and released during the Mexican Golden Age to examine their influence on legislation related to those groups depicted in films would also prove to be an interesting precipice for research. Additionally, examining the societal impact of non-indigenous actresses portraying indigenous roles, and how this hindered indigenous actresses from emerging during the time. Also absent from this work was an investigation as to whether government and societal initiatives were developed in response to the issues that filmmakers present in the films released for both the Mexican Golden Age and 21st century, their impact and their evolution.

Furthermore, if more time was allotted, a comparative study of films produced at the beginning of the fourth historical transformation, to examine the concept of social, cultural and political shortcomings in Mexico would have proven interesting. A movie of interest would be

Museo (2018) directed by Alonso Ruizpalacios which tells the story of two veterinarians who rob the National Museum of Anthropology of its Mayan, Mixtec and Zapotec priceless artefacts. While *Roma* takes place in the 1970s, *Museo* sets its narrative in the mid-1980s. An analysis on the impact of failed post-revolutionary societal initiatives and how they appear in the film's storylines would be an intriguing branch of research.

The possibilities for future research in the area of CSP, Mexican murals and film are plentiful and all can result in practical application in Latin American Studies programs as well as in teaching methodology courses. Of these applications would be guidance for scholars and educators on how to leverage the murals and films to provide a more comprehensive Latin American Studies curriculum identifying a wide range of works by artists of the time. This would entail suggestions for aiding scholars in unpacking and identifying historical narratives and indigenous representations found in murals and later replicated in films.

Lastly, leveraging CSP was not only a theory to apply to Mexican Indigenous representation in muralism and film, but could also prove to be beneficial to other cultural studies programs, particularly American History. A thought-provoking investigation about the representation of Native Americans in artistic products such as paintings, television and film its evolution throughout American History and how this can guide and inform teaching of said history would be invaluable to researchers and students in the lower and higher educational spaces. It would also serve as a way for the United States as a collective to confront the ways in which it promotes unity and equality yet ignores specific groups whose imprint on the nation is undeniable.

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ The Mexican Revolution began in response to a perfect storm of national social and economic issues. Before the 1910 Revolution, over 97% of Mexican citizens were unable to own land due to restrictive and discriminatory ownership land rights developed by previous leaders and expanded under the corrupted leadership of Porfirio Díaz; a President who saw fit to strip land belonging to Mexican citizen and sell them to wealthy buyers outside of the country. Additionally, Mexico's natural resources, specifically over 70% of its national oil reserves were owned by the Rockefellers of the United States. The lack of economic independence and internal socioeconomic and ethnic oppression became a hotbed for revolution. The Mexico Revolution of 1910 is thought to be comprised of two major phases: The Armed Phase from 1910-1920 and The Reconstruction Era from 1920-1940. The Armed Revolution began with a call to arms by Francisco Madero's "Plan of San Luis Potosí" which encouraged all Mexican citizens to rise up against then dictator Porfirio Díaz. A surge of uprisings throughout Mexico, some led by famed revolutionaries Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, Pascual Orozco and Francisco Madero led to the end of *El Porfiriato*—the reign of dictatorship held by Porfirio Díaz. Madero was elected as President in 1911 only to suffer a coup and later executed in 1913. General Victoriano Huerta, a supporter and defender of Madero, declared himself President of Mexico but later resigned in 1914 following the recognition of Venustiano Carranza as provisional President of Mexico by the United States. Three years later with the adoption of the Constitution of 1917, Mexico sought leadership that could hold up the newly outlined regulations and rights for land and human rights as well as sanctions imposed on the Catholic Church. In 1919 Álvaro Obregón announced his candidacy for President of Mexico and was later elected in 1920 following the murder of interim President Venustiano Carranza. The Armed phase of the revolution gave birth to the Reconstruction Era that spanned the years from 1920 to 1940. This time period saw a reimagining of art, culture, politics and economy within Mexico. Most notably was the educational reform that took place as a result of aggressive financial reinvestment to the educational system by President Obregón. One of his first policies entering office saw an increase of fiscal dollars in Mexico's education from 5 million to 55 million dollars. These monies lead to a National Literacy campaign which sought to improve the 16% literacy rate befalling Mexico. By the close of the Reconstruction Era, literacy had increased to over 50%. This era was also the birthplace of Mexican Muralism, a third of the three-pronged educational initiative set in motion by recently appointed Minister of Education José Vasconcelos.

² La cuarta transformación or The Fourth Transformation of Mexico was a term coined by Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador during his 2018 campaign for presidency. This was created in direct response to past terms of corruption found with the Mexican government and in attempts to renew the nation. According to Hanrahan and Aroch "the term identifies Morena's victory as inaugurating the moral re-foundation of a thoroughly corrupted state". Reflections on the Transformation in Mexico, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 28:1, 113-137.

³ "El mestizaje" has both racial and political implications. In its original definition, it refers to the racial blending of Amerindians and European cultures during the time of Spanish conquest. During the time of Jose Vasconcelos, the theorist and politician made it a cornerstone of Mexico's modern national identity tied to its social and economic development.

⁴ Marinque (2016) In her article describes Jose Vasconcelos' description of La raza cósmica as the accelerated mixing of the world's races" which will lead to the emergence of a new fifth race. The birthplace of this future cosmic race is in Latin America and specifically Mexico as the Spanish conquest contributed to the intermixing of races. "Dreaming of a Cosmic Race: José Vasconcelos and the Politics of Race in Mexico, 1920s-1930s." *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, vol.3,no.1,2016

⁵ José Vasconcelos in his essay entitled *La Raza Cósmica* defines the fifth race as the result of the fusion of races and cultures from all continents throughout the world at the hands of white men. This race represents all of those from the past and would replace the four identified racial trunks: Black, Indian, Mongol and White (Vasconcelos 3).

⁶ According to *Tendencias del cine Mexicano de los años 30*, Mexican films produced during the 1930s have been categorized into four groups of which each had distinctive themes and subjects. The first being El melodrama cabreteril (Cabaret Melodramas) and exemplified in the films *Santa* (1931) and *La mujer del puerto* (1933) featured women as either submissive wives, self-sacrificing mothers, or prostitutes, all with the ability to lead to greatness or destruction. Expresionismo a la Mexicana (Mexican Expressionism) the second type of film produced during this era with *El fantasma del convent* (1934) and *Dos monjes* (1934) serving as examples, included characteristics derived from German expressionism. This included scenes that foreshadowed unexplainable twists, a focus on the unnatural or unexpected, and anything contrary to the normal. The third category una estética de la imagen (Aesthetic Imagery) included the beautiful landscapes of the nation, the exoticism of indigenous figures, folklore and music, ancient pyramids, and religion. *¡Qué viva México!* (1979) is an exemplar of this style and contains the aforementioned characteristics. The fourth el humor artístico (Artistic Humor) saw the birth of improvisation and *Cantinflas* a character that depicted a neighborhood boy whose language is often nonsense or difficult to understand giving rise to a household term “cantinflar”; the ability to talk about universal concepts in prolonged yet humorous discourse but never really come to any conclusion.

⁷ The Mexican Secretariat of Public Education is a federal government building in which matters related to public education in Mexico are handled. It serves at the direction of the Minister of Public Education who is appointed by the sitting president.

⁸ Mexicanidad refers to the characterization of what it means to be Mexican. During the time following the 1910 revolution, the Mexican government sought to communicate a unified message about the Mexican identity or “lo mexicano” (Montfort 178). As a result, this became the focus and intention of the literary and plastic arts.

⁹ It is noted that many other muralists contributed to the Mexican muralism movement including but not limited to...However, for the scope of this research and its connection to muralism in film, the big three are the primary focus with Diego Rivera’s work being given priority. This is mainly due to its intentional replication in Sergei Eisenstein’s *¡Qué Viva México!* which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

¹⁰ El Caudillo Cultural- Cultural Commander.

¹¹ Bibliotecas populares- Public libraries.

¹² Cultura oficial- Official Culture.

¹³ Indigenism as defined by Mary K. Coffey is the resurrection and appreciation of the ancient and contemporary culture of Mexico’s indigenous populations (31).

¹⁴“El mestizaje” has both racial and political implications. In its original definition, it refers to the racial blending of Amerindians and European cultures during the time of Spanish conquest. During the time of José Vasconcelos, the theorist and politician made it a cornerstone of Mexico’s modern national identity tied to its social and economic development.

¹⁵ Porfiriato refers to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico which spanned the years from 1877-1880 and again from 1884-1911. Even while out of office, Díaz exercised his influence; handpicking his successor and then replacing him when he did not meet his expectations. Though Porfirio Díaz was known to be mestizo, that is to say a person of mixed race and heritage, his regime was synonymous with a strong hatred of anything mestizo.

¹⁶Hispanista refers to the glorification of Spanish civilizations and cultures

¹⁷ *Man, Controller of the Universe* had two iterations. The original was located in New York City, New York and the second in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico, City Mexico. The first mural, entitled *Man at a Crossroads* commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller was found to be highly offensive due to its socialists’ themes and figures, particularly Vladimir Lenin. The painting was covered and later destroyed after outrage was expressed by Rockefeller and those within the Rockefeller center. Rivera later repainted the mural in El Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico and changed its name to *Man, Controller of the Universe* (Goldman 120).

¹⁸ La Catrina is a character imagined and developed by José Posada.

¹⁹ This refers to the Manifiesto of the Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico spearheaded by David Alfaro Siqueiros and signed by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, as well as other notable artists of the time.

²⁰ Small college which included some stairwells

Chapter 2 Notes

²¹ White, James-La Guerra Cristera or La rebellion Cristera was a war waged between the Catholic church against the Mexican Revolutionary regime from 1926-1929 in response to then President Plutarco Elías Calles enforcement of anti-clerical mandates outlined in the Constitution of 1917.

²² All translations from Spanish to English are my own unless otherwise noted.

²³ Translation by Ronald Bergan.

²⁴ Banking education is a term coined by theorist Paolo Freire who is best known for his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Banking education refers to a system of learning and teaching in which the learners are akin to empty receptacles, approaching schooling as a blank slate, waiting to be filled by the knowledge a teacher supplies.

²⁵ Cine intellectual refers to the theory developed by S. Eisenstein in which viewers would be critical engaged both in thought and emotion in order to better connect with the content of the film.

²⁶ Double consciousness, as theorized by W.E.B Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, refers to a sense of always looking and measuring one's self through the eyes of others specifically through White middle-class norms and ways of being.

Chapter 3 Notes

²⁷ Mexicanidad refers to the characterization of what it means to be Mexican. During the time following the 1910 revolution, the Mexican government sought to communicate a unified message about the Mexican identity or "lo mexicano" (Montfort 178). As a result, this became the focus and intention of the literary and plastic arts.

²⁸ De la Garza summarizes this initiative as one that reappraised the value of indigenous cultures solidifying them as a place of pride in the Mexican identity, however, recognizing that these indigenous cultures and peoples were to be simultaneously incorporated or assimilated into the developing national "we" (416).

²⁹ Bonapartism as defined by Bensussan and Labica (1999) points to an era in which the political practice of governing emphasized the ideology of one class while simultaneously catering to the interests of another in relative autonomy of both classes. In relation to Mexico and the example given through *Río Escondido*, the Mexican government sent Rosaura, an everyday school teacher, to a remote village under the guise of improving their physical and social well-being of its inhabitants, when in actuality, in the eyes of the nation, Mexico's modernization was dependent on their assimilation into a homogenous national identity absent of indigenous and small village backwardness.

³⁰ Virtudes campiranas- peasant or country virtues.

³¹ Bigotones bravíos con sombrero-big bearded men with sombreros.

³² Agresivas señoritas Latinas-aggressive latina women

³³ Pureza de la tribu o raza- pureness of the tribe or race.

³⁴ Bandidaje or banditry is discussed in Chris Frazer's *Bandit Nation: A History of Outlaws and Cultural Struggle in Mexico, 1810-1920*. In it he tracks the history of banditry in Mexico and notes that fighting el bandidaje had been a focus of the nation since the turn of the 20th century. Frazer quotes the proposed reasons for banditry and crime given by the Procurador de justicia of Mexico, Emilio Álvarez, who evaluated the rise in crime in Mexico city in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Banditry and criminal behavior in Álvarez's opinion was due to a "lack of moral education among the criminal classes..." and that crime was a direct result of the "cultural backwardness of the lower classes"(Frazer 172). Of course, those belonging to the lower socioeconomic class at pre and post Mexican Revolution were mainly the rural poor of Mexico and Indigenous peoples. This directly impacted Mexico City due to the increase in migration from the outreaches of Mexico to urban centers. The belief was that poorly educated individuals who lacked the ability to form stabilized home lives, a characteristic positively associated with civility and cultured upbringing, were in closer proximity to savagery which would eventually lend itself to criminal activity and banditry (173).

Chapter 4 Notes

³⁵ Noble salvaje- Noble savage.

³⁶ Buen salvaje- Good savage.

³⁷ Victima inocente- Innocent victim.

³⁸ White gaze is a term coined by Toni Morrison birthed out of the theory of double consciousness identified by W.E.B Du Bois. Double consciousness is defined as "This sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity". The White gaze builds upon this theory adding that people of color are viewed through the lens of northern whiteness as a standard for literature, film, living and being (Paris & Alim 3). Pailey expounds on this definition, defining the White Gaze as the assumption of whiteness as a primary referent of power, prestige and progress across the world equating it with wholeness and superiority (733).

³⁹ Gayarti Spivak's post-colonial theory-based essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* discusses the ability of the subaltern, also referred to as "other" or belonging to lower working socioeconomic classes as well as minority groups be they gender or ethnically based, to speak for themselves in narratives concerning themselves (Maggio 419).

⁴⁰ Narratives regarding Indigenous people were not new and had evolved throughout literature beginning with the accounts of Cortés, Bartolomé de las Casas and Columbus. Each account varied leading to regurgitated and amplified discourses around Native Americans in fictional literature, artwork and later film. Of those narratives found within Indigenist novels of the 20th century were the trope of the victima inocente (Innocent Victim) that was poor and (Noble Savage), buen salvaje (Good Savage) which were constantly antagonized by the Church, the Bourgeoisie and the Government resulting in the tragic loss of life of an innocent Indigenous man or woman.

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ABSTRACT

**MURALS IN MOTION: MEXICAN MURALISM ON THE SILVER SCREEN AND ITS
PLACE IN CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY**

by

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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

This research focuses on Mexican Muralism as a part of an educational initiative introduced following the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Functioning as a didactic art form, the intention of the murals was to educate the masses about its history, new national identity and promising modern future. This work not only examines Mexican Muralism and its recurring themes and representation of Indigenous subjects, but also tracks the appearance of these images from mural walls to movie screens in Mexican film of the Golden age.

Using the 21st century theory developed by Django Paris and Samy Alim, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, this work asserts and finds that elements of the pedagogical theory, however small, can be traced from the Mexican Muralism movement of the 1920s to Golden Age films of the mid 20th century and finally in the 21st century where the theory is established. Previous research in this area emphasizes the transference of imagery and subject matter from wall to screen with little connection to its lasting impact in modern film nor to pedagogical theory as it relates to potential integration in Latin American Studies curriculum. The purpose of this study is to leverage the artistic products created in post-revolutionary Mexico in the form of muralism and film to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Indigenous representation and the evolution thereof in order to utilize these artforms for their original intended purpose-as didactic artforms meant to educate the public on a nation's people and history

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I was born and raised in the metro-Detroit area in Michigan. As a child, I always struggled with anything academic. My parents were inundated with phone calls and notes home with just how concerned my teachers were about my academic performance. My mother would spend every evening reteaching whatever material was taught in class and I would weep about how nothing made sense. My grades were average until junior high and I entered my first Spanish class. For the first time, I saw success in a class that others found difficult. This success transferred to my other courses and my academic career began to flourish.

Upon admittance to two major universities in Michigan, I chose Michigan State University for their robust study abroad program. In my junior year, I spent a summer in Santander, Spain learning about Spanish culture and improving my language all while taking in the sun at the beach. The beach would become my place to engage in deep thinking, to reset and to make plans for the future.

Those plans would include a second summer abroad in southern Spain during my first Master's program in Education at Wayne State University. It was through this trip, led by a very experienced professor that I experienced how culture could be enmeshed in language curriculum. After completing this degree, I continued my studies at Wayne State, earning a second Masters in Romance languages. I knew that while I had the tools to develop curriculum that centered culture, that at point in my career, my knowledge of the diaspora of the Spanish-speaking world was limited.

Another trip to the beach gave me time to consider my next steps and I applied for PhD program in Modern Languages at Wayne State University with the commitment to dive deeper in Latin American Cultural studies and use that knowledge to direct my everyday language instruction.

With the closing of my final academic chapter and some professional plans already underway, I plan to create space and dedicate time to consider my next steps at the place where all my best thinking and planning happen—the beach.

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