Indigenous people's historical background and their current participation within the
Mexican educational system and society

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ABSTRACT

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The intent of this study is to explore and analyze the historical facts that have subjugated indigenous people, their knowledge, culture and values in Mexico during the colonial period and what has been the role of education in perpetuating colonial legacies. The Spanish conquest in Mexico deeply transformed Mesoamerican civilizations by developing different methods of exploitation as well as the imposition of colonial institutions. However, colonial practices relied on complex ideological mechanisms of power that are analyzed through postcolonial theory in order to better understand how reality is socially constructed, rather than inherently assumed. Regarding education, this study portrays how education has been used to perpetuate social inequalities by excluding and marginalizing indigenous people in Mexico. In doing so, this thesis attempts to raise inquiry about social reality and the core educational issues that are at stake in developing educational policies and practices. Thus, it is expected that this study will contribute in shaping different educational avenues for social change.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a critical literature review of the historical facts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Mexico, and how those facts have affected indigenous people's participation in the current educational system and other societal institutions in Mexico. Based on this analysis, this research project also addresses educational possibilities to incorporate, preserve and promote their indigenous knowledge, language, and culture. This will lead to a better understanding of the current situation of indigenous people in Mexico and the educational options that can be established so that they might be integrated within society.

The foremost research objective is to critically understand how the main methods of colonization in early Mexico have marginalized indigenous people, and the educational possibilities to incorporate them within society. There are also important questions that subsequently surface such as:

- What were the main strategies that Spaniards used to conquer indigenous people in Mexico?

- How have indigenous people resisted and dealt with the power of the Spanish supremacy?

- What has been the role of education in colonial times until now regarding indigenous people in Mexico?

- In what way or ways do current education policies and practices perpetuate the marginalization of Mexico's indigenous people

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- How can education, based on the historical and current context of indigenous people, contribute to the recognition, promotion, and preservation of indigenous culture and communities?

The analysis of literature will be used in an attempt to explore and answer the research questions listed above. This analysis will be carried out through a postcolonial lens in order to question colonialism in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and their effects in the present indigenous people's participation within the Mexican educational system and society. However, there are also important political and educational events between the period of the Spanish contact and current times that are addressed in this study in order to better understand the current situation of indigenous people in Mexico. Regarding the postcolonial theoretical framework, it includes core issues such as the development of colonial discourse and its connections to power and knowledge, as well as the construction of ideologies and colonized subjects. It is necessary to clarify that even though hybridity and postcolonial feminism are important aspects of the postcolonial theory they will not be the focus of this study. Nevertheless, it is expected that the analysis of the literature from a postcolonial lens will contribute to a better understanding of the current situation of indigenous people in Mexico; the importance of the preservation of their knowledge, culture and languages; and the attempt to better integrate indigenous people in society and the educational system in Mexico.

Rationale

Historically, since the arrival of the Spaniards to the new world, indigenous people in Mexico have been a minority group in their own land. Consequently, Mexican indigenous people have had to adapt themselves to the rules of the dominant group,

which has lead them to unequal access and participation in the structures of society, particularly in the education system. This situation has caused other problems such as the gap between the indigenous community and the rest of society. This is a consequence of how the colonial discourse has portrayed indigenous people as inferior and subjugated group in order to maintain the power of dominant groups. Consequently, this perpetuates unequal social, economic, and political relations, leading to the threat of disappearance of indigenous knowledge and communities. However, despite ethnocide and genocide, native people have resisted the power and domination of the Spaniard since colonial times. They have struggled, and still are struggling for their human and cultural rights. This is evident in the large and diverse indigenous population and native languages in Mexico, where there are 12 million indigenous people in the entire country who constitute 13% of the total population (UNHCR, 2008).

However, it is important to specify what the term "indigenous" means in Mexico. According to the Article Two of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, "indigenous peoples... are those who are descended from populations which inhabited the present territory of the country from the beginning of colonization and preserving its own social, economic, cultural and political, or part thereof" (Legislación Federal, 2009). In other words, indigenous people are those who have survived and resisted the Spanish domination since colonial times and whose lifestyles and local political institutions portray their indigenous practices and knowledge. This definition is the base on which the term indigenous people will be used in this study. However, there are important factors such as race and class that directly influence this definition and change the way indigenous people are perceived and treated within

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Mexican society and its educational system. This relation between how indigenous people are officially described, and how they are considered on a regular basis by other groups in a better social position will be explored and analyzed in further chapters.

Also, there are many indigenous cultural practices and beliefs that are still evident in Mexican lifestyles and traditions. Nevertheless, there are social, economic and political factors that have been excluding indigenous people from Mexican society and the educational system, ignoring the precarious situation that indigenous people face on a regular basis. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the importance of the preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultures, and attempt to better integrate them within Mexican society.

Significance of Study

The reason I choose to center my attention on this specific topic is due to my personal background and experience as a Mexican. Most indigenous people live in the south of Mexico, an area where I have spent most of my life, sharing their culture, knowledge and language. However, I have noted that they are not only poor people but they are also marginalized and excluded from society, and from the mainstream educational system at all levels. I therefore want to focus my study on this topic to gain insights to develop future educational programs for indigenous people in Mexico. The goal is not only to increase awareness about the importance of indigenous people and what they represent within Mexican society, but also to start educational and social change by providing them equal access to education, and on a wider scale participation in society's various institutions. In doing so, we can contribute to the respect, promotion and preservation of their knowledge, language and identity as indigenous people.

Theoretical Considerations

This study draws on postcolonial perspectives which basically deal with cultural and national identity after the colonial rule that has placed indigenous people in a subjugated position. Postcolonial studies carry "implicit expectation that, through the exposure to new literature and cultures and challenges to hegemonic assumptions and power structures, lives would be made better" (King, 2003, p. 58). More specifically, this literature review will utilize key issues of post-colonialism such as the attempt of the colonizers to homogenize indigenous people by using different ideologies and practices that started the local subjugation of native people. Another key issue is the use of the colonial discourse which directly influenced the construction of how colonized subjects have been portrayed and how this construction affects their social and educational participation in current times. Therefore, the literature is studied through postcolonial lens, which permits the "contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, 2005, p. 16), by analyzing the interwoven connections between colonial discourse, power, and knowledge. In doing so, postcolonial perspectives can contribute to better understand and question the current situation of indigenous people in Mexico, including the marginalization of their knowledge, culture and languages as well as their low participation within the Mexican educational system and society.

Literature Review

Mexico is considered a multicultural country due to the diverse indigenous population, which consists of 62 indigenous groups with approximately 300 native languages. The most significant groups are Taraumaras, Nahuatl, Huicholes, Purepechas, Mixtecos, Zapotecos, Otomies, Totonacas and Mayas, which constitute the 13% of the

total population (UNHCR, 2008). However, the number of indigenous groups in Mexico is decreasing causing them to not only become a minority, but also vulnerable to the power of the Mexican-Spanish dominant culture. These people have been historically excluded from the Mexican educational mainstream and society. Yet, it is important to mention that this exclusion not only refers to the physical aspect but also what "being indigenous" entails, which defines them as "Indian by race, brown by color, [and] peasant by class"(Ruiz, 2008, p. 40). This description of indigenous people has been socially constructed and reconstructed since colonial times. For this reason, by using a postcolonial lens this study seeks to analyze how this social construction of being indigenous was developed through history and how this currently affect indigenous people.

Some of the major issues, which will be addressed in the thesis are the following. First of all, religion was one of the main methods that Spaniards used to conquer indigenous people by imposing Christianity as a new way of religious belief. Consequently, Christian religion was taught by colonizers which subjugated indigenous beliefs, and undermine the validity and value of native religions. Also, race and identity are key factors in influencing the subjugated social position of indigenous people in Mexico. Furthermore, native languages is another crucial issue because the standardization of the Spanish language highly affected indigenous languages in their disappearance. Finally, education, formal and informal, has played a very important role since colonization because it has been used to assimilate indigenous people by imposing the Spanish rules, ideologies and lifestyles. Therefore, these core issues will be explored and critically analyzed throughout this project research.

Religion

Western religion played a very important role during the conquest of Mexico. The Spaniards used Christianity to control native people. Their religious philosophy was "to spread the gospel throughout the world, [which] meant acceptance of its message by all the world's people...and that in turn meant the total conversion or extermination of all non-christians" (Stannard, 1992, p. 192). This religious philosophy was used to conquer indigenous people and undermine their native beliefs and ways of living. Spaniards saw natives as savages because their ideology was totally different to theirs. Native people's religious beliefs were, and still are, closely connected to nature, mythology, cosmos, and many male and female gods, which is better explored in the next chapter. On the other hand, the imposition of Christianity reduced the notion of god to a single man, disconnected human beings from nature, and developed the notion of sin, which was a strategy to maintain the Christian religion. Therefore, conquering the new world not only referred to the appropriation of its wealth and lands but also of its people by applying different mechanisms of power that helped the Spaniards to impose their religion in order to colonize native people. For this reason, it is very important to explore in depth the ways religion was used in colonial Mexico, how indigenous people reacted to the new manners of believing, and how the fusion of the Indigenous and Western beliefs is portrayed, not only by native people, but also by Mexicans, in general.

Indigenous and Western knowledge

Western knowledge was also imposed as way of conquest, which placed the indigenous knowledge as an inferior and subjugated way of knowing. Foucault (1980) defined "subjugated knowledges: a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified

as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" (p. 82). On the other hand, Western knowledge created completely different worldviews through its religion, language, and education. Furthermore, Western knowledge, especially in the academic aspect, has been based on "objectivity" which focuses on the importance of knowledge that can be evidently proven. Consequently, this lack of objectivity favours the spiritual and the holistic in indigenous knowledge which has been portrayed as primitive, simple, and static, something that only belongs to the past. However, there has been resent studies about the importance of the indigenous knowledge which can be defined as:

> an everyday rationalization that rewards individuals who live in a given locality...[that] reflects the dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives. (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 3)

In other words, this indigenous knowledge, which is usually oral and symbolic, is the way of life of indigenous people, the way they think, feel and act, especially for their connection with the land that they uphold by their traditions. Therefore, the point is to critically understand how indigenous knowledge has become historically seen as something uncommon and useless and why it is important to incorporate it within the Mexican educational system.

Race and Identity

These two issues are closely connected because one gives meaning to the other. However, what is most important to know is how both race and identity are socially and historically constructed. In the case of native people "racial boundaries established in the colonial era had reaffirmed the exclusion of non-Europeans from the high spheres of economic and political power" (Appelbaum, Macpherson, & Rosemblatt, 2003, p. 4). As

a consequence, indigenous people have become subjugated and considered as "indian by race, brown by colour, and peasant by class", which has made them vulnerable to the power of the dominant group since colonial times. Furthermore, identity is another big issue because it involves how indigenous people have been identified within a "Mestizo" society, where the color of a "mestizo" and an "indigena" is not the main concern, but how we perceive each other, how our socially constructed identity defines our values, beliefs and bias that influence the Mexican social stratification. It is also important to consider the Mexican national identity that has prioritized hegemonic values and ideologies, which have excluded indigenous people from education and society. However, it is important to notice that identity is not the main focus of this study. Rather, by analyzing the historical subjugation of indigenous people in Mexico, it can contribute to a better understanding of how indigenous identity has been socially constructed. In other words, how through the development of history, with an emphasis in the educational arena, indigenous people have been perceived and treated as an inferior race.

Native Languages

The imposition of the Spanish language was the first mechanism that the Spaniards used to colonize the new world. The standardization of the Spanish language was of great importance in order to disseminate the Catholic faith and the new laws, which despite of the indigenous resistance to Spanish supremacy, has caused the disappearance of most of indigenous languages. This was one of the consequences of the hegemonic force that started the degradation of native languages through the assimilation of the Spanish language. Unfortunately, since that time until now, in Mexico "at least 113 languages have been extinguished, other people have been assimilated and some

have floundered, generation to generation, in a cultural wasteland, their traditional values and ways of living discarded, and the ways of new culture not yet assumed" (Davidson, 1993, p. 54). Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the native languages because they are key elements to preserve indigenous knowledge, culture and personal identities. In other words, language "involves a process of socialization of language and knowledge, ways of knowing, and nonverbal and verbal communication – the core tools of indigenous knowledge and capacity with indigenous culture"(Battiste, 2008, p. 86). For this reason, it is urgent to develop educational programs that promote the learning of native languages especially among recent generations of indigenous people who are assimilating the Spanish language and forgetting their native languages.

Education

Education was a fundamental method during the colonial period in the transmission of Western religious beliefs, knowledge, the Spanish language, and values. Consequently, education became a medium to not only impose Western traditions, but also a key element to develop dominant ideologies and discourses. In current times, formal and informal education continue portraying hegemonic ways of knowing, ideologies, and values that have placed indigenous people in a subordinate position especially within the formal educational system. Flores Crespo (2007), in his article about *Ethnicity, identity, and educational achievement in Mexico*, argues that indigenous people have been excluded from formal education, especially at higher levels. He points out that national statistics and independent research show that indigenous people are often excluded from educational opportunities, and those who have had the chance to enter the national education system perform poorly in academic terms compared with the

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rest of the Mexican population (p. 36). For this reason, some educational programs have been developed in higher education that seek to support and encourage indigenous students, who usually are descendent of native people, to continue their studies. Flores-Crespo provides an example of the Academic Support Program for Indigenous People (PAEIIES) which was introduced in 2001 in 11 public Universities in Mexico, where one of its main focus is to help improve indigenous students' academic performance and encourage them to pursue further studies. (p. 334). However, Flores-Crespo and Barron (2005) carried out a survey by using a qualitative approach in order to analyze and evaluate the effects of PAEIIES. This analysis shows in one of the findings that indigenous students, after finishing their university studies prefer to stay in the city and get a good job because they could not apply in their village what they have learned (p. 135). Then, Mexican educational support for indigenous people is helping them in getting better educational and economic opportunities, however it is also subtly contributing to the slow division among indigenous communities and the rest of Mexican population. Therefore, how can an educational program contribute with the personal indigenous development and, at the same time, with the preservation of indigenous communities, culture, language, and knowledge? This is one of the challenges of this thesis to first explore and analyze the historical reasons of the current indigenous exclusion, and then seeking educational opportunities that can allow indigenous people to be incorporated within the Mexican educational system and society.

In conclusion, this study seeks to critically analyze the ways of colonization in early Mexico that have led to the social and educational exclusion of indigenous people in current times, and how education can attempt to incorporate them within Mexican

society. Postcolonial perspectives will be applied in order to question the historical, social, and educational ways of oppression that indigenous people have experienced since colonization. For this reason, the literature review described above provides a context of the historical and the current situation of indigenous people. Specifically, how some educational programs have been developed in order to promote indigenous education but, at the same time, promote the assimilation of national values and beliefs. Therefore, the goal of this study is to seek educational possibilities to incorporate, promote, and preserve indigenous culture and communities by exploring their historical background, and their current situation within a social and educational context.

Following the previous introduction, which makes up chapter one, this thesis includes four more chapters. Chapter two provides an account of the historical background of the indigenous people in Mexico. Chapter three discusses the theoretical perspective of post-colonialism of previous discussions written in the context of this framework. Chapter four explores and analyzes the role of the educational system in colonial times and currently in Mexico. Finally, chapter five develops some key issues that should be debated and analyzed in order to shape educational policies and practices in Mexico. Hence, it is expected that the content of these chapters will contribute to a better understanding of the historical context and current situation of indigenous people, and the educational avenues to incorporate them within the Mexican educational system and, at the same time, to preserve and promote their indigenous knowledge, culture, languages and values.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL SUBJUGATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN COLONIAL MEXICO

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the most outstanding historical facts that subjugated indigenous people, including their culture, religion, language, and social and political life during the colonial period in Mexico. This historical process involves different Spanish militant strategies and circumstances, such as genocide and disease, which caused a large indigenous depopulation and, subsequently, contributed to their subjugation. Furthermore, the Spaniards developed core mechanisms, such as the imposition of new economic and political administration, a new religious order as well as a system of caste, in order to subdue and oppress Mesoamerican civilizations. This chapter will contribute to a better understanding of how indigenous people have been perceived as a powerless minority group since the arrival of the Spaniards in early sixteen century and within the current Mexican society. However, it is important to highlight the traditions of Pre-Columbian civilizations in order to conduct future analysis of the impact of the Spanish conquest within the native world.

Pre-Hispanic Traditions

Ancient civilizations were very complex societies with a large variety of languages. They had a well defined and interweaving social, political, and economic structure, including an important religious philosophy shaping their lifestyle. Some of the distinguished indigenous societies at that time were the Toltec, Mexica (Aztec), Tarasco, Huastec, Totonaco, Mixtec, Zapotec and Maya, of the post-classical period, which concluded in the sixteenth century with the Spanish conquest and the establishment of the

colony (López Austin, 2002, p. 35). Their knowledge was interwoven with the notion of universe, cosmos and nature. This was embedded and portrayed in their cultural and religious practices, their political, economic and social organization as well as in their architecture and art. Their knowledge was also portrayed in their forms of communication, which involved oral tradition and a symbolic writing system.

The main method of subsistence of Mesoamerican civilizations in Mexico was based on agriculture, where the sowing of maize (corn) was their priority of production. They developed sophisticated technologies that enabled them to increase their production and deal with environmental difficulties, such as periods of drought. For example, the Maya constructed irrigation canals and reservoirs on mountainsides in order to collect rainwater that permitted additional cultivation. Also, household gardens increased food supplies and fruits that supplemented the basic consumption of maize, beans, and squash (Burkholder & Johnson, 2004, pp. 6-7). Another important example was the artificial agricultural fields called *Chinampas*, which were floating gardens developed by the Aztecs on the marshes of Lake Texcoco. They constructed canals, dikes to separate salt, freshwater systems, and aqueducts that connected the main cities (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 13). This agricultural development allowed them not only to survive but also to develop a supply system by positively benefiting from their ecological context.

Their economy was based on the exchange of products and as Knight (2002a) argues Mesoamerican exchange involved subsistence and goods that depended on ecological issues and local craft specialization. He also emphasizes that this type of commerce included two main principles, reciprocity and redistribution. Reciprocity was to the mutual exchange of desired goods. Redistribution occurred where elite groups who

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had access to the supply of goods were responsible for collecting and distributing them among their people in difficult times. Knight points out that rather than the personal accumulation of goods, the purpose of exchanging goods was a form of subsistence and biological reproduction (p. 61). This kind of trade was carried out in different open-air markets where people joined to exchange their goods such as food, clothes, animals, and furniture. However, these markets represented much more than a center of commerce; they were sites of interaction and socialization. For instance, Bernal (1973/1985) describes how Tenochtitlan, the great Aztec city, developed the most powerful market in Mexico during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. He points out that this Aztec market attracted people from different regions who came to buy, eat, sell, entertain themselves, make offerings to their gods, catch up on the news and greet friends. According to Bernal this market was the social center, the 'newspaper' of Tenochtitlan, which reported the events, the edicts and the religious festivals (p. 45). Thus, the form of commerce within Mesoamerican civilization was based on the interchange of goods that contribute to the social interactions among them, and which provided their people to have a fair economic lifestyle.

Mesoamerican civilizations also made very important contributions to the development of the Mesoamerican calendar, which is concerned with time and cosmos. The Mayan calendar, for instance, was divided into two calendars, which focused on the ritual cycle (260 days, 13 months of 20 days) and a solar system (365 days, 18 months of 20 days with 5 days at the end of the year). This calendric system was the most accurate among the Mesoamerican civilizations. Another core contribution of the Maya was in their mathematics system. It included the concept of zero and place value, which was the

beginning of the current numerical system in modern times. (Burkholder & Johnson, 2004, p.10). The Zapotecs also made important contributions, they likely originated some of the most important and widely diffused aspects of Mesoamerican culture, including hieroglyphic writing, masonry, and advanced astronomy. Indeed, Zapotec astronomers are credited with inventing the complex but highly accurate 365-day solar system (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 11).

Ancient Mesoamerican religions, which were the foundation of their civilizations and defined their lifestyle, relied on cosmos, mythology, nature and universe. Pre-Columbian civilizations believed in different male and female gods that represented water, fire, earth, heaven, war, fertility, the sun and the moon. Their religious philosophy was portrayed in their social life that included a high number of rituals, art, architecture, and everyday practices (López Austin, 2002). For instance, the Mayan religion believed that the universe originated sacred energies, which were represented in many forms, in diverse natural beings, and events according to a temporal order. They believed that the supernatural created the cosmos for a specific goal including the maintenance of their own existence as human beings. This world view was portrayed especially in the classical Mayan sculptures.(de la Garza, 2002, p. 93).

Moreover, Aztec religion included a pantheon, an abstract site of deities that were inherently considered sacred and expressions of divine quality that created the world. Aztec references of these divine forces were expressed in the Nahuatl word *teotl* which signified a sacred power manifested in mysterious places or in natural forms such as a rainstorm, a tree, a mountain or in people of high distinction (a king, an ancestor or a warrior). In the Aztec pantheon, deities organized major cult themes that included

cosmogonic creativity, fertility and regeneration, and war and sacrificial nourishment of the Sun (Carrasco, 2002, p. 20).

Taking into account the previous Mesoamerican religions, it is necessary to notice that sacrifice, including animal and human was an important aspect of Pre-Columbian societies, especially in the Aztec tradition, whose expansion of its empire included the sacrifice of its subordinates. However, sacrifice was meaningful religious rite, it was a way of veneration, a complex ritual system with a high level of energy, time and wealth that was used in the diverse festivals that contextualized the worship of gods (Carrasco, 2002, p. 27). Thus, sacrifices offered a vital energy, the spirit present in the blood of animals and human beings. More specifically, human sacrifice sought to communicate with gods in order to thank them for their benevolence. Blood was the vital cosmic energy from the gods and had to be returned to them in order to nourish their universe. The victims of sacrifice included both those who were conquered by powerful groups such as the Aztecs, and those who volunteered since it was considered a honorable action (de la Garza, 2002, pp. 149-50). Therefore, this religious tradition is highly complex that is difficult to understand in depth in these pages. However, this can provide a better idea of how Mesoamerican civilizations perceived their world and universe.

It is worthwhile to notice that before the Spanish arrival, the Aztecs were the most powerful group among Pre-Columbian civilizations who inhabited the central plateau of Mexico City. However, their empire had expanded throughout central and south Mexico. The Aztecs had a hierarchical society and a tributary system in order to maintain their economy to provide goods to their people. Nevertheless, despite the Aztec political power, common people owned the basic things such a house, food, clothes, and a canoe

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to live comfortably enough (Bernal, 1973/1985). It was in this context of social, agricultural, economical, political and religious system of indigenous societies in Mexico that the Spaniards arrived during the early sixteenth century and at the beginning of the European Conquest.

The Spanish Conquest

The Spanish conquest deeply affected the lifestyles, religions, customs, economy, and political and social life of Pre-Columbian societies. Those people experienced an intense trauma and transformation that placed them outside the new political, economic and social system imposed by the Spaniards. Europeans considered themselves as civilized people, a superior class and race with high economic and technological development, and with a religious philosophy that needed to be spread to all nations in the world. For this reason, the Spaniards' mission in the so called New World was to take possession of the native material wealth, to subdue indigenous people, and to impose their system of governance, religion, politics, economy, language and lifestyle. In doing so, the Spanish colonizers carried out different kinds of indigenous exploitation that will be explored in the following paragraphs.

First methods of subjugation

Upon the first encounter with native people in the Península de Yucatán and Veracruz in early sixteenth century, the Spaniards realized two important issues. One was the richness that characterized Mesoamerican civilizations not only for their natural environment and architecture but also for the existence of precious metals such as silver and gold. Cocker (1998) argues that the goal of the Spaniards in the so called New World was the appropriation of material resources; however, their core motivation was focused

on 'gold' that was usually portrayed in the pre-Hispanic ornaments (p. 86). Also, the Spaniards learned that the Aztecs were the most powerful social group that politically and economically dominated most of Mesoamerican civilizations at that time. Hence, in order to take control of the native wealth, the Spaniards needed to defeat the Aztec empire. Thus, the greed for gold inspired the first Spanish colonists to destroy the Aztec city, undermine its power, and exploit its people and all those who supported them.

However, during the first encounters with the Spaniards, the indigenous people treated them as important guests. The inhabitants were impressed seeing people with different appearances, and they considered them as individuals who were sent by their gods. For this reason, the natives welcomed the colonizers with food, drinks, and precious metals. Thus, when the Spaniards received these presents and later visited the great Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, they reaffirmed their mission by taking control of the indigenous wealth and people (Ruiz, 1992, p. 45).

To carry out that purpose, the Spaniards first captured the Aztecs kings in order to instil uncertainty and make people vulnerable to their control. In doing so, Cortés asked for an audience with Moctezuma, the Aztec king whose belief was that the Spaniards were people sent by his deities. However, this peaceful encounter was a Spanish strategy in order to firstly seize the Aztec king and use his authority in favor of the Spaniards. Yet, Moctezuma was finally killed, which caused instability and confusion among native the population, who tried to remove their guests (Cocker, 1998, pp. 36-37). However, the Spaniards also captured Cuauhtémoc, an Aztec priest and successor of Moctezuma. Cuauhtémoc who highly resisted the Spanish confrontations, was painfully tortured and interrogated because, in the eyes of the Spanish colonists, he was a key element in order

to discover the supposed Aztec treasure. (Knight, 2000a, p. 240). Hence, the submission of native leaders created a beneficial setting for the Spaniards to start the annihilation of native population.

It is important to note that during these militant attacks, the Spanish colonists had different advantages over native people. One was the training of animals such as horses and dogs that were brought by Hernán Cortés, who arrived to Mexico in 1519. Also, Cortés brought different kinds of weapons such as guns, muskets, arquebuses, and many different metal weapons including swords, lances, and daggers for example (Cocker 1998, pp. 34-35; Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 15). These European tools were an advantage for the colonizers because indigenous people lacked that kind of weapons, which make them vulnerable to the Spanish attacks. This technological advantage permitted the Spaniards both to kill many indigenous people and take control of the rest. However, these weapons were not only used during confrontations against native people but also to commit genocide.

There exists evidence regarding the massacres that the Spaniards carried out against the pre-Hispanic Indians. Stannard (1992) gives different accounts of Spanish exterminatory attacks and physical abuse as related by the Spaniards themselves[1]. For example, Stannard, by using Bernardino de Sahagún accounts – one of the first Christian missionaries in New Spain and witness of the cruel Spanish behavior – describes one of the acts of genocide that Aztec people experienced. This slaughter occurred within the city of Tenochtitlan where a public celebration of the feast of the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli was taking place. Here, there were nobles, priests and soldiers among

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[1]   For more information see Stannard 1992, Chapter 3: Pestilence and Genocide, pp. 57-96

other native people. This was the scene when the Spaniards, led by Cortés, were allowed

to enter for a supposed conciliation that never happened. Instead, the Spaniards

surrounded the ceremonial stage while the Aztecs were dancing, playing and singing,

unaware of the conquistadors' intentions. They thought that their celebration was being

admired, but they were ultimately attacked by the Spaniards. In the account of

Bernardino de Sahagún (cited in Stannard, 1992):

> The first Spaniards to start fighting suddenly attacked those who were
> playing the music for the singers and dancers. They chopped off their
> hands and their heads, arms, and legs and to disembowel the Indians...
> Those who reached the exits were slain by the Spaniards guarding them ...
> So great was the bloodshed that rivulets [of blood] ran through the
> courtyard like water in a heavy rain... Now that nearly all were fallen and
> dead, the Spaniards went searching for those who had climbed up the
> temple and those who had hidden among the dead, killing all those they
> found alive. (pp. 76-77)

This cruel annihilation is one of several examples that native people perished during the

Spanish 'contact' not only in central Mexico but also in other regions and countries that

experienced the Spanish conquest as well.

However, Indian population not only endured genocide but were also victims of

devastating diseases such as smallpox brought by the Europeans. Smallpox was decisive

for the Indian depopulation because of their geographical location and different lifestyle;

they were not immune to that disease. The spread of this disease was catastrophic

because it killed a lot of native people including key leaders (such as Cuitláhucac,

Moctezuma's successor). It also caused the decrease of the labor force and subsequently

affected the food supply. (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 15; Knight, 2002a, pp. 20-21).

Thus, many pre-Hispanic Indians who survived smallpox, eventually died of hunger in

about two months after the illness. During this time, Cortés started with the

reorganization of the defeated people and burned small towns in the region (Stannard, 1992, pp. 77-78). This depressing situation gave the colonizers the opportunity to take control of the main city of Tenochtitlan and subdue its people by applying new institutional mechanisms of power.

Nonetheless, there were other circumstances that allowed the Spaniards to take control of the New World such as the Indian allies. These alliances, most notably with the Tlaxcaltecs, were the result of complex political rivalries that exited among some pre-Hispanic civilizations, and from which Cortés took advantage. The Tlaxcaltecs, after having been defeated by the Spaniards, the Tlaxcaltecs saw their Spanish enemies as potential allies to fight against their traditional adversaries, the Aztecs. However, it is important to notice that while the Spanish conquest has been perceived as a core line in the history of the New World, for native people of that time the Spaniards were simply another group, even though an alien one, looking to gain political dominance in central Mexico (Ruiz, 1992, pp. 45-46; Stannard, 1992, p. 75). Thus, the Tlaxcaltecs, ignoring the real purpose the Spaniards became their allies. This caused discontent and division among native population, allowing the Spaniards to increase their army and have native translators who talked two or more native languages in order to discover the strategies of the opposition, which eventually assured their victory (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 16; Knight, 2002a, p. 10). Therefore, this period of conquest resulted in a massive decline of the native population leading to the eventual subjugation of indigenous people in Mexico.

Imposition of the new Spanish administration

After the collapse of the Aztec Empire in August of 1521, it was necessary to take

control of the main indigenous cities and start the subjugation of its people through the imposition of the Spanish administration over native people. This new form of Spanish governance embedded an economic and political system that favored the Spanish colonizers and the crown. Therefore, the Spaniards, based on their assumption of being the owners of the so called New World, developed different economic and political structures that allowed them to keep their power over the Indians by exploiting them in various forms.

This economic and political exploitation of native people was firstly carried out through slavery, including not only indigenous men but also women and children, to serve the Spanish colonists (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 83). Nevertheless, slavery was veiled under the establishment of an institutionalized form of exploitation called *encomienda*. On one hand, this new economic and political institution was an instrument of authority and control for Spanish colonists. On the other hand, it was a source of subjugation and abuse for native people. The official objective of the encomienda was the consignation of indigenous people, sometimes entire towns, to privilege Spanish colonists who became *encomenderos* in recognition of their bravery and their establishment within New Spain (Gibson, 1964, p. 58). The encomienda system demanded the colonizers their responsibility to maintain the order in the villages, to 'protect' their Indians, and to help in their religious conversion. Consequently, the Indians were demanded to pay tribute and labor, however they were legally regarded as 'free' because they were not owned as property by their encomenderos, which made a distinction between encomienda and slavery (Gibson, 1964, p. 58; Ruiz, 1992, p. 60). Instead, it was perceived as an exchange system where the colonists should protect their

assigned Indians and the Indians should repay with their labour in return.

In theory, the encomendero protected and controlled native people for the crown. Nevertheless, in practice, it was the beginning of the institutional, economic and physical exploitation of the Indians. Gibson (1964) argues that encomenderos used their Indians in all forms of manual labor, such as building, farming, mining for example, and whatever other jobs which benefited the power of the state and increased its wealth. Encomenderos imprisoned, beat, and used them as beasts of burden. In worst cases they were killed. They took control of their goods, destroyed their agriculture, and took their women, who were used as domestics and concubines while they remained useful. Encomenderos also took tribute from them, which included precious metals, grains, textiles, and many other kinds of materials that increased the colonists' wealth, including native people themselves as servants. Encomenderos, after taking tribute from them, would resell the products at highest possible prices to the Indians. Although the crown tried to control the encomienda, coercion and physical abuse were a daily practice of the encomenderos over the Indians. Thus, there was a huge gap between theory and practice that compounded the encomienda system of indigenous exploitation where the division of social classes started and where the first Spanish elite began.

The encomienda worked as a way to subdue native people and enrich the Spanish colonists, which subsequently benefited the Spanish crown. However, the extreme indigenous abuse and the parallel wave of new illnesses within New Spain caused a high level of native depopulation, which started the decline of the encomienda and allowed other ways of Spanish control over the indigenous population. These new economic and political institutions started with the *repartimiento*, a new form of coercive labor system

under direct Spanish royal control. Repartimiento ensured that "Indians were compelled to work for Spaniards on a rotation basis and at fixed wage rates" (Knight, 2002b, pp. 21-22). In other words, through the repartimiento system, indigenous people were forced to work for the crown by carrying out public works and receiving minimal payments. In doing so the Catholic Church and Spanish elite also demanded Indian labor to work for them by constructing cathedrals and monasteries for the former, and building houses and working as servants for the latter (Chance, 1978, p. 76). Thus, repartimiento was another exploitative institution that directly replaced the encomienda.

The crown also demanded the grouping of Indians in villages by arguing that they would be regulated by the crown according to their needs, which was only a subtle method to continue the indigenous exploitation (Cope, 1994, p. 3). Hence, one group of Indians, called *congregación,* formed an indigenous town, which developed into amalgamation of several additional indigenous towns called *repúblicas the indios*. This new institution was directly controlled by the crown to avoid the personal and direct opportunism of previous enconmenderos. Furthermore, the pueblos were given *ejidos* (communal land) to cultivate. However, these royal decisions were far from being a fact of social justice. Instead, the crown wanted to place their vassals under their power to directly profit from their tribute, which was changed into cash (Ruiz, 1992, p. 64). In other words, the Spanish crown segregated native people and assigned land to them as an easier mechanism to control them and receive their desired tribute. Thus, it was the crown that dictated the political and economic life of New Spain at that moment.

This was the scene of the Indian people in early colonial period. However, because indigenous people were arduously cultivating their lands to pay tribute, it

reinstated the importance of the agricultural development in favor of the Spaniards. For this reason, a more effective economic and political structure arose during the late seventeenth century called the *hacienda*. This colonial institution became the principle method of production to serve the Spanish elite. The hacienda allowed the Spanish colonists to become wealthy farmers through the accumulation of large extensions of land. This caused awful consequences for the Indian population who became 'agricultural workers' and continued the process of exploitation. Firstly, the land accumulation resulted in the loss of land for many indigenous people. In this sense, the hacienda was a monopolized mechanism of production, favoring Spanish economic and political power. Secondly, native people were forced to labor long working days and received minimal salaries that compelled them to borrow money from the *hacendado*, the hacienda owner, in order to fulfill any basic need. This caused a continual debt that assured a permanent exploitation of indigenous people (Moreno-Toscano, 1973/1985, pp. 67-69). Therefore, after different attempts to reinforce the colonial economic and political structure in favor of the Spaniards and at expenses of indigenous exploitation, the hacienda became the reaffirmation of the Spanish power in New Spain. Furthermore, this was also the beginning of the social stratification that placed indigenous people at the bottom of the colonial society in Mexico.

Imposition of Spanish Religion

Despite the physical exploitation of indigenous people through the establishment of the economic and political Spanish system, the imposition of Christian religion was without doubt the most important colonial mechanism to subdue the inhabitants of New Spain. The Spanish mission in the New World was to Christianize native people by

spreading the gospel and, at the same time, undermining pre-Hispanic religions. For that

task, it was necessary to bring the Spanish clergy from Europe, who was divided into the

regulars and the seculars. The regulars were priests and friars, members of the highest

religious orders. The seculars were parish priests who had direct access to native people

but subject to the authority of the bishop. The first missionaries were around twelve

Franciscans who arrived in 1524, followed by twelve Dominicans in 1526, and seven

Augustinians in 1533. However, by 1559 the number of missionaries increased to 802 in

160 monasteries (Schwaller, 1996, p. 125).

During the process of the so called 'spiritual conquest'[2], it was imperative to

directly disseminate the gospel and to construct a new religious life through Catholic

sacraments. These sacraments included baptism, marriage, penance (confession),

Eucharist (communion), fasting as well as officiating masses (Nesvig, 2006 pp. 65-66).

These new rites entailed the notion of sin and evil that was framed according to the

Catholic vision. More specifically, for the Spaniards,

> Mesoamerican belief was a gross falsehood, the orientation of [native]
> society a monumental delusion. Their very gods, the symbols of what was
> most valued in their world, were not images of the divine, but of the devil,
> hideously ugly and unspeakably evil... Their priests matted locks and
> lacerated earlobes were not outward signs of submission to the sacred, but
> examples of conduct that was both meaningless and disgusting. (Cocker,
> 1998, p. 78)

Based on this negative notion of native religions, the Spanish clergy condemned native

rituals, especially sacrifices, which were awful acts in the eyes of the Spaniards.

Therefore, sacrifices and other indigenous rites were attributed to the notion of devil and

sin, and consequently, they had to be removed (León-Portilla, 1976/1990, p. 98). In other

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[2]   The term 'Spiritual Conquest' was developed by Robert Richard in 1993 in one of his classic
histories of Mexico. See Moreno-Toscano, 1973/1985, p. 61.

words, this persuasive method entailed the idea that native people did not reserve the right to become Christians because of their barbarian lifestyle unless they refuted their former beliefs and accepted Christianity. Therefore, Spanish missionaries disseminated their Catholic religion as a form of salvation that liberated indigenous people from themselves. For this reason, baptism was the first main practice of conversion because "[it] was the official rite of admission to the Catholic Church" (Cleary & Steigenga, 2004, p. 6). However, confession was also a very important practice because it was perceived as a form of purification that native people had to carry out to liberate their souls from their former religious beliefs. Consequently, confession was required once a week, on special days, especially in native towns, and those who did not confess would be punished (Gibson, 1964, p. 115). Thus, the native's worldview and lifestyle were perceived by the Spaniards as barbarian and must be fixed by their gospel in order to become good Christians. In doing so, native people were considered as an uncivilized and inferior race. This led the Spaniards to conduct different acts of destruction and strategies to better impose their new Spanish religious rule.

One strategy to disseminate the gospel entailed the physical destruction of native cities that included religious symbols and other tangible evidence opposed to the Catholic faith. For this reason, the Indians were compelled to destroy most of their sacred temples and palaces as well as many of their monuments and artistic creations, calendric inscriptions, and books of paintings, which should contribute with their complete conversion (León-Portilla, 1976/1990, p. 99). Emerging from this destructive scene of pre-Hispanic architecture, new Spanish cathedrals, churches, monasteries, and convents were constructed by subjugated Indians. In fact, "many [Mesoamerican] pyramids served

as building material for the new churches that began to erected" in New Spain (MacLachlan and Rodriguez, 1980, p. 87). Essentially, replacing pre-Hispanic architecture for Spanish buildings was a powerful technique for the Spaniards to portray their domination over native people and make them vulnerable for their conversion through the Spanish authoritarianism.

This physical abuse was encouraged by the encomienda system where indigenous people were not only exploited for their labor and tribute, but also to serve the clergy who also profited from their tribute. Furthermore, the clergy took advantage of the encomienda to punish native people by arguing that 'Indians wanted to be disciplined' (Gibson, 1964, p. 118). This argument implied that Indians had to follow a new pattern of behavior where the main task was the total abandonment of native beliefs and lifestyle. This implied that indigenous individuals who did not accept the Spanish religion would be tortured with the help of the encomendero. However, despite the success of encomienda system in the exploitation of the Indians it also contributed to the native depopulation. This indigenous decline became an economic problem for the crown because it meant the decline of Indian tribute as well. For this reason, it was required to create new ways of taxation and coercive donations that directly served the clergy and members of the crown.

One new form of taxation demanded by the Catholic Church was *diezmo*, which was established during middle sixteenth century. The goal of this indigenous payment was not only to support the clergy's commodity but also the construction and maintenance of churches. Nevertheless, during the diezmo period there were different debates between the regular and the secular friars, some of them arguing that Indians

were already paying tribute through the encomienda system. Others argued that tribute was not enough for the ecclesiastical needs. For this reason, the crown decided that the encomienda tribute should be raised in order to fulfill the demands of the clergy and the church. Moreover, extra payments were also required under the notion of 'voluntary donations' called *limosnas*. This meant that some clerical services, such as the performance of Catholic sacraments, would be offered for free to the Indian population. However, it was understood that they should make donations for those services (Gibson, 1964, pp. 124-25).

The establishment of *cofradía* also worked as way of economic exploitation. Cofradía informally started during the sixteenth century but its apogee was during the seventeenth century. The cofradía was a religious regulation within Indian villages. This "was an elaborated organization of ecclesiastical insurance, maintained by regular premiums, covering Masses and remission of punishment resulting from sin, and contributing [around] twelve pesos to the largest single expense that many Indians ever incurred... the Christian funeral" (Gibson, 1964, p. 129). In other words, cofradía was a kind of spiritual protection that included the Catholic funeral for the converted Indians in exchange of their payment to have this special service. Thus, the establishment of cofradías as well as other forms of coercive payments contributed not only to spread the gospel but also to enrich the members of the Catholic church. This was the beginning of the new religious order in New Spain. However, it did not assure the acceptance of the Catholic faith. Therefore, it was necessary to use other persuasive mechanisms to convert the Indians into 'good' Christians.

One of these new persuasive methods during this process to better convert Indians

was the learning of native languages. To better communicate with the majority of native population, the friars were especially required to learn Nahuatl, the Aztec language, which was the lingua franca of indigenous people during the sixteenth century. Thus, native languages were perceived as the most preferable strategy to spread the Catholic faith as this allowed the Spaniards to convert a large indigenous population. In doing so, Spanish missionaries were able to understand how native religions operated. More specifically, Bernardino de Sahagún, one of the first missionaries, compiled an encyclopedia of Aztec traditions, religion, beliefs, customs and history, which was written in Nahuatl. However, his purpose was the radical removal of native religions, knowledge and lifestyle rather than their preservation (Schwaller, 1996, p. 126). Thus, learning indigenous languages was a key element for the Spaniards to learn about native cultures and recognize their main characteristics in order to easily remove pre-columbian traditions.

However, just learning native languages was solely sufficient for the Indian conversion. This process required complementary educational tools such as the use of theater. At the beginning pantomime was used to portrayed biblical stories due to the lack of effective oral communication between Spaniards and Indians. Nonetheless, these plays were translated into native languages after these were adequately articulated. Yet, not only were these performances propagated among indigenous cities and towns but also the images of Catholic saints and religions symbols such as the cross (Schwaller, 1996, p. 127; Moreno-Toscano, 1973/1985, p. 64). In doing so, Spanish missionaries started with the saturation of Christianity within the New World as a method of indoctrination.

In their continual attempt to convert native people, the Spanish missionaries also

developed the *Christian Doctrine*, by firstly using native languages. The Christian

doctrine was a guide to inculcate indigenous people with Catholic beliefs. This included

"the seven articles of faith, the ten commandments, seven sacraments, deeds of mercy,

instructions on making the sing of cross, a sermon for those recently baptized, a brief

history of the world from creation to ascension, and two blessings to be offered before

and after the meal" (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 86). In other words, the Christian

Doctrine was another instrument of power in the process of indigenous conversion by

portraying the 'master' of the Catholic Church, which implied the subordination of native

religious traditions.

Once the Spanish missionaries mastered indigenous languages, they also found it

imperative to promote their own language. This idea was encouraged by Philip III in the

early sixteenth century who demanded education for girls in Spanish with the purpose to

prepare them for religious and secular literature. This language policy was reaffirmed by

Philip IV, and later by Charles II who both ordered that Spanish be taught to the

indigenous population, which became the responsibility of the Catholic Church in New

Spain (Hidalgo, 2006, p. 79). Thus, the promotion of Spanish language as well as other

European disciplines remained under the clerical control by using educational methods.

The imposition of the Catholic religion then demanded new ways of Spanish

instruction and the establishment of new educational and religious institutions. One of the

first schools was the Franciscan Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, where selected

native students studied Europeans traditions. The teaching of the Spanish language and

Christian theology were core components of the curriculum, which encouraged the Indian

to become a good Spaniard (Ruiz, 1992, p. 70). Because the principle objective of the

first Franciscans was to inculcate the Christian doctrine as well as Spanish values, they concentrated on the education of children, especially of young nobility Indians (Moreno-Toscano, 1973/1985). In doing so, the church expected that those native students would contribute to the regulation of their own people. For this reason, the target group was native children.

Education was not restricted to formal institutions, it was also carried out in many different religious settings such as convents, monasteries, and churches within cities as well as villages. For example, students attended monasteries operated by secular clergy in order to be instructed with the Catholic doctrine and the fundamental Spanish language and culture. Furthermore, education for girls was also necessary, being conducted within convents administrated by nuns who were also brought from Spain. In these convents, girls learned the Spanish culture including language, reading, writing, religion and domestic arts. Moreover, local churches also served as educational settings to propagate the European religion and culture promoted by local Spanish priests (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 136).

In later seventeenth century, Spanish language became a source of power and prestige promoted by the church, which demanded the writing of poetry and other Spanish literature exclusively of the Catholic domain. For example, the church demanded that liturgical villancicos (Christmas carol) and sacred lyrics would be sung only on holy days by those people who reserved the right to sing them, such as Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz, a criollo[3] woman who also performed theatrical religious pieces, dances and other spectacles for which she was paid (Hidalgo, 2006, p. 74). During this century, the

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[3]   A person who was born in New Spain but with Spanish parents

Spanish language embraced all the domains of power and prestige such as education, administration, and public correspondence for example (p. 77). In doing so, the Spanish language, under the management of the Catholic Church, became a predominant and sophisticated language that was diversified throughout the New Spain. Thus, spreading the gospel also entailed the dissemination of the Spanish language and culture through religious education.

Religious resistance

Despite many great efforts of the Spaniards to impose their Catholic religion and eradicate Mesoamerican beliefs and values, the so called 'spiritual conquest' did not succeed. This spiritual failure occurred due to different indigenous resistance, allowing the maintenance of their native beliefs and lifestyle. Indigenous people never fully grasped Christianity; instead, they used the Spanish religion in order to preserve their polytheistic universe. In other words, Native people perceived Catholic saints not as intermediaries between god and man but as a pantheon of their deities with human and non-human characteristics. The symbol of crucifixion was accepted but interpreted as an act of sacrifice by adding peculiarities of this pre-Hispanic ritual. God was admitted but as an exclusive or omnipotent deity. Hell and heaven were recognized but ascribing souls to animals and inanimate objects (Gibson, 1964, p. 100; Ruiz, 1992, p. 70). Thus Indian people did not abandon their polytheistic religion; instead, they found sites of resistance and negotiation by superficially accepting Christianity.

There is also evidence of native priests resisting the imposition of Catholicism. Their duty was to revive the religion of their ancestors in the native people, especially in those who had been already baptized. They also took the risk to propagate the pre-

Hispanic religious message among their people by arguing that nobody should become

indoctrinated and baptized. In other words, they needed to return to their former culture

and system of beliefs. They also insisted on the need to carry out their traditional rituals

including sacrifice of animals. However, their mission in disseminating ancient beliefs

caused them to be persecuted by Spanish friars, royal authorities and the new inquisitors

in New Spain, who established campaigns against them (León-Portilla, 1976/1990, pp.

72-74).

Indigenous people also resisted the imposition of the Spanish language. Despite

the efforts of the church and the crown to carry out different methods to propagate the

learning of Spanish, native people often retained their own languages. When friars

learned native languages, this allowed a site for language resistance. For instance, during

the colonial period Indian documents and public notices were written in Nahuatl by

native scribes. Thus, even though Spanish missionaries learned native languages, Indian

people were those who worked as translators required doing the services of Spanish

courts (Gibson, 1964, p. 149). Therefore, Indian people could deal with a kind of

bilingualism during this period that permitted the survival of some of their indigenous

languages.

The cofradía system also became a site of indigenous resistance because it was

designed not only for economic exploitation but also for the celebration of Spanish

religious ceremonies. In this scenario, native people were able to live without direct

subjugation and used cofradías to portray their pre-Hispanic religion and culture. For

example, during the celebrations of religious ceremonies, indigenous people introduced

traditional food and drinks like pulque, a fermented indigenous beverage as well as

performances of classical native dances. Also, in the Sierra of Oaxaca, indigenous people carried out secret and special ceremonies that included the sacrifice of turkeys, dogs, and other small animals (English-Martin, 1996, p. 207). Therefore, indigenous people used cofradías to contest Catholicism by portraying their own culture.

Resistance was also portrayed within indigenous social life, especially in rural areas where Spanish economic, political and religious imposition was weak due to geographical factors. For example, the Spanish colonial system remained unequal and precarious in some areas of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Yucatán in the southwest of Mexico due to its large mountainous regions that made it difficult for the Spaniards to infiltrate. This allowed the indigenous people of these regions to keep many elements of their Pre-Columbian life. For example, they preferred to produce and consume corn rather than wheat, they retained most of their language, way of dressing, and cooking utensils such as *metate*, a curved stone to make tortillas (Knight, 2002b, p. 116; Ruiz, 1992, p. 71). In other words, geographical issues as well as other forms of native resistance, allowed indigenous people to maintain some of their culture, language, religion, and to have the opportunity to survive as indigenous people.

Race and Social Stratification

During the colonial period especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, a mix of races developed, placing the indigenous population at the bottom of the stratified colonial society. This commenced with the establishment of the *republicas de indios* that excluded the Indians from the mainstream Spanish society but still under the power of the colonial governance. In doing so, the division of the two groups, Spanish and Indian, was established and a new social pattern emerged: the urban society for the

Spaniards and the rural for the Indians (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 197).

In the context of this division of social class, indigenous people experienced different kinds of abuse carried out by the Spaniards. For example, through the encomienda system, the Spanish colonists physically exploited indigenous people and took advantage of their tribute. Additionally, native people suffered the disappearance of much of their pre-Hispanic religion, culture and languages; and were compelled to worship the Catholic God. They also had to follow a new pattern of behavior and education according to the Spanish rule. In other words, Indian people were subdued in many different ways and placed at the bottom of the stratified colonial society because they were non-whites, and therefore an inferior race.

On the opposite side were the Spaniards, born in Spain specifically, who were in the most privileged position. They took control of the economy, politic, religion, and education in New Spain through indigenous exploitation, and subsequently, imposed the system of caste. The Spaniards were the elite, including the clergy and nobility, who enjoyed special privileges such as the exemption of personal taxes and imprisonment for debt, and immunity from judicial torture or base punishment (p. 199). They believed in the *limpieza de Sangre*, meaning to preserve their purity of bloodline and to distinguished as a superior race (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, pp. 199-200; Chance, 1978, p. 98). This unequal notion of race contributed to a social stratification that involved other vulnerable groups such as the Africans slaves.

This social division included African people who were brought from Spain as slaves due to the indigenous depopulation. African slaves were also at the bottom of the colonial society, compelled to work in agriculture and mining in New Spain to support

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the wealth of the Spanish elite (Klein, 1996, pp. 170-1). Hence, the racial panorama in New Spain started to change and now included the Spanish, the Indians, and the Blacks, which allowed the formation of other social and racial groups.

A system of caste was created from the conditions of this scenario, where people in New Spain were classified according to their proportion of Spanish blood. This social system was based on the emergent racial groups that included the Spaniards, ranked at the top, the *criollos* (Spaniards born in New Spain), the *mestizos* (Euro-Indians), *mulatos* (Euro-africans), Zambos (Afro-Indians), pure Indians and blacks ranked at the bottom (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 199). Mulatos, Zambos, Africans and Indians remained at the bottom of the colonial society. All of them were the people who subsidized the economy of New Spain. They shared a common history of exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization because they were outside of the European mainstream society, culture, and race.

The criollos, who considered themselves as Spaniards, also functioned in high levels of society. They acted according to caste and class lines. However, criollos were seen as an inferior category by original Europeans because, even though the criollos maintained their pure bloodline, they were directly influenced by the emergent hybrid Mexican society. Thus, pure Euro-Spaniards maintained that their European traditions would always be superior of those in New Spain (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 216). However, over time, this subtle inferiority did not significantly affect the criollos because they compound the closest race to the European Spanish, and who latter became part of the elite in New Spain.

On the other hand, the mestizos experienced a different situation. At the

beginning of the emergent races, marriages between Spaniards and Indians were very unusual. However, due to sexual abuse of native women it did not avoid the mix of blood. Therefore, mestizo people were illegitimate children of the Spaniards, considered as the bastards of the Spanish elite, and subsequently, discriminated by the white Spanish society (Gibson 1964, p. 144). This caused the exclusion of the mestizo society from public office and their marginalization to carry out the jobs of lower classes such as agriculture and mining. However, physical features influenced the way some mestizos were treated. For example, mestizos who physically tended to appear more Europeans were considered less inferior. In fact, in some places, mestizos were considered as more rational and responsible; they were regarded as *gente de razon* (people of reason) because the Spanish blood flowed through their veins (MacLachlan & Rodriguez, 1980, p. 217; Chance, 1978, pp. 102-3; Cope, 1994, p. 18). Thus, the mestizo people were perceived and treated according to their racial propensity to the Spanish or Indian features. Therefore, each one of these social groups played specific roles according to their race which, at the same time, determined their social class; the Euro-Spanish elite at the top, followed by the criollos, then the mestizos, and, at the lower level, the blacks, mulatos, zambos and native people.

To summarize, the subjugation, discrimination, and marginalization of indigenous people in Mexico has its roots in the process of colonization led by the Spaniards in the early sixteenth century. During this time, the Spanish colonists carried out several methods of subjugation that undermined native people and destroyed a lot of their culture, religion, language, and forms of governance. These mechanisms were not separated and independent acts to undergo pre-Hispanic civilizations, but rather

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interconnected and, in some cases, parallel events and circumstances that allowed the

Spaniards to take control of the so called New World. Genocide was one of the Spanish

acts that started the decline of indigenous population conjointly with the spread of alien

diseases such smallpox within the New World. Moreover, the development of the new

Spanish administration, such as the encomienda, repartimiento, and hacienda system,

contributed to the physical, economic and political exploitation of indigenous people.

However, the establisment of the Catholic Church was the most effective mechanism to

conquer the native world because it required subtle and coercive forms of subjugation.

For instance, it was necessary to spread the Catholic faith through its sacraments, such as

baptism, confession and marriage, while portraying native beliefs as evil and barbarian. It

was also important to destroy both tangible and intangible evidences of Mesoamerican

religions, and to develop a new religious education. Nevertheless, the Catholic religion

was superficially accepted due to the resistance of indigenous people. In doing so, they

were able survive and deal with the Spanish rule in a regular basis. Nonetheless, the

Spaniards also developed a racial system, based on their assumption of a superior and

civilized race. Within this hierarchical system the Spaniards remained at the top and

native people at the bottom. Therefore, it can be argued that the sum of these historical

facts was the beginning of both a stratified society during colonial times and the

indigenous subordination and discrimination that is still evident within the current

Mexican society.

However, how can we interpret the Spanish conquest in the so called New World?

How have these historical facts shaped the identity and the current social, economic,

political and educational situation of indigenous people in Mexico? How have these

methods of subjugation influenced the ways indigenous people and knowledge are

perceived by other people, and why have they become marginalized? Responding to

these questions requires a deep analysis that will be carried out through post-colonial lens

in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORICAL SUBJUGATION OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLE FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Indigenous people in Mexico have experienced a deep and traumatic

transformation since the conquest of the so called New World. However, this process of

transformation not only involves the historical facts themselves that subjugated

indigenous people, but also, and most important, how those facts have defined native

people as an inferior race, class, culture and knowledge. For this reason, the objective of

this chapter is to analyze and question the Spanish colonial project in Mexico as

described in the previous chapter. This analysis is carried out through the postcolonial

theoretical framework. More specifically, postcolonial theory will contribute to study the

relationship between the colonizers and the colonized by analyzing the connections

between colonial institutions, dominant discourse, power and knowledge. This analysis

will contribute to a better understanding of how and why indigenous people in Mexico

have been politically, economically, racially, and socially marginalized and oppressed

since colonial times.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is a body of knowledge that is part of the Postmodernist

opposition against the legacies of the grand dominant narratives. Postcolonial framework

questions the legacies of colonialism by analyzing local situations of those who were

once colonized since the fifteenth century. It also challenges the dominant Western ways

of thinking and discourses by arguing that, in previous colonized places, there exists a

diversity of knowledge and cultures that should be recognized. Postcolonialism also seeks

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to demonstrate that 'reality' is socially constructed rather than inherently assumed. In other words, postcolonial theory is an intellectual and cultural framework that investigates how issues of race, class, identity, knowledge, and culture has been created rather than given.

Defining Colonialism

According to the postcolonial framework, colonialism worked distinctly in different parts of the world, however, "everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history" (Loomba, 2005, p. 7). Thus, colonialism can be defined as "the temporal, systematic and opportunistic process of one country (usually European...) overtaking another country (...now called the 'Third World')" (Ghosh, Abdi, & Naseem, 2008, p. 58). In other words, colonialism was a process of exploitation, oppression, and imposition within the colonies. In Mexico, colonialism caused a very deep transformation within Mesoamerican civilizations. It profoundly altered and disrupted ancient traditions and knowledges, including their social, cultural and religious lifestyle as well as forms of governance. Nowadays, it is evident how the colonial project and its legacies have affected those who were colonized. However, during colonial process, colonialism was not perceived as a form of exploitation and appropriation, but rather it was defined as part of human development.

Postcolonial theorists have studied and analyzed both the causes and effects of colonialism. Said (1993) argues that what motivated the expansion of European empires were the profit and appropriations of new lands, but, most important the notion that native people 'should' be subjugated (p.10). In this argument, Said questions the

European's assumption as a superior and civilized nation that encouraged them to conquer other territories and subdue those people. Hence, in order to justify the conquest of the so called New World, colonialism was equated to a 'civilizing mission.' Subjugating native people meant an attempt to educate and civilize them within the Western framework. Consequently, the notion of civilizing mission developed a dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, portraying each one as rational and barbarian respectively. Dirks (1992) states that "colonialism came to be seen as ascendant and necessary... through the construction of colonial world, with its naturalized oppositions between us and them, science and barbarity, modern and traditional" (p. 8). Thus, it can be argued that colonialism, within the Western framework, was required in order to continue the progressive belief of human development from 'primitivism to modernity'.

Additionally, the European expansion embedded another justification in order to colonize not only lands but also the soul of native people by installing Christianity in the New World. Dirks also argues that "the colonial project of missionization and conversion... represented the ultimate form of conquest. To convert was to submit to God's domination and, by implication, to a host of mediating authorities, including the church and the priests" (p.16). In other words, in order to complete the colonial project in the New World and reinforce the European superiority, it was also necessary to spread the Christian Gospel through the process of missionization and conversion, which required the dissemination of diverse Christian religious practices. Therefore, the Spanish colonial project in Mexico involved the profit from the New World, a commitment to 'civilize' the 'savages,' and to convert the pagans into good Christians. In this context, the

relationship between colonizer and colonized became much more complex because the Spanish conquest in Mexico required not only evident forms of exploitation but also ideological mechanisms of power.

Colonial Institutions

During this colonial process the Spaniards perceived native people in Mexico as primitive, savage, barbarian and irrational, which began to create the economic, social, and racial boundaries between the dominant groups and subordinate ones. Mohanty (1991) highlights that "institutionally, colonial rule operated by setting up visible, rigid and hierarchical distinctions between the colonizers and the colonized" (p.17). Regarding the Spanish conquest in Mexico, these boundaries were carried out through the establishment of Spanish institutions such as the *encomienda, repartimiento, hacienda,* and Church administration. On one hand, these institutions allowed the destruction of most of Mesoamerican architecture and the physical and economic exploitation of native people. On the other hand, they privileged the Spaniards by increasing their wealth and portraying their power. In other words, colonial institutions legitimized the exploitation of native people as well as the profit and appropriation of their lands. Consequently, the native population was minimized, impoverished and physically exploited.

Colonial institutions also legitimized racial divisions, which was necessary for the Spaniards to maintain their racial superiority and power within New Spain. This task was carried out thorough the "physical and symbolic separation of races (Mohanty, 1991, p. 17) between the colonizer and colonized. For instance, the segregation of native people through the development of *republicas de indios* was a method to start the physical division between Spaniards and indigenous people. This racial division was physical

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because native people were literally excluded from the Spanish mainstream society, which, subsequently, denied them their economic, political and social rights. It was also symbolic because it embedded the idea that native people should remain physically separated from the Spaniards to avoid miscegenation. In other words, it was an attempt by the Spaniards to avoid the mix of race, preserving their white European heritage, but without losing control over their vanquished.

However, the mix of races was unavoidable among Spaniards, indigenous people and, later Blacks. For this reason, for the Spaniards to maintain their race as superior they developed a form of social organization that can be perceived within the system of caste. In doing so, the Spaniards classified native people according to their race which also determined their social position within colonial society. This classification of races allowed the Spaniards to remain at the top of colonial society while native people remained at the bottom. Therefore, colonial institutions were methods to legalize and justify the exploitation of native people and the division of races during the colonial period in Mexico in order to maintain the Spanish domination within New Spain. However, in order to better understand the practices of colonial institutions, it is necessary to highlight that these practices were not single forms of exploitation and divisions but rather they were the product of dominant Western ideologies.

Power, Knowledge and Colonial Discourses

In understanding the connections between colonial institutions and ideological mechanisms of power, it is first necessary to illustrate the interwoven relationship between knowledge, power, and colonial discourses. Firstly, power, such as that possessed by governments, does not operate from above institutions but rather it is

something that flows within society. Foucault (1994) states that "[p]ower must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth... [and] individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (p. 214). In other words, power is not vertical neither hierarchical but horizontal and reproduced by people themselves.

It is in this last notion of reproduction where we find its connections to knowledge because power reproduces knowledge. Knowledge and power can be defined as a form of how we come to understand ourselves, concepts and ideas (Brown, 2000). Thus, in order to reproduce knowledge, it is necessary to exercise power. In other words, the goals of knowledge and power are interconnected, but it is the kind of knowledge that determines the forms in which power is exercised. However, reproducing knowledge and practices of power would not be possible without a medium to connect them, and it is here where we found the key role of discourse.

Discourse is the medium through which the reproduction of knowledge and the practice of power are portrayed because discourse is what allows what can be said or what cannot be said; it is where knowledge is produced. Obeyesekere (cited in Loomba, 2005) argues that "discourse is not just a speech; it is embedded in a historical and cultural context and expressed often in a frame of a scenario or cultural performance. It is about practice: the practice of science, the practice of cannibalism. Insofar as the discourse evolves it begins to affect the practice" (p. 90). In other words, in order to disseminate power and knowledge the application of discourse is necessary. Thus, the development of discourse allows the forms in which power and knowledge are depicted.

During the colonial context, power was embedded in every different discourse and practice carried out by colonizers within the Western framework. In other words, it can be argued that it was Western knowledge that demarcated practices of power through colonial discourses. For this reason, it is very important to notice that colonial institutions were part of the practice of more complex ideological mechanisms of Spanish power. These ideological forms of power need to be explored through the analysis of colonial discourse. Loomba (2005), writing on a postcolonial perspective based on a post-structuralist insight, argues that the analysis of colonial discourses is a "way of conceptualizing the interaction of culture, intellectual, economic or political processes in the formation, perpetuation and dismantling of colonialism... by examining the intersections of ideas and institutions, knowledge and power" (pp. 50-51). In other words, the analysis of colonial discourse enables us to explore how colonial economic, political, and religious institutions were closely connected to the construction of knowledge and representation of colonial subjects that, subsequently, subjugated and marginalized them. Therefore, the relationship between power, knowledge and colonial discourse is interwoven because the former were embedded in the latter. This was the scenario where Spanish colonialism took place, where indigenous knowledge was undermined, leading their degradation and disappearance; and where the construction of the colonized 'other' within the western framework emerged.

Construction of knowledge about colonial subjects

Colonial discourses were based on dominant ideologies that made native people become the 'other,' which meant being non-European, non-white, non-civilized and non-Christian. In the case of Spanish colonization in Mexico, one of the first colonial

discourses at the arrival of the Spaniards was the portrayal of indigenous people as savages, uncivilized, undeveloped, barbarian, irrational and, particularly, "cannibal" which became a justification for violent colonial practices (Hulme, 1986; Miles 1989, p. 25) such as genocide. Thus, these were the first stereotypes that the Spanish colonists made of native people, allowing the emergent dichotomy between colonists and colonized based on the construction of the 'other' within the western framework. This is also a helpful insight in understanding how the new Spanish administration was based on the ideological construction of native people, creating the scenario for maltreatment under the Spanish rule.

The development of native stereotypes was also encouraged and supported by the Catholic Church during the Spanish conquest. Native people were perceived as pagans, whose religion was equated to the devil. Their religious lifestyle was considered barbarian, especially for the performance of sacrifices. Consequently, in order to carry out the so called spiritual conquest, native people needed to be purified and rescued by using Catholic sacraments. Furthermore, Spanish missionaries developed the discourse that illnesses in the New World were an expression of divine redistribution of people, and therefore, native depopulation was needed. Additionally, if Spanish colonists carried out abuse, they did so with divine permission due to the sins committed by native people (Cocker, 1998, p. 111). Thus, the Catholic Church played an important role in the construction of knowledge regarding colonized subjects. The portrayal of native people was constructed according to what Christianity dictated what was right or wrong within the western framework through the development of colonial discourses. These were the first images and stereotypes that not only misrepresented indigenous people, but also

justified their exploitation and destruction of Ancient traditions.

However, it is important to note that "stereotyping involves a reduction of images and ideas to a simple and manageable form; rather than the simple ignorance or lack of real knowledge" (Loomba, 2005, p. 55). This means that the construction of stereotypes about native people was based on the assumptions that Spaniards made of them on their arrival in the New World, excluding or misunderstanding the complexity of Mesoamerican civilizations. Their assumptions relied on previous notions of civilization and barbarism, Christianity and heathenism, which subsequently framed native people within fixed and inferior categories. Therefore, the development of stereotypes was part of the construction of knowledge about native people within the western framework, deteriorating the real identity of native people on one hand, and privileging the images of the Spaniards on the other hand.

In doing so, the construction of knowledge about native people in Mexico through stereotyping permitted the Spaniards to practice their power through their different ways of colonial administration. However, stereotyping is something that demarcates people's identity and creates the scenario whereby future generations can maintain these negative assumptions. Hence, stereotypes are not only the misrepresentation of native people but a form "to perpetuate artificial sense of difference between 'self' and 'other'" (Gilman, 1985, p. 18). This can be evident through the history of indigenous people in Mexico who are still categorized as inferior. Regarding indigenous knowledge, it was perceived and described as backward and primitive since the images of indigenous people within the western thought implied the notion that indigenous people and knowledge were incapable to contribute to the development of humans beings. Subsequently, indigenous knowledge

and people were perceived as something that needed to be improved by learning western traditions. For this reason, it is very important to know that stereotyping is a mechanism that is (mis)represented into fixed categories, allowing the scenario for the development of other kinds of misrepresentations, such as race.

Construction of race and racism

The construction of race and racism were also portrayed through colonial discourses. During colonial times, racial discourses relied on the stereotypes about native people and on dominant ideologies that portrayed Europeans as a superior race, creating the scenario for colonizing practices such as slavery, force labor, appropriation of lands and genocide. Mohanthy (1991) highlights "interpretation and classification of racial differences was a precondition for European colonialism" (p. 42). However, race not only referred to skin color but also to its representation within the western framework. Meaning, differences between races were based on notions of civility, social behavior, habits, and religion. Loomba (2005) states that "race explained not simply people's skin color, but also their civilisational and cultural attributes" (p.57). This meant that being white was equated to being civilized, rational, educated and Christian, and all those who were non-white were backward, primitive, savage and pagan, allowing the emergence of racism since race was categorized according to what it meant within the western framework. For example, institutionally, the segregation of indigenous people during the Spanish conquest through the creation of *republica de indios* not only referred to the physical division between Spaniards and natives but also their exclusion from the mainstream society. In other words, the segregation of native people allows their marginalization and their discrimination by denying their political, economic and social

rights. Therefore, their exclusion was shaped according to racial differences to justify native segregation and exploitation. Thus, native segregation implied that "to be civilized meant to be a citizen of the city (preferably walled), as opposed to the savage (wild man) outside or the more distant barbarian roaming in the lands beyond" (Young, 1995, p. 31). The colonial practice of native segregation was a method to demarcate racial differences between the primitive native and civilized Spaniards, developing the social construction of racism within a western framework.

Racial discourses were also reinforced by the Catholic Church through the establishment of system of caste based on the Christian ideology of limpieza de sangre (purity of bloodline). This categorization described people with specific abilities according to their race and defined their role within society, both legitimating the misrepresentation of indigenous people and permitting the Spaniards to maintain their dominance in New Spain. Consequently, this also reinforced the process of conversion by institutionalizing the need for native people to accept Christianity but without losing control over them. In other words, the system of caste entailed racist ideas and practices because, while emphasizing the need for Christian conversion, it also embedded the notion that native people lack racial attributes to become complete Christians. Hence, indigenous people were depicted as pagan, implying the need to accept Christianity in order to become complete human beings. However, the colonizers considered that becoming a good Christian was not only a religious issue but also a matter of race. This meant that being a white Christian Spaniards must be differentiated from the 'other' non-white Christians. Thus, the establishment of the system of caste was an strategy for the Spaniards to maintain control upon indigenous people by privileging their status as white

and Christian race during the process of colonization.

Additionally, the notion of "purity of blood" allowed the Spaniards not only to maintain their race as superior, but also to justify the native exploitation that the Catholic Church was carrying out conjointly with the *encomienda* system, while spreading their gospel. Then, the system of caste was another mechanism to portray the Spanish power thorough racial discourses, demarcating social inequalities and racist practices. One more time, it was the western thought that developed racial differences, contributing to the emergence of racism and social stratification that is still evident in current times.

Language: Writing and Translation

Colonial discourses were also developed through language, which embedded ideological forms of Spanish power. In the case of the Spanish conquest, the power of language was specifically portrayed through the development of writing and translation within the western framework. It is important to notice that during the fourteenth and fifteenth century the development of writing and printing emerged, influencing the expansion of European imperialism. Thus, the presence of writing and printing press demarcated a new stage in imperial conquests; this was also part of the civilizing mission. In fact, writing has been described as probably the one of most important element in the colonial process because "the control over language [oral and written] by the imperial centre... by displacing native languages [or] by installing itself as 'standard' ... remains the most potent instrument of cultural control." (Ashcroft, Graffiths, & Tiffin, 2006, p. 261). In other words, the standardization of colonial language was a means to conquer the culture of previous civilizations. It was the medium through which other cultures and peoples were recreated according to the colonizer understanding. Furthermore, previous

systems of languages relied on oral and symbolic communication, and their 'lack' of writing made them incomplete and inferior according to the western framework. Thus, the implementation of western writing system was a method to supplant traditional oral languages since it was not only an important part of colonialism but also it was a bridge to pass from primitivism to civilization, which subsequently undermined indigenous forms of knowing.

In order to impose the western system of writing in the New World it was necessary to carry out a process of translation. This process was a crucial medium where colonial discourses were developed in order to portray native people and languages according to the colonizer's perspective. Young (2003) states that "to translate a text from one language to another is to transform its material identity" (p. 139). In other words, the process of translation involved the literal change of the native languages' structures by imposing the colonial language. However, translation also embedded cultural baggage that altered the meaning of words by incorporating the interpretation of certain kind of knowledge, usually the dominant knowledge. Thus, process of translation created the scenario where the translated subject became the object since the meaning became something manageable.

In the context of the Spanish colonial project, this can be evident in many different situations where native people, knowledge, and culture were interpreted as inferior and barbarian. For example, in chapter II, it was explained how Mesoamerican civilizations understood sacrifice as a sacred and meaningful rite that nourish universe so that it would allow the survival of humans beings. Sacrifice was also perceived as a form of communication with their different gods, where blood what the vital energy to do that.

However, within the western framework, sacrifice was perceived as something negative, irrational, cruel, barbarian; it was something criminal. Therefore, while the meaning of sacrifice began to change, it also started to alter the practice. In other words, based on the western notion of sacrifice, it was necessary to prohibit by punishing those people who practiced it. Hence, the form in which reality is understood according to certain kind of knowledge determined the forms in which power is exercised. Then, translating words not only change their structures but also what they mean for those who translate. For this reason it is necessary to think in depth about how different knowledges work, what are the real meanings that are embedded in the words people use, and, most important, the understanding that there exists different ways of knowing and perceiving reality.

In the context of colonialism, native culture and knowledge were interpreted by colonizers according to their western understanding. This means that translating from one language to another became a kind of superficial understanding because both colonized and colonists perceived their reality in different ways. In the case of the colonizer, translation was a mechanism to literally impose their own language, however, it also embedded their power and knowledge by representing native languages as inferior. For the colonized, translation was another method of subjugation because "not only must the slave speak the language of the master, but he must also speak from the representation the master renders of the adversary's language" (Rabasa, 1990, p. 205). In doing so, during the process of translation, the colonizer's language was portrayed as superior and complete which was considered important to improve native languages by adapting them to Spanish grammatical structures. Moreover, colonial language was not only oral but most important it was written, which involved the development of writing literature.

Consequently, native languages, culture and knowledge were (mis) represented within the western framework through colonial discourses that was necessary for the colonizer's to maintain their power. Young (2003) also argues that "as practice, translation begins as a matter of intercultural communication, but it also always involves questions of power relations, and of forms of domination" (p. 140). Therefore, translation was not only a way to communicate to indigenous people but also it was a source of power and control because the meaning of words was shaped according to colonial discourses.

Language, power and knowledge

During the process of Spanish colonization, as described in the previous chapter, Spanish missionaries learned and transcribed native languages, transcribed these languages by using Spanish grammatical structures in order to finally impose their own language. In this context, the relation between language, power and knowledge through writing and translation can be evident in different scenarios. Firstly, during the process of conversion, learning and translating native languages allowed the Spaniards to portray native culture and people according to what they believed was religiously and socially correct. For example, being a good Christian was shaped through the oral and written dissemination of sacraments, especially confession, firstly in native languages and later in Spanish. In other words, native people had to learn and understand religious concepts according to Christianity. However, the message was not only the need to understand the colonizer's religion but also the notion that Christianity was a superior religion since it entailed a form of divine salvation that was framed within the western tradition. Then, religious colonial discourses through translation embedded the power and knowledge of the Spaniards as well as a form to become civilized.

The development of Spanish language policies also portrayed the relationship between language, power and knowledge. The institutionalization and legitimation of Spanish language was the beginning of a new stage during colonial process. This new colonial law sought to disseminate the Spanish language through different educational avenues such as the emergence of schools and religious sites that worked as forms of educational institutions. However, due to the establishment of colonial institutions such as repartimiento, which allowed the segregation of indigenous people, access to education was restricted to those who lived in the city. Education became elitist; it was reserved for those who were part of the mainstream society, usually Spaniards. Therefore, the need to both speak and write in Spanish became a source of power because not all people, especially indigenous, were able to communicate in Spanish. In other words, Spanish language became powerful and sophisticated because it was the medium to learn western knowledge and culture, and the opportunity to become a better Spaniard.

Spanish language was also used to name and rename native towns, people and geographical areas as forms of control and imposition. One evident example is the use of the term "New Spain" to name the new colony and to make evident both the decadence of previous civilizations and the imposition of Spanish power. This means that "the act of naming and renaming geographical features... also constituted an act of power and appropriation" (Young, 2003, p. 141). Therefore, Spanish language became powerful and dominant, while devaluing native languages because the Spanish power was embedded within the process of writing and translation. Thus, writing became a way to maintain and perpetuate the dominance of Spanish language.

This analysis of colonial discourse is very important because it contributes to a

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better understanding of how indigenous people became the 'other'. However, this process of colonization was not only a form of marginalization and misrepresentation of indigenous people, but also it meant the deterioration of indigenous knowledge and the disappearance of many indigenous languages. In other words, "colonist production of knowledge was not a simple process. It included a clash with and a marginalization of the knowledge and belief systems of those who were conquered" (Loomba, 2005, p. 60). Thus, colonialism created the scenario where the social and ideological construction of colonial subjects emerged. Nevertheless, it also crucial to explore the forms in which indigenous people resisted Spanish colonialism, allowing them to survive as indigenous people and to preserve their knowledge and culture.

Indigenous Resistance

It has been argued that there were many different ways in which the Spanish colonial project exploited and inferiorized native people through institutional and ideological mechanisms of power. However, despite the Spanish efforts to impose their culture, knowledge, religion and language, the Spanish colonial project did not totally work as expected. This means that the power of colonialism was not total and homogenous but rather it involved a diversity of contradictions and complexities in the relationship between colonists and colonized subjects. Loomba (2005) states that "dominant ideologies are never total or monolithic, never totally successful in incorporating all individuals or subjects into their structures" (p. 60). This is a crucial insight because it means that colonial authority embedded itself a site for resistance. In other words, even though colonialism developed a dichotomy between colonized and colonizer through the development of colonial discourses, forms of social organization

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and institutional practices, the process of colonialism involved fractures, allowing colonial subjects to resist dominant discourses and ideologies. Subsequently, the colonial scenario became dynamic and diverse.

It has been argued that the goals of knowledge and power are interwoven, but it is the kind of knowledge that defined the forms in which power is exercised. However, the dissemination of power is not homogeneous, rather it is unequal and contradictory. Although it is accepted by people to some extent, it depends on local situations. In other words, the different forms of imposition of power and authority create gaps since people themselves interpret and deal with that power according to their personal and local conditions where authority takes place. Then, those gaps can be used as sites for resistance, providing the opportunity to challenge authority. Equally important is the notion that knowledge embeds resistance since it can be used to question dominant ideologies. More specifically, people might accept certain kind of knowledge and use it to deal with he imposition of authority, which allow them the opportunity of preserving their cultural practices, language and knowledge. Thus, the understanding and acceptance of dominant discourses, knowledge and power depends on how people interpret them and for what purposes they use them, which can create the room for resistance.

In the context of colonialism, complex, dynamic and contradictory relationships between colonizers and colonized subjects created cracks where authority was disrupted and challenged by colonial subjects, transforming these fissures into sites of indigenous resistance. Bhabha (1985) suggests that

> resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, not is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as difference once perceived... [but] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate

the signs of cultural difference (p. 153).

In other words, resistance was an effect that was embedded within the dissemination of colonial discourses and institutions. Theoretically, colonial power and western knowledge and culture were highly accepted during the process of and after colonialism. This is true in the sense that especially western knowledge is the dominant way of knowing in Mexico. However, due to different forms and sites of resistance during colonialism it was possible for indigenous people to maintain some of their culture, knowledge, and the possibility to survive as indigenous people.

The main forms of resistance can be perceived during the process of Catholic conversion. In this scenario, the insistence of Spanish missionaries to spread their gospel made them to carry out different practices that facilitated the Catholic conversion. For example, at the beginning of colonialism, the Catholic church asked for the help of the encomienda system, where people would be punished if they did not accept Catholic sacraments, especially baptism and confession. In doing so, native people had to do what missionaries said in order to survive. Consequently, the effect was that people did not really understand Catholicism, but rather they 'accepted' it as a form of exchange: Catholicism for their survival. This was a kind of negotiation to resist the dominance of colonial authority.

Another situation, where Christian conversion created sites of resistance, was through the process of writing and translation. During this process, meaning were altered and misrepresented, especially in translating religious concepts from Spanish to indigenous languages and vice versa. Dirks (1992) states that "even as submission through belief was totalizing, belief itself depended upon a range of understanding,

communicated and organized translation. And in translation, conversion was not always what it seem" (p. 16). This means that, even though Spanish missionaries used Spanish grammar to write and translate native languages, transforming thus their material identity, "certain aspects of indigenous culture may remain untranslatable" (Young, 2003, p. 140) as well as Spanish concepts. In other words, there were native concepts that could not be possible to translate into Spanish especially those concepts that involved complex meanings of deities, universe or death. Thus, the process of translation included cracks that were used to incorporate ancient beliefs and concepts because translating from one language to another embedded the knowledge and perception of those who are translating and, subsequently, altering and adapting the meaning.

In this context of religious conversion, indigenous people never fully grasped Christianity; instead, they used the Spanish religion in order to preserve their polytheistic universe. Native people perceived Catholic saints not as intermediaries between god and man but as a pantheon of their deities with human and non-human characteristics. The symbol of crucifixion was accepted but interpreted as an act of sacrifice by adding peculiarities of this pre-Hispanic ritual. God was admitted but as an exclusive or omnipotent deity. Hell and heaven were recognized but ascribing souls to animals and inanimate objects (Gibson, 1964, p. 100; Ruiz, 1992, p. 70). Thus, indigenous people did not abandon their polytheistic religion; instead, the effects of religious conversion allowed them to resist by superficially accepting Christianity.

Additionally, the implementation of racial colonial discourses and practices created gaps of resistance. For instance, the development of system of cast and the segregation of indigenous people through the repartimiento system was a form of

indigenous exclusion and, the same time, a site of resistance. On one hand, the exclusion of indigenous people from the mainstream colonial society was a method of subjugation where their social, political and economic rights were also denied. However, on the other hand, this colonial rule created the scenario for indigenous resistance, which was used to challenge Spanish authority, allowing native people to maintain their traditional lifestyles, perform their cultural practices and preserve their native languages. Hence, the power of colonial discourses and institutional practices were not only methods of subjugation, but also created the gaps for indigenous resistance.

Resistance was an effect of colonial authority itself because in order for the colonizer to take control of the colony and impose their culture, knowledge, religion and language, it was necessary to rely not only on force labor of the colonized, but also in his/her knowledge and skills. Propagating colonial power needed the colonized subject' help in the process of religious conversion, in translation, in his/her knowledge about pre-Hispanic social organization, politics, culture, and economy. It was in this need of the colonized that resistance was able to emerge because colonial subjects used colonial dominance to engage and adapt their traditions, beliefs, and languages. Thus, the survival of native traditions and people was a consequence of the colonial project itself, and this can be evident within the current Mexican society and culture, where native practices are part of people's lifestyle.

In conclusion, postcolonial theory demonstrates how the Spanish colonialism involved a diverse and contradictory relationship between colonizers and colonized subjects. Postcolonialism explains that colonial regime was based on ideological forms of power, which were disseminated through colonial discourses. This theory also analyzes

how knowledge, power and discourses are intrinsically related since colonial power embedded western knowledge and in order to reproduce this knowledge and power it was necessary to develop colonial discourses. These colonial discourses created stereotypes and misrepresentation of native people, they also developed the notion of superior and inferior races, which subsequently allowed the emergence of racist practices. Colonial discourses were also embedded in the development of western writing system and translation, where native languages and culture were altered and misrepresented as a form to maintain the power of western knowledge. However, postcolonial theory emphasizes that dominant ideologies and power are not total and homogenous, but rather they involve multiple processes where authority itself is challenged. During Spanish colonialism, these processes created gaps that permitted the inclusion of ancient beliefs, traditions, and lifestyles. This was a form of indigenous resistance, an effect of colonialism itself.

However, It is important to notice that although identity and culture are not the main concerns of this study, they were highly modified and transformed since colonialism. The formations of stereotypes and images of indigenous people were crucial to the success of colonialism because stereotypes have been perpetuated since colonial times. Nowadays, despite the many forms of indigenous resistance, native people are still perceived and treated as inferior and backward. Thus, their identity means being brown, poor, and uneducated; their culture is perceived as folkloric and exotic; and their knowledge as primitive and useless. Indigenous culture is accepted as an exotic part of Mexican culture, but native people are still marginalized from the mainstream society. For this reason, there exists the need to civilize and 'improve' their lifestyles. Nonetheless, how has this notion of improvement and development been produced and

reproduced through more than five centuries? There have been many economic and political mechanisms to carry out this task; however, one of the most important vehicles to disseminate colonial legacies has been education. This will be the focus of next chapter where we will explore what has been the role of education since colonialism in perpetuating the marginalization of indigenous people and knowledge.

CHAPTER IV

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN MEXICO

The purpose of this chapter is to explore and analyze the role of educational polices in perpetuating the dissemination of western thought in Mexico since Spanish colonialism. It is important to highlight how education was shaped within the western framework and how it was a method to maintain social inequality, since education has been perceived as an essential element to construct a homogenized and progressive nation. Consequently, indigenous knowledge and people, who were outside this kind of education, continue to be marginalized, discriminated and backward. However, educational policies along history have also influenced debates concerning the importance of developing new educational reforms that consider the large cultural diversity in Mexico. For this reason, this section highlights the most important educational policies that has been developed since colonialism with an emphasis in the current Mexican public education and its major changes.

Education in Colonial Mexico

Education during the colonial Spanish project played a very important role in disseminating Spanish power, culture and knowledge. Education was formally developed with the emergence of the Franciscan Colegio de Santa Cruz Tlatelolco in 1536, where some native children started to learn Spanish religion, language and culture. However, colonial education was not restricted to a formal and institutional education. Rather, it was embedded and informally portrayed in many different Spanish mechanisms to impose western traditions. For instance, colonial education began when Spaniards explored native cultures and lifestyles, by learning native languages and collecting

information. Colonial informal education was also portrayed through the use of theatre and the propagation of images of Catholic saints and religious symbols. Education also functioned in religious institutions such as monasteries, convents, and churches, where indigenous people would learn the Christian doctrine and language.

This western learning was later supported and legitimized by the Spanish Crown through language polices. Nevertheless, this Spanish decision demarcated the use of Spanish as an official language in New Spain. This meant that Spanish became a source of power and dominance because it was restricted to the Spanish elite and to domains of politics, economics, religion and culture. Hence, education was very important because only those who were well educated - being able to speak, write and read the Spanish language – could be involved in those domains and portray Spanish culture. In fact, during the last century of the colonial period, the notion that only Spanish language was capable to transmit the ideas and concepts of Christianity was developed (Mar-Molinero, 1995, p. 211). Thus, education was the medium to become a good Christian Spaniard, leading to the deterioration of indigenous knowledge, languages and culture. However, due to economic issues and various colonial discourses and practices such as native segregation, the development of native stereotypes, and racism, education was restricted to the Spanish mainstream society, excluding indigenous people from educational domains. Therefore, colonial education was an important tool for the Spaniards to disseminate colonial discourses to achieve their colonial project and eradicate Mesoamerican traditions. However, education was not only needed during colonial period in Mexico but also it was imperative to maintain and spread Spanish knowledge through generations, involving its language, culture and values.

Indigenous Education after the Independence of Mexico

While independence (1810-1821) is an important part of the Mexican history, it did not change the social, economic and political situation of indigenous people. Rather, through education, social inequalities, notion of racism, and discrimination against native people were reinforced. During this period, one of the most important events was the separation of the Church from the State, where the new government sought to develop lay education. Theoretically, the independence of Mexico would allow all people, including indigenous, the opportunity to have a better life by providing them access to politics, economics and education. In practice, it was an attempt to consolidate a national state and the development of the country through the emergence of industrialization and science. Bertely (n.d) points out that this pre-revolutionary period was assimilative because it sought to politically incorporate indigenous people in the national citizenship by eliminating the term "Indio" within official documents from 1824-1917. She also emphasizes that this century was characterized by the promotion of private property, the confiscation of church property and community, as well as the emergence of cultural and ideological conflicts. With an industrialized country, indigenous people became more marginalized and underdeveloped because, once segregated, they continued to perform their traditional ways of life, which appeared as backward to an industrialized civilization.

In the educational realm, indigenous people were forgotten and continuously marginalized. During this period, education was a key element to demarcate social inequalities through educational policies. The state found it necessary to develop a progressive education and increase its intellectual, moral and aesthetic level. In doing so,

it was necessary to create a hierarchical system of education based on geographical aspects (Bertely, n.d) . This meant that the quality of education was associated with urban and peripheral zones, defining the distribution of educational resources, which were very limited due to the small budget assigned to education. The best schools were created and well supported in the cities and surrounding towns, while schools with a lower quality were constructed in rural areas and designed for poor people, usually indigenous. The difference between these kinds of schools relied on the quality of infrastructure, budget for its maintenance, and on teachers' form of payments and salaries. Furthermore, the curriculum only considered the formal teaching of Spanish language and knowledge, which was irrelevant for the real needs of rural students (Sanchez, 2008 p. 51). Thus, education during this time was highly monolingual and monocultural since it was framed within western knowledge and culture, considering Mexico as a homogenous nation and reinforcing the invalidity and uselessness of indigenous knowledge. Once again indigenous people were excluded from education and mainstream Mexican society, which subsequently also reinforced social, cultural, economic inequalities in favor of the Spanish-Mestizo society. This was the scenario that created the conditions for the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) and the emergence of new educational mechanisms for the post-revolutionary period.

Indigenous Education in the Twentieth Century

During this century, indigenous education received much more attention from the state. However, indigenous people were considered a 'problem' in constructing a national Mexican society since the notion about indigenous people as an inferior race and primitive knowledge was clearly defined at that time. Thus, education was perceived as

the best medium to solve this problem by assimilating indigenous people into the developing westernized world. In this period, the role of education was a mechanism to construct a modern, literate and homogenous nation. To carry out this task, it was necessary to develop different educational policies to integrate indigenous people within mainstream society to achieve this idea of nationhood.

One of the first attempts to incorporate indigenous people was based on the notion that the 'Indian' should be educated because "to educate...[was] to redeem, and that, through that redemption, to educate is to govern." (Sanchez, 2008, p. 52). In other words, education was perceived as a possibility that should be focused on rural problems and people, who would redeem themselves by educational instructions in order to reach their aspirations. However, this new form of education based on people's reality was just an attempt to activate a national life where the state would provide education to officially assimilate indigenous people into the European mould. Based on this ideology, one of the educational policies was the dissemination of western culture and knowledge throughout the country. This new law was encouraged by José Vasconcelos, Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924, who was inspired by the Latin intellectualism that led to the creation of the Secretariat of Public Education in 1921. He developed the emergence of rural schools, which were highly influenced by his literary humanism. Vasconcelos also launched a mural movement and set up a program of Cultural Missions to spread education and culture to the most remote areas of Mexico dedicated to the Western canon. As part of his mandate, he distributed copies of classical texts to the poor and started a network of libraries throughout the country (Flores, 2008, p. 1; Bertely, n.d). Thus, education in the early twentieth century was an important issue because

Vasconcelos highly influenced the form in which education was conceived as the bridge to become successful and construct a national identity within the western framework. Consequently, later administrations developed this concept of education; although they did so at different levels, at the root was western knowledge, culture and values.

During the 1920s and 1940s, the indigenous culture and people were considered differently. At that time, some intellectuals started to recognize the existence of a large indigenous population and folklore. Their main purpose was to help indigenous people by increasing their economic and social lifestyle through education so that they could be better involved within society. Consequently, new educational policies and practices were developed. One of them was the creation of 'La casa del Estudiante Indígena' (The Indigenous Student House) in the capital of the republic. This was an experiment developed by Moisés Sáenz who served as Under-Secretaries of Education. This school had two purposes: the training of indigenous leaders for native communities and to demonstrate that Indians had the same intellectual capacity as 'Others' (Mestizos) (Bertely, n.d; Ruiz 2008, p. 50). Also, this school was an attempt to overcome the evolutionary distance separating them from Western civilization via education. Nonetheless, this school resulted in a problem because the few indigenous students who achieved their education in this school preferred to remain in the city. To solve this problem, this school was replaced by many rural schools where indigenous students could remain in contact with their culture.

This last notion was better developed by the president Cardenas (1934-1940). He was committed to the social and economic improvement of indigenous towns by developing the Mexican rural school. His attempt was to create an educational program

where the school was not socialized outside of life and society, but rather a form to incorporate people" (Quintanilla, n.d). Through the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), he increased the number and quality of indigenous schools and organized an Autonomous Department of Indian Affairs to better contribute to indigenous education. He also advocated for bilingualism, which led to the development of the Tarascan Project whose purpose was to create texts in Tarascan language in order to be used by Tarascan children and adults (Corona, 2008, p. 5; Garcia, 2004). This created the scenario for the need to literate indigenous people in their native languages and then teach them in Spanish, which became the responsibility of the Indigenous National Institute (INI) established in 1948 (Bertely, n.d). Therefore, Cardenas' educational policies were less evident in the dissemination of western knowledge; it was a subtle way to assimilate indigenous people by focusing on their 'needs,' which were shaped by the apparatus of the state.

Later administrations during 1950-1970 were more focused on technical education, especially in secondary education during the 1960s. Educational policies and practices were developed for urban areas, excluding again indigenous groups. Policies were based on principles of "learning by doing" and "teaching by producing" (Ministry of Public Education, 1981, cited in Gonzalez de Turner, 1987, p. 186). This required that new technical subjects were added to the curriculum and secondary schools were expanded. They were provided with laboratories, workshops, and raw materials that facilitated the technical learning. This education was necessary for the state due to the industrial development of the Mexican nation, which included the construction of new roads, hydroelectric projects and the promotion of tourism (Corona, 2008, p. 8). Thus, in

these decades, education was the medium to create a modernized nation. This emphasized the gap between the urban and the rural, and subsequently reinforced a stratified society in which indigenous people remained at the bottom, and their knowledge and values totally excluded from the educational system.

However, in the later 1970s, indigenous education was considered more seriously. Again, the need for a literate nation was emphasized, and in order to carry out this project it was imperative for all the Mexican population to learn the Spanish language. Nonetheless, in order to foster literacy in indigenous people, it was first necessary to use their native languages as an transitional method to learn Spanish language. Thus, through the creation of the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI) in 1978, a bilingual bicultural model was legitimized in primary school (Corona, 2008, p. 9; López & Viveros, 2003, p. 3). In doing so, different elements related to indigenous education were increased through the employment of bilingual teachers and the promotion of indigenous culture. The policy involved literacy in indigenous languages during the first years of primary education so that indigenous students could better use the Spanish language in later grades (García, 2004, p. 66). This policy sought to recognize and promote indigenous languages and culture through bilingual programs. However, it was based on the idea of one educational model for the entire nation, where indigenous people were seen as homogenous. Reinke (2004) states that the bilingual program was formalized and operated by the state, which only reinforced the predominance of the Spanish language above indigenous ones (p. 486). Thus, the formal bilingual education was not successful in incorporating native people but rather it was another subtle form of indigenous assimilation and the reinforcement of dominant ideologies and discourses.

Although, education during this time took into account indigenous language and culture, it was in a subordinate form because indigenous languages were only a transition to easily learn Spanish. Furthermore, since colonial times until the late 1980s, education was directly operated by the government in order to achieve national unification. Therefore, education during most of the twentieth century was used as a mechanism to portray dominant ideologies to achieve an unified and modernized Mexican nation by assimilating indigenous people. As Mar-Molinero (1995) points out, "education is always an important weapon in the business of constructing a national hegemony" (p. 214). Nevertheless, different social and political events that occurred during the 1990s, such as the decentralization of education, demarcated the beginning of a new stage for deeper debates regarding indigenous education.

Decentralization of Public Education

During the last decade of the twentieth century educational policies changed, especially since the beginning of decentralization of public education. The decentralization of education was established in 1992 and officially transferred the direct responsibility of education to local states' governments (Gershberg, 1999, p. 68). This meant that each state of the Mexican republic must take control of its local education. This new educational reform was implemented during the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). His focus was on the modernization of the country by improving the quality of education through the development of new educational polices and practices. As a consequence of this educational decentralization, the National Agreement of Basic Education Modernization (ANAM) was established, demanding the local governments to develop their own secretariats of education in each Mexican state

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(Gershberg, 1999, p. 68).

ANAM caused important modifications in the national curriculum, which was highly homogenized within the western framework. The priorities were to reinforce the national language and mathematics as this would allow more people to choose science based carriers, which was perceived as necessary to reach modernization. Moreover, it was required to restructure the teaching of history in order to adapt the national identity to the development of globalization (Corona, 2008, p. 10). Thus, the Mexican history and cultural heritage, through national textbooks, would become something mythical; legends that only belonged to the past and were depicted in museums and through popular art. Consequently, indigenous people were much more excluded, and even their history formally altered.

Theoretically the decentralization of public education demanded individual states to adapt the ANAM policy to their local contexts. However, it was not based on the need for a social change considering the cultural and racial diversity in Mexico, but rather it was based on the western thinking of development and modernization. Furthermore, decentralization was a result of external pressures where "International developing agencies (in particular the World Bank and US AID) have supported decentralization as an educational reform [which] constitutes part of a larger reform strategy often labelled neoliberalism" (Gershberg, 1999, p. 67). Therefore, decentralization of education was an important step in the Mexican public educational system. However, it did not mean a social change in the educational practice; rather it was just another modification in the administrative arena of local governments still framed within western dominant thought. Consequently, this decision raised different kinds of controversial and political debates

where indigenous people were again not considered.

This was the scenario where the uprising of Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) emerged in 1994 against a system that has marginalized and inferiorized them for hundreds of years. This was their opportunity to speak up and demand social justice within the indigenous framework. Regarding education, this indigenous movement demanded "adequate bilingual indigenous education devoid of the [dominant] ideology of the state" (Flores, cited in Reinke, 2004, p. 490), since education has been based on methods of acculturation and assimilation. For this reason, it was imperative for indigenous people to decide and shape their own education based on their knowledge, culture and historical background. Consequently, an agreement (Acuerdos de San Andrés) between Zapatistas and the federal government regarding indigenous autonomy was signed. However, this agreement was far from being translated into practice, rather this was a strategy for the government to control the situation as indigenous demands remained on paper. Nonetheless, this movement highly contributed to demonstrate the importance of local based education operated by indigenous people themselves, which strongly influenced further educational policies and practices developed in current times.

Current Indigenous Educational Policies

One of the major contributions of the indigenous movements was the need to perceive Mexico as a pluricultural nation that should be recognized. In doing so, one major change regarding indigenous education was to move from a "bilingual bicultural education" to "intercultural bilingual education (EIB)" officially established in 1997, leading to the establishment of the General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual

Education in 2001 (CGEIB, 2009). The Policies and Fundaments of the Intercultural Bilingual Education in Mexico was first published in 2004 and reprinted in 2007 by the General Coordination in charge. This document details the recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity in Mexico by developing an intercultural bilingual education for all the population, including indigenous and non-indigenous peoples at all educational levels. In doing so, this new policy perceives an intercultural education as a social project for the twentieth-first century that seeks to reconsider and reorganize the social order by recognizing the importance of the 'other' as different and with key roles within society (pp. 40-41). Moreover, this policy admits that indigenous languages have been discriminated by being considered as dialects. Hence, indigenous languages are now recognized as languages with own linguistic and grammatical structures, which imply a change from ethnocentric educational reforms within the western tradition to incorporate other knowledges, values and forms of social organization specifically of indigenous towns (pp. 48-51). In general terms, it proposes an intercultural bilingual education for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, where Spanish and indigenous languages would be learned as second languages respectively according to the local situation of each case. In monolingual Spanish contexts, a bilingual orientation will lead the valorization and importance of indigenous languages and the need to be learned according to specific contexts. Consequently, the intercultural pedagogy seeks to center on educational practices and processes that recognize the diversity of cultural expressions and knowledges (individual or collective) in the classroom as well as the improvement of pedagogical resources such as the curriculum, educational communities and materials (pp. 63-64).

As we can see, this policy has been developed considering the importance of indigenous peoples in Mexico based on the notion of cultural diversity. It can be argued that this is an important step in the history of education in Mexico and, at least theoretically, indigenous people, culture and knowledge are being considered within the public educational system. However, this policy itself involved many important challenges such as educational budgets, the development of educational programs that respect and apply the parameters of the intercultural bilingual education, as well as the commitment and participation of local governments, educational authorities and people in general. However, there is still a huge gap between this educational policy and its practice.

During the Fifth Virtual Forum regarding Education for Interculturalism, Migration, Displacement and Linguistic Rights on July 25, 2005 organized by the Latin American Forum of Educational Policies (FLAPE) there was an important focus on the development and practices of the Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB). In the case of Mexico, the general director of CGEIB Sylvia Schmelkes explained how EIB policies are disconnected from its practices. One of the main arguments stated that intercultural bilingual schools across the country are far from meeting the minimum conditions to carry out the educational policies such as the lack of infrastructure and equipment. Furthermore, it is also missing the appropriate preparation of native teachers due to the lack of teacher training programs. Additionally, intercultural bilingual education for the indigenous population implies the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. This necessarily requires the active participation of indigenous peoples, which has not occurred. Moreover, intercultural bilingual education for indigenous

people today does not transcend the level of primary education. If indigenous people want to continue their education beyond the primary, they usually have to leave their community or pursue the next level of education in a format that does not serve the goals of bilingualism. There are not options for middle and higher education to meet the needs of indigenous people. Thus, there is still a lot to debate and accomplish as the intercultural bilingual education embeds many challenges within itself since cultural diversity in Mexico is large, and the interpretation and application of this policy differs from numerous perspectives as illustrated in the following case study.

Based on an ethnographic research, Mijangos-Noh and Romero Gamboa (2008) developed a case study regarding the use of Mayan and Spanish in bilingual elementary schools in the Mayan area of the Yucatan State, Mexico. Their analysis focuses on how the Mayan and Spanish language are used within the classroom and how it is influenced by issues outside the school. They conduct a comparative usage of language communication within the teaching-learning process such as when teacher, students and parents talk among themselves; and when they read, write or translate. They argue that the relationships among children communication are mainly in the Mayan language, as are the major part of the conversations between teacher and parents. In the schooling context, the use of Mayan is higher in oral conversation. However, their interpretation portrays that the cultural context compels the teachers to use the Mayan language, but not by choice, they only use Mayan as a lingua franca to enable communication with the children. On the other hand, Mijangos-Noh and Romero Gamboa state that the Spanish language is the language used in the literacy process, and that the educational process at school is focused on Spanish literacy. Hence, even though the Mayan language is used in

order to facilitate communication, it is the Spanish language in writing and literacy that are the focus of the program. They also argue that Mayan children, under the present conditions in school, should supposedly learn Spanish as a second language and simultaneously develop their reading and writing skills; however, the pedagogical materials are not culturally related with their environment. They also highlight that teachers do not use any method to help the children to improve their writing and reading skills in Mayan language.

However, there is another important issue that occurs outside the schools, and which according to Mijangos-Noh and Romero Gamboa affects the performance of Mayan language in the classroom. Based on interviews with students they found that despite Mayan language is orally used within the community, it is considered as an inferior language and there is a need to learn Spanish. One of the interviews is cited as an example of a dialogue with a little girl of third grade:

— Why you don't speak Mayan?

— Because I don't like it.

— In your house your family speaks Maya?

— My mother speaks Maya, but she speaks to me in Spanish; also my brothers speak Maya, but they speak to me in Spanish. My mother doesn't like I speak Maya (Personal communication)

As we can observe, Mayan language use in the classroom has a subordinate position in relation to Spanish and not because it is not orally used, but rather because it is necessary for communication in learning a second language. The findings portray that the Mayan language is not just excluded of the processes of literacy, it is also denied by

some parents to their children because they perceive the risk of discrimination related to the use of Mayan language by their sons and daughters. They prefer not speak in the Mayan language to their children because it is not useful in class and it is also discriminated by the dominant culture in the Yucatecan society. Therefore, the use of certain languages also depends on how society thinks about that language, which has been shaped by dominant discourses. In this case, the need to learn Spanish is not only because it is an official language but rather because it is considered superior comparing to native languages that have been portrayed as dialects. Thus, the inequalities of language use rely on larger social context that should be scrutinized when developing an intercultural bilingual program.

This study demonstrates that the application of the intercultural bilingual education in Mexico requires a clearer conceptualization of what the EIB is and why it is necessary. Theoretically this policy attempts to promote an education based on diversity; however, there are many different ways in which it is understood by parents, students, society in general, and educational authorities themselves. It is important to notice that hegemonic and dominant ideologies regarding western education, as an important element to become successful in a modern world, are so engaged within society and it would be a hard task to incorporate counter-hegemonic ideologies. Hamel (2008) states that:

> historical discrimination and a pervasive ideology ... rise high barriers against the implementation of a curriculum that would be more appropriate, both from a pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspective, and from the standpoint of the official declared goals of language maintenance and cultural development. (p. 62)

Therefore, an educational intercultural bilingual education cannot be restricted to a pedagogical arena but rather it should be expanded to an analysis and conception of how

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to make a social change. Considering this, it is also imperative to develop an analysis of the forms in which EIB is portrayed within the classrooms. This means that, although it is expected to include indigenous culture and knowledge into the curriculum, it will not be relevant if the pedagogy is still shaped within the western framework (Zavala, n.d). Thus, the intercultural bilingual education policy must be deeply analyzed since it is still structured within western thought and controlled by federal and local governments.

It is worth to notice that educational policies in Mexico have been usually developed for basic education. However, there have also been new reforms for adult education, which has been the responsibility of the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) founded in 1981. Initially, its purpose has been to provide literacy, primary and secondary education as well as non-formal training for work to the population aged 15 or older who has not had access to education. Nevertheless, in 1995 the INEA developed new and more flexible programs to provide adult education in rural and marginalized areas. In 2001, the INEA designed the Educational Model for Life and Work (MEVyT), whose main purpose is to offer youth and adults education that is more relevant for people's needs (INEA, 2009). Regarding indigenous education, the MEVyT for indigenous population is divided in two pathways. One is the Indigenous Bilingual Integrated MEVyT (MIBI) which is addressed for people who have an intermediate or efficient level of bilingualism. Its initial phase includes simultaneous bilingual work (in native language and in Spanish) with a focus on literacy. The second pathway is the Indigenous Bilingual MEVyT with Spanish as a Second Language (MIBES). It is designed for monolingual people who are determined, by means of INEA instruments, to have little or no familiarity with Spanish. The initial phase focuses on the literacy in the

indigenous mother tongue and Spanish is introduced orally. Written Spanish is developed once the oral form is learned. In general, MIBI and MIBES foster the developing on reading and writing -in indigenous languages and Spanish- as well as in mathematics (Castro-Mussot & de Anda, 2007 pp. 129-130).

Regarding indigenous adult education, even though it seeks to apply the intercultural bilingual education (EIB), it can be perceived that it is still shaped by educational authorities within the western knowledge. For instance, the notion to provide education according to indigenous people's needs, it is first necessary to think about what these needs are and who are framing them. Thus, what it is missing is that indigenous people themselves should define what are their 'real' needs and not what other people think it is better for them. Furthermore, it is also evident how indigenous languages are still working as a transition to learn Spanish as a second language, which seems to be the last goal. Additionally, the curriculum does not consider indigenous knowledge; rather it is another method to learn western knowledge through indigenous languages.

Another important policy regarding indigenous education was the result of the debate concerning the rights and revitalization of indigenous languages based on the notion of a plurilingual and pluricultural nation. After long process of discussions and in response of international agreements such as the UN declaration of 1994-2004 as an International Decade of Indigenous Peoples (Rovillos, 1999), the General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous peoples (LGDLPI) was officially published on March 13, 2003. In general terms, this language policy is theoretically in favor of the protection, respect and equality of indigenous languages in Mexico. More specifically, it includes "the obligatory nature of bilingual schooling, the use of Mexican indigenous languages in

legal affairs, their standardization, and their usage in mass media" (Pellicer, Cifuentes, &

Herrera, 2006, p. 129). This law project seems to be a very innovative and ambitious

educational reform especially in the last two points. Pellicer et al. also emphasize that

indigenous languages in legal affairs would require a high level of writing and reading

skills within both indigenous and non-indigenous population, which will depend on the

'effectiveness' of the bilingual programs and processes of translation. Consequently, it

will not only rely on grammar structures but also on the understanding on knowledge and

culture that, as discussed in chapter III, is influenced by dominant ideologies.

Additionally, the incorporation of indigenous languages into mass media depends on

other legislations such as those of the Federal Radio and Television (p. 127) that can

obscure the application of the law since media is designed for economic purposes and the

maintenance of dominant cultures and ideologies (p. 150). It might be very soon to make

an evaluation of this language policy; however, it is important to argue that in practice

this policy may not be fully applied.

The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Towns (CDN) have

created different programs in areas such as productivity, tourism, infrastructure and

indigenous rights for example. The goal is to contribute to the development of indigenous

communities by considering their identity as indigenous peoples (CDN, 2009).

Concerning the linguistic policy, the CDN has designed some programs where the

promotion of indigenous languages is emphasized. One of them is the Support Project for

Indigenous Communities Projects (PAPCI), whose main goal is to support the

communication projects in order to promote, value and reinforce indigenous culture,

languages, as well as education, the promotion of indigenous rights and gender equity.

This project provides technological tools to carry out their goals such as audio, video, printing press and internet. Another project is the Promotion Program for Agreements Regarding Law (PPCMJ). This program seeks to contribute to generate the conditions so that indigenous communities can be able to exercise their individual and collective rights. Additionally, it promotes the access to law and the recognition of its rights through economic support. Moreover, the Release Project for Imprisoned Indigenous seeks to promote the release of indigenous people when they find themselves in risk of losing their freedom or already imprisoned. The services that this project provides are the orientation concerning how to face their legal and penal problem, agency through the CND as well as economic support when needed.

As was previously noticed, educational programs are still framed within the western framework for different reasons. In the particular case of language policy and practices, it can be perceived the huge gap between theory and practice. Although, there is a promotion for indigenous rights, it seems that most of it should be carried out in Spanish language, which necessarily requires that indigenous people should master the official language, or the need for other people to translate legal documents. Consequently, the information from one language to another may be disrupted since the process of translation implies to transform the material identity of the word. Furthermore, the law is still framed according of what the government decides what is right or illegal, which is influenced by dominant ideologies that have not been scrutinized. Consequently, the application of the law may be based on those ideologies rather than on the fact of what has been criminalized. Equally important is the form in which the notion of development is defined which, in this case, seems to portray a homogenized notion of

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what is better for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Therefore, it is imperative to go in dept about the conceptualization of these kinds of terms because on this depends how law and educational policies are portrayed.

To sum up, this chapter explored the role of education in Mexico since colonialism. During the colonial period, education was first used to spread Christianity by using native languages. Later, through the legitimation of Spanish as an official language, education became highly elitist since most of people in the colony lack the language skills to reserve the right to be educated within the western framework. The independence of Mexico meant the removal of Spanish control; however, it did not change the social situation of indigenous people. In fact, through education, it contributed to widen the gap between social classes by designing an education based on geographical issues. This meant that urban areas would have better schools than rural areas, contributing to the marginalization of indigenous people. However, the twentieth century was a period of changes in the educational realm. For the first time, indigenous people were considered as an important part of the Mexican society that must be educated in order to construct a progressive and modern country. Yet, this kind of education was very assimilative because indigenous knowledge was totally excluded, and native people and culture were still perceived as inferior. Thus, a western education would allow them to become more accepted in society, while promoting their culture as the exotic and folkloric part of the Mexican traditions. This led the developing of an important indigenous movement -EZLN- which highly influenced the ways of how further indigenous educational policies has been shaped in recent years. However, despite these new educational policies attempt to better integrate indigenous people through education,

they are still far way to reach their goals. This is because they are still influenced by western thought, which subsequently implied a series of controversies and contradictions that should be broken down such as the analysis of how and why indigenous people, knowledge and culture have become subjugated and marginalized from the mainstream society as it has been explored in this study. In doing so, it might contribute to a better understanding of the complexities that involve the design of educational policies, and its practices; rather than shaping them as a formula to fix social, racial, cultural, political and economic inequalities that have been socially constructed through centuries. This last point is the focus of the next chapter that will seek to provide some educational possibilities for indigenous people by considering their history of subjugation.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

This chapter explores some of the core educational issues that should be analyzed in framing educational policies and practices. It can be argued that what is first necessary is to start a process of decolonization in order to question social reality and the role of education itself in disseminating and perpetuating dominant ideologies. In doing so, education can be also used to create inquiry on people and seek educational avenues in order to challenge social inequality. However, it is first necessary to carry out a summary of the important topics explored and analyzed in this study.

Conclusions

As has been explored throughout this thesis, indigenous people in Mexico have experienced a deep transformation since Spanish colonialism. Consequently, indigenous people, knowledge and culture were undermined by the imposition of Western thought and practices, which are still evident in current Mexican society. During colonial time, colonizers carried out different mechanism of subjugations which not only required evident and physical forms of power, but also the imposition of dominant and religious ideologies through the development of colonial institutions. These institutions were the *encomienda, repartimiento*, the development of *republica de indios*, the *hacienda* and the system of caste, which portrayed the force and technological advancement of the Spaniards as well as their notion of superiority as human beings. This last notion of superiority was explored and analyzed through a postcolonial lens, which provided the room for a deep inquiry regarding Spanish colonialism in Mexico.

Postcolonial theory has contributed to a better understanding about how reality is socially constructed rather than inherently assumed. This theory helps us challenge the colonial process and their legacies by analyzing the complex, contradictory and diverse relationship between colonizers and colonized subjects. In this context, the role of knowledge and power was a key element in disseminating dominant ideologies through the development of colonial discourses, which were shaped within the western framework and depicted through colonial institutions. A postcolonial perspective, concerning this issue, is that knowledge and power are intrinsically tied and in order to achieve one, the other is necessary. However, it is the kind of knowledge that defines how power is exercised and, in exercising power, knowledge is reproduced where the development of dominant discourses is needed.

In the context of Spanish colonialism, this relationship was based on ideologies of civilizing and religious missions, justifying the Spanish forms of power. These ideologies led to the development of colonial discourses in favor of the colonized to maintain their control upon the colony. Colonial discourses were necessary for the development of native stereotypes that portrayed native people as primitive, backward, irrational, and inferior. Colonial discourses were also necessary in the construction of superior and inferior races, which contributed to the emergence of racist practices. The translation also embedded dominant ideologies, privileging Spanish language and western thought. Consequently, Mesoamerican peoples, their knowledge, cultures, and languages were undermined and, in many cases totally destroyed. Nevertheless, the Spanish authority embedded in itself gaps for resistance, allowing native people to maintain some of their Mesoamerican traditions and survive as indigenous people. Therefore, the Spanish

colonial project embedded deep and complex nuances that contributed to the maintenance

of Spanish colonialism in Mexico by privileging western ways of thinking and acting.

However, although the colonial period has ended in the timeline of history,

colonial legacies are still evident in current Mexican stratified society. This can be

perceived in the different social, economic, and political inequalities where indigenous

people remain at the bottom. In doing so, education has been a key instrument in the

maintenance and perpetuation of colonial legacies by privileging western thought and

culture. Since colonial time, education has been used to portray and disseminate western

knowledge and values based on the notion to construct a homogenized Mexican society

where indigenous people were invisible. However, during the twentieth century, national

educational policies started to consider the large racial and cultural diversity in the

country. During this period, formal education was shaped on the notion of indigenous

assimilation, where native languages were used as a transition to subtly impose the

national language and perpetuate western ways of thinking.

Nevertheless, the late twentieth century, due to indigenous social movements,

debates about indigenous education and self-determination emerged, demarcating a new

stage for the development of new indigenous educational policies. This led to the

establishment of the Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) for indigenous and non-

indigenous people and the General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples

(LGDLPI). In different forms, these policies seek to recognize the importance of

indigenous people and culture within the national society. Both attempt to incorporate

indigenous people within mainstream Mexican society by providing them educational

and social rights according to their needs. However, as it has been argued, there is still a

huge gap between theory and practice since these policies are still influenced by western thought in various forms. More specifically, these policies are shaped on the assumption that it is time to include indigenous people after having been marginalized for hundred of years. However, they do not address debates about the reasons and effects of colonialism and why indigenous people should be considered and incorporated within the current Mexican educational system and society. Therefore, theses policies are perceived as possible solutions regarding indigenous people and their education, but this cannot be possible without an understanding of why and what is necessary to be solved. For this reason, the purpose of this thesis is also to provide some important educational issues that should be taken into account for further debates and studies concerning indigenous education in Mexico.

Final Remarks

In this study, it can be perceived how indigenous people in Mexico have been subjugated and marginalized since the Spanish conquest, and how education has been used to maintain and perpetuate social inequalities by privileging western knowledge, culture and values. Hence, educational policies since colonial times have been designed within the western framework. Although, current educational reforms attempt to take into account indigenous people, culture and values in reshaping public education, they are still influenced by western thought. For these reasons, this section attempts to provide some educational issues that should be considered regarding indigenous education.

It can be argued that it is not only important to develop educational polices to solve social inequalities, but rather we first need to think about how these inequalities have been created in order to better understand our reality. In doing so, what is necessary

is a long process of decolonization, since it was colonialism that began the development

of a stratified society, the emergence of prejudices and racial practices that have

inferiorized indigenous people for hundreds of years in Mexico. Thus, it is first necessary

to address the importance of decolonization.

Decolonization can be defined as a process that questions and uncovers

colonialism itself and its legacies based on the notion that reality is socially constructed.

More specifically,

> decolonization entails developing a critical consciousness about the causes
> of...oppression, the distortion of history,... and the degrees to which we
> have internalized colonist ideas and practices... Decolonization is about
> empowerment – a belief that situations can be transformed. (Winona, cited
> in Wilson, 2004, p. 71)

Hence, the process of decolonization involves both indigenous and non-

indigenous people. In the case of indigenous people in Mexico, we have explored how

they have resisted Spanish domination and how they have recently become much more

active by developing indigenous social movements. However, it is important to recognize

that there are also indigenous people who have been assimilated within western thought

through different mechanisms of power and the dissemination of dominant ideologies. In

the case of non-indigenous people, it is also necessary to analyze who they are and how

they identify themselves as Mexicans. In addition, we must ask what is their position

within society and their relationship with 'others.' The core point is an attempt to install

inquiry in order to challenge national hegemony. Therefore, a process of decolonization

requires a deep analysis and questioning of ourselves as well as society.

There are various avenues that can provide the opportunity to start this process.

Regarding education, which is the focus of this thesis, some important issues are explored

since they are considered key elements that are at stake in developing an education for social change. One of these educational avenues is the notion that history matters because history is created and recreated according to people who are writing during certain times, involving the forms in which reality is perceived. For instance, in developing the literature review of chapter II, I have noticed how authors describe or explain the Spanish conquest in Mexico. Some of them try to be just descriptive in the discovery of the New World, others support the notion of the civilizing mission and Spanish achievement in the colony, and others attempt to question the colonial project. More clearly, inquiry also needs to be applied to history; how, why and by whom historical facts have been shaped. Ruiz (1992), using insights of the historian Edward Hallett Carr, points out that "[f]acts, never speak for themselves, but only when the historian calls on them; it is he[or she] who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context"(p. 11). In other words, facts are interpreted according to how 'reality' is understood, but it does not necessarily mean that it is a totalized truth. Particularly, Mexican history has been mostly shaped within western thought since it was the Spaniards who began to describe what they 'saw' in the so called New World. Since that time, Mexican history has portrayed indigenous people as inferior and with the need to be improved within the western framework. In doing so, education has played a very important role in reinforcing these dominant discourses.

As was noticed, education in Mexico has been used in different assimilative forms in the attempt to construct a homogenized nation, perpetuating social inequalities. Concerning the subject of history in the educational system, it has privileged western cannon and excluded indigenous knowledge. In recent years, indigenous history has been

emphasized; however, their culture, knowledge and values have been portrayed as something mythical, non-objective that can be only perceived in museums, archaeological sites, and folk art. Consequently, this creates a disconnection between what history portrays and what indigenous people face on a regular basis such as discrimination, racism, negative stereotypes and so on and so forth. For this reason, I consider it necessary that a process of decolonization requires the incorporation of a critical analysis of how history is constructed and portrayed within national textbooks, and how it influences the acceptable forms within society. The interpretation of history should be based and shaped on the understanding of our present (Ruiz, 1992, p.11), on how social inequalities have been constructed. This is not an attempt to create a prescription to solve the 'indigenous problem,' but rather a hope that would require a long complex process of inquiry.

Also, in understanding the importance of history and how our reality is socially constructed, this can lead to a better understanding of another important avenue of decolonization: the importance of indigenous knowledge concerning education. As has been explored, indigenous knowledge has been highly excluded, marginalized and subjugated since only western knowledge has been privileged. Consequently, indigenous knowledge has become primitive and irrelevant for a modernized society. For this reason, it is necessary to study in depth how the exclusion of indigenous knowledge from educational policies and practices directly influences the performance of indigenous students.

One of the key issues concerning indigenous knowledge relies on the dichotomy between indigenous and western knowledge. These dichotomies have been shaped within

western thought, which usually are "mind-body, nature-nurture, emotion-reason, and human-animal" (Nisbett, cited in Merriam, 2007, p. 2). Subsequently, indigenous knowledge has become useless and static since it was western thought which determined these concepts. However, the important point is not to decide which knowledge is good or bad, useful or useless, but rather, how knowledges are portrayed as 'valid' or 'non-valid' (Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000, pp. 4-5). In doing so, it will contribute to a better understanding of why indigenous knowledge has not been legitimated and, instead it has become 'non-valid.' For this reason, it is imperative to develop a deeper analysis and exploration of what indigenous knowledge means, what is its relationship with the people, and how indigenous knowledge is interwoven with their social, cultural, and religious life. Dei (et al, 2000) state that indigenous knowledge refers to:

> traditional norms and social values, as well as mental constructs that
> guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense
> of their world...seeing the individual as part of nature; respecting and
> reviving the wisdom of elders; giving consideration to the living, the dead,
> and future generations; sharing responsibility, wealth, and resources
> within community; and embracing spiritual values, traditions and practices
> reflecting connections to a higher order, to the culture, and to the earth (p.
> 6).

Thus, indigenous knowledge is far away from being something static and primitive but rather, it is complex, dynamic and continuous. This can be perceived in chapter II, where the diversity of indigenous lifestyle before the conquest was detailed. However, indigenous knowledge has survived a long period of domination; it is in the people who still have and develop this knowledge. For this reason, it is very important to understand the complexity of indigenous knowledge and how it is applied in the indigenous and non-indigenous everyday practices in Mexico. For instance, Hopper (cited in Merriam 2007) argues that indigenous knowledge "is not about woven baskets, handicraft for tourists or

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traditions dances *per se*. Rather, it is about excavating the technologies behind those practices and artifacts" (p. 10). In other words, indigenous knowledge is not the folkloric part of a subordinate culture, but rather is a non-western perspective to construct and understand reality. Therefore, education cannot be divorced from this analysis and debate; educational policies and practices should first consider in depth what is indigenous knowledge and why it is important to incorporate it within the curriculum. Without this understanding, education would fail since an assumption to 'help' indigenous people through western thought would remain at the roots.

Regarding indigenous knowledge, a very important issue is the oral tradition. Since colonialism, it has been necessary to develop a writing system for indigenous languages in order to impose western traditions and assimilate indigenous people. This is still evident in current educational policies and practices that seek to preserve native languages by applying a process of writing. This can be helpful to some extent since it is a form to express some of the indigenous knowledge. However, the transmission of indigenous knowledge from one generation to another basically relies on oral tradition. Their ways of teaching and learning hugely differ from traditional western education; indigenous knowledge is produced and reproduced through "story telling, poetry, metaphor, myth, ceremony, dreams and art; and honoring indigenous elders as cultural professor[s]" (Greveline, 2005, p. 308). Thus indigenous knowledge embraces a complexity of a non-western perspective about nature and universe, for example, this is passed to further generations by using oral languages as key elements in transmitting and preserving indigenous knowledge.

Unfortunately, since colonialism, "oral cultures are often described as 'preliterate,'

as if literacy were a form of communication more advanced on an evolutionary scale" (Castellano, 2002, p. 26), based on the western assumption of civilization and progressive human development. Nevertheless, what is at stake is the inquiry about the necessity of creating a writing system for indigenous languages, which theoretically would maintain and revitalize native languages. In the case of Spanish writing, Mar-Molinero (1995) states and asks that "Western literacy concepts are based...on a written tradition; does this make sense for languages with entirely oral traditions? Will these peoples ever have need to read or write in their non-Spanish languages?" (p.215). I would also add, what does learning western knowledge and values through the written form of native languages mean to indigenous people? Would this really contribute to the revitalization of their languages, culture, and knowledge? Or does this only perpetuate their subordination in hierarchical forms of thinking? How could indigenous students be 'successful' in a western educational system if they perceive reality and understand their world in different forms? Answering these questions would require further research and deeper debates regarding indigenous education. However, it can be argued that a western writing system should not be considered as the only method to portray ideas and concepts. Rather, it is important to explore other perspectives such as the importance of oral tradition and the development of oral literature that could be an educational possibility to incorporate indigenous knowledge within the educational arena.

To sum up, an educational social change would demand a long process of decolonization through critical thinking, analysis and self-reflection. Consequently, this would embed a better understanding of the devaluation of indigenous forms of knowledge, culture and values, which subsequently would contribute to their recognition

and revitalization. Within the educational arena, one of the key core issues is the important role of history in perpetuating social inequalities by privileging western perspectives about how historical facts have been interpreted. Thus, the analysis of history would allow us to incorporate others points of view, especially of those who have been marginalized and oppressed. This would lead to a process of inquiry about the importance of indigenous knowledge and languages not only for their people but also for non-indigenous peoples. This would also engage inquiry about the importance of oral tradition in the transmission of indigenous knowledge and language to achieve their recognition and revitalization.

Therefore, educational policies and practices should not be designed as isolated forms of solutions regarding the incorporation of indigenous people within the educational system. Rather, they should be based on the notion of decolonization, which would require a process of inquiry, questioning, analysis, self-awareness, and consciousness about how we come to understand our realities and given truths. As Raymond William (cited in Loomba, 2005, p. 60) states, we need a "process of unlearning" whereby, through education, our taken-for-granted ideologies, beliefs, and values would be questioned and broken down. This does not mean a form to devaluate western thought, but rather the awareness of its domination and the need to create room for non-western ways of thinking; the recognition that other kinds of knowledge are also valid. Thus, I believe that this century, more than the sole establishment of educational polices, would be a decolonization period, a hope for social change.

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