

**José Leiva's *El indio Juan* and the Discourses of National and Moral
Progress in El Salvador**

Brian Davisson

Mississippi State University

By 1933, the year when José Leiva's novel *El indio Juan* was published around 30 Salvadoran novels or novellas had been produced, and of those, roughly one third have subsequently been lost. It would be unsurprising to consider Leiva's novel amongst those missing texts, given its small print run of 100 copies, self-funded and distributed to friends and family members, and reinforced by the lack of critical attention paid to it subsequent to its publication. The reading of *El indio Juan* likewise suffers from problems of didacticism, as its author wrote the text more as a response to the social and political ills he observed in El Salvador than with an intention of creating a lasting piece of literary art. Yet it is here that the novel's value lies, given that it was written in the late 1920s, during a period of political stagnation in the Central American nation, which would in turn give rise to large-scale upheavals including the disastrous crash of the Salvadoran economy in 1929, the overthrow of the populist Araujo government in 1931 leading directly to the 13-year "Martinato" (the military dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez), and the 1932 *Matanza*, the massacre of indigenous Salvadoran peasants carried out in the name of eradicating communism from the nation.

The political and civic discourses surrounding the nation during this period were conditioned by major intellectual figures—the strongest voices being those of David J. Guzmán and Alberto Masferrer—who proposed competing visions for morality and progress. Leiva's text fits into an intriguing niche, given that he models his protagonist on those same ideological concerns of morality and progress, yet through a novel that questions the foundational ideas presented in the discourses of Leiva's contemporaries and forbearers, thus engaging the economic, national, and (in problematic and discursive terms) ethnic issues facing El Salvador in the late 1920s. Chief amongst these models is the grounding of civic discourse within either national or familial structures, two poles that Leiva's novel is careful to dismantle entirely, as it presents a morally upright individual with no ties to either family or nation who understands better than those within positions of political influence how best to move the nation forward. Leiva's anger and disappointment with El Salvador becomes manifest in an individual who cannot tolerate his homeland in ethical or practical terms. His novel presents a tempered tragedy that condemns not only the concept of national discourse, but also the ideological structures that would condition the ideal citizen, projects that ended in a consistent and foreseen failure, in a work that never reached any prominent level of public discourse.

José Leiva and El indio Juan

El indio Juan was the only novel written by Leiva, a lawyer, law professor, and diplomat of considerable significance in early 20th century El Salvador. He was born in 1883 in Nueva San Salvador and died in 1937, after having spent the majority of his life in political positions in his home nation and throughout Central America, Europe, and the United States, and had traveled extensively abroad, common for upper-class Salvadorans at the time (Wilson 56). He taught law at the Universidad de El Salvador, was asked to lead a revision of the nation's consular and diplomatic laws in 1924. He stepped down from his position at the university in February 1926 when the dean of the school also gave up his position (in uncertain circumstances) (*La Prensa Gráfica* 90, 145). By the end of his life, he had served as Salvadoran ambassador to Italy, Spain, Mexico, and Honduras, and aided in the failed overthrow of the presidency of Pío Romero Bosque in 1927. His involvement led to his exile to the United States (he had family in New Orleans, the likely site of his exile, though he apparently hated the United States, and New York and Washington in particular). By 1933, and possibly earlier, he had returned to El Salvador, the same year that *El indio Juan* was published

in Spain.¹ Outside of the novel, he wrote poetry (none of which has been edited) and numerous newspaper articles, many of which displayed an anti-dictatorial bent and an interest in social justice.

The minimal publication history of *El indio Juan* has in large part led to the disappearance of both novel and author from the literary histories of El Salvador. One hundred copies of the work were printed in Madrid by Espasa Calpe, with no intention of wide distribution. It is not clear that Espasa Calpe ever held rights to the novel. In consequence, the novel has survived mostly as a title, with the references made to it often based on incorrect information that has passed from literary study to literary study. In 1962, Luis Gallegos Valdés refers to it as “el obligado antecedente de la novela en El Salvador” (177), a puzzling assertion given that it was not the first novel in the nation’s history, nor in any clear way influential to subsequent authors. He likewise fails to indicate at any point that he knew the work. Ramón Luis Acevedo, in 1982, mentions the novel in his generally well-researched *La novela centroamericana*, though he claims the novel has no stated date of publication (despite the frontispiece clearly indicating “Madrid 1933”), calling into question whether he had seen a physical copy of the text. He does, however, accurately reflect the concerns of the novel in the paragraph he dedicates to it, despite situating the action in El Salvador rather than an unnamed Central American nation (130-131). Linda Craft’s *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* (1997) likewise makes a brief mention of “José Leiva’s *El indio* (n.d.) [sic] about the morally and intellectually exceptional Indian Juan, who faces much discrimination despite his accomplishments” (63), and drawing directly from Acevedo’s work. The first major study of Salvadoran literature, Juan Felipe Toruño’s *Desarrollo literario del Salvador* (1957), makes no mention of Leiva or the novel, logical given its limited distribution.

¹ The novel contains a single footnote, on pp. 215-216, that indicates that Leiva had nearly completed the novel when the police entered his home and jailed him, knowing his opposition to the current regime, though not indicating the name of the president or any date. He references his exile, and writes that he was only able to complete the novel in 1933, though by 1933 “son tan escasos los conceptos que tendrían alguna modificación, respecto a las condiciones de la tierra del pobre Juan Pérez, prefiero dejarlos como los escribí” (216). Given what is known of Leiva’s involvement in the coup attempt in December 1927, I have accepted that year as the almost certain date of his exile, and the point by which the ideological foundation for the novel had been laid down. The timeline is further confused by a reference at the beginning of the second part of the novel to the book *La extraña muerte del presidente Harding*, this being published in English in 1930 and translated to Spanish in 1931, in Barcelona (the Spanish city where his protagonist would live). It would appear most likely that the reference to this text was added after the majority of the novel had been completed, though without further information on Leiva’s life, I have no way to confirm this point.

El indio Juan treats the life of Juan Pérez, the son of an illiterate indigenous man, Pascual Pérez, from an anonymous village in the highlands of Central America,² who is taken at a young age to Spain by a Spanish prospector in order to make him an “hombre de provecho,” and to weed out the barbarousness in him. Juan excels in school, though while studying his father dies, taken advantage of by Jewish lenders, and leaving Juan an orphan. He develops a love for Spain and hatred of imperialism and of the United States in particular, falls in love with a girl of a much higher social class and thus fails to receive permission to marry her, and struggles with depression. He attempts suicide by fighting for the Spanish in Morocco, only to return a hero to his country of birth.

In the second part, upon his arrival, Juan is offered a position in government but is repulsed by the corruption he sees around him. He renounces the position and decides instead to work the land. He acts fairly to his indigenous workers, but remains highly distrustful of the Jews, refusing to sell them his crops, and instead earning considerable money by selling to an Italian company. He finds himself jailed for a short period, ostensibly for renouncing his political position, but is released and returns to his lands. He falls in love with an indigenous girl, Soledad, but after refusing to marry through the Catholic Church, she rejects him and instead decides to elope with her previous love interest, Mancho. Her father kills this other man, thinking his daughter has been taken advantage of, ultimately to be imprisoned, and Juan leaves the country by boat, for the “South,” thinking Soledad has rejected him when in fact she continues to love him.

Throughout the novel, Leiva works through discourses related to economic and moral progress, positivism, and the *sarmentino*-style binary of civilization and barbarism. These discourses are drawn in plain terms, such that it becomes quickly evident toward which national or ethnic groups Leiva felt fondness (the Spanish, the indigenous) and which he despised (the French, the North Americans, the Jews). The question of morality, however, is among the most nuanced of these when shown in

² While El Salvador is ostensibly the novel’s national context, the author very clearly resists using that label, preferring to locate the action that occurs in Central America in generic terms (in contrast to the explicit description of Barcelona, Spain). Indeed, the text opens with a veiled nod to *Don Quijote*, appropriate given the novel’s strong connection to Spain. Leiva writes: “¿El nombre del pueblo? ¡Qué más da! Enclavado y perdido en un rincón de la sierra, parecía no estar en este mundo” (11). References to Cervantes’s novel are frequent in the text, often turning don Quijote’s misfortunes around into statements of progress: “Podrá ser que algún día arremeta contra molinos de viento; pero será para que muelan mejor el trigo que, transformado en pan, aliviará muchas necesidades, muchas hambres” (19).

the light of competing Salvadoran discourses of moral progress. It is here that the racial issues that the novel has no intention of working through in fair terms give way to a rational discussion of how the moral foundation of the individual is grounded when the interests of national, familial, and racial identity compete upon that person. As such, while its treatment of racial and national identity is naïve, its use of these elements to exploit the question of moral progress is informative in its break from the greater discourses in vogue at the time.

Moral progress in early 20th century El Salvador

The discussion of progress in El Salvador, much the same as with its Central American neighbors, emerged several decades after the breakup of the Federación Centro-Americana in the mid-19th century. The great majority of the intellectual treatments of progress in the nation were written in rather explicit reference to European and North American models of the political state and its relationship to more specifically Latin American ideas of the conflict between civilization and barbarism, influenced by the writings of Sarmiento and, in their later manifestations, by the work of José Enrique Rodó. In this regard, the foundation of moral progress for El Salvador, as well as for most of the Isthmus, was rooted in writers and systems whose origins lay well outside the region.

Perhaps the most developed of these early treatments of progress was the first volume of Salvadoran historian and lawyer José Antonio Cevallos's *Recuerdos salvadoreños*, from 1891, a historical text fully indebted to ideas of travel and geography that demonstrates the influence of the writings of Sarmiento. In the work's introduction, he writes of the value of the:

elemento extranjero...á quien debemos llamar á nuestro suelo, ya para que por medio del trabajo y de las industrias útiles, contribuya al aumento de nuestra riqueza pública y privada, ya para presentarle muestras de nuestra civilización creciente, cuyo progreso esperamos se verifique de día en día, asociando la culta emigración de todas partes, a la deficiencia material e intelectual de nuestros pueblos. (10)

Much of the work's thesis, expressing a desire for immigration to El Salvador that would help to bolster the strength of its citizenry and present a stronger face to neighboring nations, is shared by similar works from this period, which often discuss

the benefits to increasing the population of the nation, whether from immigrants in general or those from specific, “civilized” nations.³

Cevallos’s text would hold an influence upon the writings of his contemporaries, in part as one of the first longer works to advance a system that united the nation’s cultural and historical identity with the ideals of progress toward a clearly stated political end. Chief among his contemporaries, though of substantially greater stature, was polymath David J. Guzmán, a medical doctor, anthropologist, politician, co-founder of the Academia de Ciencias y Bellas Letras, director of the Biblioteca Nacional and the Museo Nacional de El Salvador (the latter an institution that now carries his name), and writer of texts on topics such as education, and natural and social science. The entirety of his intellectual labor revolves around the advancement of “progress” as a means of enhancing the standing of the nation, and to this end he wrote in detail on the desire to create a working class that would increase the slow development of industry in the nation. He wrote in 1909, in an article titled “La evolución del progreso por las ciencias y las artes,” that this working class would renovate the nation to the point that:

nuestros humildes creyentes del progreso, pobres obreros que ponemos nuestro grano de arena en el edificio inmovible de la civilización, viviremos con todos los hombres al través de todos los siglos asimilando día por día ese trabajo inmenso, ese saber supremo, esas conquistas del trabajo y de la luz que constituye el capital social de la humanidad. (*Obras escogidas* 387)

Guzmán’s vision for the nation thus follows from Cevallos, in that the cosmopolitan impulse that would link Salvadorans with other nations would lead to a greater sense of civilization for El Salvador. Further extending this desire, he would remark on his admiration for Lincoln’s freeing of North American slaves as the desired precursor to the emancipation of Salvadoran “slaves” who lived subjugated by economically civilized powers, such as those same United States (389). For Guzmán, the true path toward liberation could only be achieved through economic and commercial

³ Interestingly, emigration from El Salvador, most commonly to neighboring nations during the first decades of the 20th century, had been regarded as “una necesidad permanente” for the nation (Wilson 24), in part due to its high population density in comparison to its neighbors. In contrast to the acceptance of Western Europeans to the nation, Article 25 of the 1933 *Ley de Inmigración* prohibited immigration to El Salvador by Chinese, Blacks, Arabs, and Roma, among other groups.

development, including the privatization of coffee plantations, which at that time existed largely as communal farms.⁴

Guzmán's project for the nation, while still linked to moral progress, is driven in effect by economics, and thus establishes a pole from which the leading voice of national progress by the 1920s (and rough contemporary of Leiva), Alberto Masferrer, would distance himself. Much the same as Guzmán, Masferrer displayed a large number of talents, though more focused on philosophy, letters, and politics than with the earlier writer. Masferrer's major philosophical system of *Vitalismo* presented one of the leading social visions for Central America during the first half of the 20th century, connected to theosophy and the ideal of diminishing racial, social, and economic inequality (though to varying degrees). His desire to establish moral progress for El Salvador presented a strong contrast with Guzmán, as he claimed that the only way to break from the hegemonic power of the United States was through the rejection of the economic ideals of the North American nation, as the Salvadoran in effect pays for all commercial development through the blood of its laborers. He would write in "El dinero maldito," from 1929:

¡Con esa sangre se pagan nuestros ocios, nuestros lujos, nuestras joyas, nuestras mansiones, nuestras quintas, toda nuestra vida ociosa y mentirosa, gris y charlatana, alimenta incesantemente con el dinero maldito!

El dinero maldito...ésa es nuestra vida...ésa también será nuestra ruina. (116)

Forceful passages such as this are common throughout Masferrer's writings, demonstrating a desire to alleviate the struggles of the lower classes, and indicating that commercialism is largely responsible for the social ills facing the lower classes during the first three decades of the 20th century.

⁴ See Burns, 77-78. These same lands were eventually privatized, which had the effect of worsening the situation for the indigenous population in El Salvador, who as a result lost a large portion of their lands to wealthier landholders and commercial interests. As a result, the process of liberating non-wealthy Salvadorans through commerce contradicts the desire of Guzmán to "liberate" the indigenous population through education. At the same time, the push toward coffee as the chief crop of El Salvador, creating an effectively one-crop system, held a strong benefit for the nation in terms favored by Guzmán, leading to "cambios económicos y sociales que introdujeron importantes elementos de modernidad al país." The push for a one-crop economy was nominally a success in this regard, as between 1922 and 1935, coffee exports totaled 88-96% of the nation's total exports. With the 1929 world economic collapse, this one-crop system effectively devastated El Salvador's economy, with the value of coffee exports falling nearly four-fold by 1932 (Wilson 9, 235). Other crops similarly struggled, though not as devastatingly as coffee, with the prices for corn, rice, and beans losing roughly half their value through the early 1930s (Castellanos 66). The economy was unable to stabilize in rough terms until the 1940s.

The nuance of Masferrer's writings, however, demonstrates a conflictive relationship with the United States, which places it in contrast to Leiva's work. Masferrer was expressly anti-imperialist in his outlook, yet there was a certain respect he held for the US at the same time, "ya que distinguía entre el pueblo norteamericano y las políticas de las administraciones norteamericanas" in both cultural and moral terms (Casaús Arzú 215). Like Guzmán, he admired Lincoln, as well as Benjamin Franklin, and respected the style of life enjoyed by North Americans. In a longer passage from his essay "La cultura por medio del libro," likewise from 1929, he writes:

El norteamericano, así con su afán de millones, su atmósfera de carbón y su *país de hierro*, es el hombre que más se divierte bajo el sol; el más capaz de divertirse, el que con más espontaneidad y rapidez se entrega al sport, al baile, a la risa, al juego en todas sus formas, al paseo en calles y parques, a la lectura de recreación y distracción...

Por eso es aquel pueblo tan fuerte: *porque es alegre...*

Por eso nuestros jóvenes, no obstante vivir aquí maldiciendo del *yankee*, de palabra y por escrito una vez allá no quieren regresar; y si vuelven, se empeñan en simular la vida que allá hicieron. (89-90)

This sentiment is far from the threat sensed by Guzmán, and the contrast between the educated North American and the uncultured Salvadoran that Masferrer expresses here will follow through the entire essay, which provides that there is a concerted need for a more systematic means of educating and culturing Salvadorans.⁵

Perhaps the strangest aspect of his vision for a modern society is the emphasis he places on happiness, which distinguishes between a developed and cultured society and a backward, uneducated one. This would seem to represent a reversal of a position he had taken sixteen years earlier, in his 1913 article "¿Qué debemos saber?," in which he rejects the idea of civilization leading to happiness:

Para la generalidad de los lectores, *civilización* es sinónimo de perfección, de bienestar, por más que, en realidad resulta que en los países reconocidos como civilizados, reinan las enfermedades, los vicios, la ignorancia y la opresión, más intensamente, muchas veces, que entre los salvajes... La creencia en que la civilización trae felicidad de los pueblos, no vale más que el dogma de la Trinidad o el de la infabilidad del Pontífice Romano. (13-14)

⁵ In a somewhat puzzling continuation of this line of thought, he would propose in that same essay a foundational bibliography of one hundred texts that should be held in all libraries in the nation (107-109). The list includes only two Salvadoran works: the *Versos* of Francisco Gavidia and *El libro del trópico* of Arturo Ambrogi, and one other Central American work, Guatemalan novelist José Milla's *La hija del adelantado*. Of North American writers, works of Lincoln, Franklin, and Poe appear throughout, as well as a book on the US political system, but the list is largely filled with works by European writers.

One still notes here the insistence upon social justice, implied by the backward vision of civilization leading to liberty; instead, he makes clear that those nations called civilized continue to suffer the same ills as underdeveloped nations, and thus that economic development is not sufficient to bring happiness to those nations that attempt to follow the models of their more developed neighbors, such as the United States.

Leiva's vision for El Salvador in this sense is not far from the position taken by Masferrer in the 1910s, rejecting any notion that progress would lead to a happy individual. His brooding protagonist, largely unhappy both in "civilized" nations such as Spain and in his underdeveloped Central American homeland, can find no means to secure long-term happiness, save through brief glimpses with his two love interests, and in a more profound sense through charitable acts in which he is given little opportunity to engage in either of his two homes. Juan's lack of happiness thus does not appear as a consequence of any increase in "civilization" that he finds while living in Spain, nor in the lack of development that characterizes his homeland. Instead, it pertains more closely to his circumstance as an individual without any clear sense of homeland. His identity as an indigenous man is frequently cited in the text, in particular while living in Spain; when he restrains himself in a fight against a bullying French student, Juan's teacher remarks: "Si así es el indio, señor rector, en lugar de matarle hay que hacerle vivir" (28). Leiva further carries the trope of the melancholy Indian by having Juan remark to his Spanish *patrón* Montesinos, when the latter tells Juan of his plans to travel to Africa: "Esa sangre [española] no se mezcló a la mía, de pura fuente india; pero yo me siento Quijote" (71).⁶ Juan, in consequence, represents an "Indio de la Triste Figura," in whom "vibra...la cuerda sentimental de su alma de indio, propicia a los desmayos melancólicos" (95), though further turned about by his lack of a clear identity.⁷

⁶ Marta Casás writes that the use of Don Quijote as a model for many Central American writers, including Masferrer, who saw in the figure an itinerant knight who "simbolizaba un estilo de vida, una forma de hacer política, una guía para la acción de personajes que recorrieron América para cumplir una misión vital" (205).

⁷ The discourses surrounding indigeneity in the novel, though not often well-developed, often appear as nods to the 1932 *Matanza*. I have resisted making these connections, largely due to most of the novel, including the sections where those passages appear, almost certainly having been completed prior to December 1927. Nevertheless, the events of 1932 did not occur in a vacuum, and Leiva's use of an indigenous protagonist presents issues that tie to the reification of the indigenous population and the official discourses against communism that helped lead to that massacre.

Ontological discourses of identity

Where Leiva's novel takes a sharp turn from the general trajectory of Salvadoran or Central American literature in the 1920s and 30s, it is through its play of nationalism upon the person of Juan. While Central America had been a land of immigrants and emigrants from independence in the 19th century, and since the 15th century was seen largely in terms of movement (from the perspective of Europeans, most specifically as a region for movement across), Salvadoran literature had, by the early 20th century, largely treated movement as between nations, but not between identities. The Central American *bananero* novels that emerged by the 1940s, including Salvadoran writer Miguel Ángel Espino's *Hombres contra la muerte*, focused not only on abuses on the banana plantations, but also on the large-scale movement of migrants between nations within the isthmus.⁸ Other works prior to *El indio Juan* dealt with national identity in ontological terms, but generally focused on issues of indigenous, *mestizo*, or *ladino* identities, and their connection to the national sphere. Leiva rather takes his protagonist as from an indigenous class, which is in turn elevated morally above all others, though within that identity he is capable of adopting the identity of other nations in terms of personal loyalty.

This turn feeds into the national discourse of the novel, wherein characters are defined by their social, cultural, or ethnic groups, though of these, ethnicity or race appear as characteristics that supersede nationalism. Thus, persons from the United States “atisban, persiguen y atrapan el dólar, fin único de su vida” and come from “tierra de las trabas, de las prohibiciones, de las cortapisas” (86), while the French carry an “espíritu afilado” and carry a strain of hypocrisy within themselves (31, 35); in either case, both nations are drawn by the author through a single named character. At the same time, Juan can remain indigenous and yet take on the identity of a Spaniard or a citizen of his nation of origin; the Jewish characters, in limited contrast, appear as residing within a national space in Central America, yet are never depicted as holding any loyalty to a specific nation.

The use of national types allows Leiva to present ideological conflicts in clear terms, permitting characters to engage in struggles that in turn exemplify the entire nation. Juan's defeat of the American Gregory in a boxing match while living in Spain is a triumph over imperialism, while his excellence both physically and academically

⁸ See Rodríguez, p. 44-75, on the Central American *bananero* novels and issues of movement.

over the French student Blanchard remarks on the relative inferiority of the French, as well as a defense of the Spanish. (Leiva includes a discussion between the boys' teacher and the school's dean regarding the ungratefulness of Blanchard for his Spanish homeland, given that his father immigrated to Spain during the First World War.) Indeed, these character traits are presented as inherent within the characters, not earned through specific actions, and instead perpetually reinforced through a tautological structure: the French are inherently hypocritical, and when the French student Blanchard acts hypocritically, he reasserts his inherent type.

Leiva's depiction of Jewish characters further reinforces this paradigm, though in those cases Juan's feelings toward them are made justified through not only their nature, but also through the consequence of their actions toward his father. In this respect, as well as the very fact of including Jewish characters, their depiction within the novel presents a considerably more convoluted vision of racial type-casting. In relative terms, the Jewish population in El Salvador in the mid- to late-1920s was not of considerable size,⁹ though those who did arrive maintained connections to agro-exportation (Castellanos 34), leading to their choice by Leiva as both part of a population made easy to treat as an undesired other, given the prevailing anti-Semitic animus in Europe and the United States, as well as being an easy stereotype for coveting money. Juan's relationship to them is entirely projected through monetary concerns, accusing them of driving his father to alcoholism and subsequently taking advantage of his wealth, and in attempting but failing to purchase Juan's crops following his return to his homeland. While passages occur that give reference to a specific Jewish context—Montesinos remarks to one of the Jewish characters, regarding the abuse of Juan's father, "Pasarán siglos, como han pasado ya, y la imagen de Cristo estará fija ante los ojos del mundo. ¿Y queréis crucificar aún? ¿Nos os habeis fatigado de tan miserable labor?" (23)—the lack of development of these characters would appear to give stronger credence to the idea that Leiva utilized this stereotype to further his criticism of monetary abuse, a reading that places both their and Juan's discourses fully in line with Leiva's overall ideological lens.

⁹ A Jewish population had lived in El Salvador well before the 20th century, though in small numbers. It was in 1921 that a marked increase in Jewish immigration to Central America was noticed, as the United States placed greater restrictions on Jewish immigrants. It was not until the late 1920s, however, that larger numbers of Jews arrived in Central America, and even at that point, most Jewish immigrants settled in Guatemala and Costa Rica, with smaller numbers in Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. See Amaya Banegas, 71-72.

Leiva's use of this stereotype allowed him to confront concerns over the function of money within Salvadoran society, which were inevitably tied to progress. Here can be seen one of the key breaks between the philosophies of Guzmán and Masferrer. From the 19th century, El Salvador existed in effect as an oligarchy, with economic power held in the hands of the limited number of coffee producers, who likewise were responsible for the foundation of the first Salvadoran banks beginning in 1880 (Castellanos 33), and political power from the 1910s through the Meléndez and Quiñónez families (linked by marriage), until the 1927 election of Pío Romero Bosque. Leiva only shifts this structure slightly, presenting the corruption of political power within the nation through the figure of the unnamed president, representative of a one-party political system, whom Juan tellingly meets when invited by a military leader, and focusing economic power on the small number of Jewish characters. The novel's rejection of these systems is configured as a commentary on the inherent political corruption of the Central Americans, with economic power wrested from them by a foreign other (not explicitly critiqued but notable in that after Juan rejects selling his crops to the Jewish exporters, he sells them to an Italian firm instead).

It is with Masferrer's line of thought that this discourse aligns most clearly, as Juan stands up to the evils of money and the pernicious effects of those who would use El Salvador for their economic gain. As Racine writes, "Masferrer confined himself to discussions of social and economic reforms and rarely spoke out for broader political participation" (211). While Leiva's protagonist participates in a limited way in government for a time, though at a lower level than Masferrer—who had been involved in politics for decades and served in the cabinet of Arturo Araujo until that administration was toppled in less than a year by Martínez—the novel imparts both a greater sense of the need for political change and a larger sense of pessimism regarding the potential for any shift in the political structure. Nevertheless, it presents a consistent focus on the exceptional need for economic reform tied to the land, and for the assertion of moral direction in a nation that Leiva felt to be distorted by the call of money and ensuing political corruption.

Juan ultimately serves as the guiding figure for this critique, made discursively effective by it being placed in the words and actions of a figure who, as indigenous, would not need to claim any inherent allegiance to a national structure. The fact that Leiva never critiques Juan's actions when he fights for the Spanish in Morocco, in a war that would seem to reinforce the struggle of an indigenous group against a hegemonic outsider, only furthers the notion that Juan's identity as an indigenous

Central American is utilized to engage the national stereotypes against which Leiva wrote, and not as part of a well-structured discourse on imperialism. Nevertheless, Juan's own identity as an indigenous man allows Leiva to characterize the struggle against corruption and immorality as pitted outside of the ontological national sphere. Juan is free to adopt Spanish-ness and then push it aside when his homeland calls to him (much like his Spanish benefactor Montesinos, who negotiates travel between Europe and the Americas before making his way to Africa). His value as an indigenous figure is grounded in his link to the land, as one uncorrupted by outside influence and driven toward the betterment of the lower socio-economic and socio-political classes.

The Moral Foundation of the nation

The rejection of nationalism found in the novel signals a clear turn away from Guzmán's ideological lens, and while the strains of nationalism exist within Masferrer's writings, Leiva's engagement with nationalism in fact questions the ideological foundations of both projects. In general, concerns over the condition of the working class, a preoccupation of Leiva's as made clear through the novel, were frequent in early 20th century El Salvador, and in fact, many outsiders remarked at the industriousness of the Salvadoran peasant and their purchasing ability,¹⁰ though as Wilson writes, social ills such as alcoholism and illiteracy (both of which affect Juan's father in Leiva's novel) were rampant. Many of the responses given to these plights were considerably more ideological in nature than practical, pushing the development of a national identity based on what were seen as the inherent traits of the Salvadoran nation, promoted through the development of national literatures and educational programs that were of greater benefit or use for the middle class than an agricultural peasantry.¹¹ Responding to those ills within the class most affected, "la condición de

¹⁰ Wilson references positive statements written about the Salvadoran agricultural workers during this period, including from Dana Munro, who compares them favorably to the peasants of other Central American nations, Frederick Palmer, who viewed the distribution of land as very favorable for the peasantry, and Wallace Thompson, who felt that agricultural work was conducted by "agricultores independientes en su tiempo libre." German geologist Karl Sapper presented a more nuanced view, understanding the relatively high level of infrastructure development, but finding criticism with the division of labor and the fact that many workers struggled to provide for their families, even as they owned their land. See Wilson 36-39.

¹¹ Among these proposals was Juan Ramón Uriarte's series of essays titled *Cuzcatlanología*, from 1926, playing on the historical name for El Salvador and defined as "el estudio sociológico de nuestra patria," which sought to establish the folkloric tradition as part

las clases obreras era interpretada generalmente como el resultado del fracaso personal y no del social” (Wilson 40).

In the decade previous to many of these projects, Guzmán published his *Comentarios sobre instrucción cívica y moral práctica y social*, a large work dedicated to fomenting nationalism amongst Salvadoran citizens. The text was published with a statement from the Ministro de Instrucción Pública, asserting the need to push the notion of “Patria” in order to aid in the development of the “carácter y la educación del ciudadano como miembro útil de la sociedad civil y política” (ix). This work’s publication, in 1914, was just three years prior to the emergence of two major historical texts, Francisco Gavidia’s *Historia moderna del Salvador* and Santiago Barberena’s *Historia de El Salvador*, both written with the support of the Salvadoran government and demonstrating the push for a clearly stated national and civic identity as part of the moral obligation held by the nation’s citizens. The thought of Guzmán was well-suited to this project, as demonstrated in his essays, yet in this text he most clearly lays out the nature of civic responsibility. In the work’s second part, dedicated to “Instrucción cívica,” he grounds his line of thought in the concept of “honor de la patria,” described as a “sentimiento innato en todos los hombres... Es la esperanza del alma, el amor de los recuerdos de gloria y libertad de que gozamos en el seno de la patria, el vínculo que ata el orgullo del nombre, el amor de la familia, el poema de todas las razas y de todas las edades” (141-142). This line of thought would be fully amenable to the goals of a nation seeking to assert patriotism, as it presents the concept of honor of the homeland as an *a priori* condition of all citizens, and allows the sense of responsibility to emerge from that shared feeling. There is, of course, a certain tautology present in this line of thought, where the feeling of national belonging constructs the ideals of identification with that homeland, which in turn brings the citizen back to a strong sense of national belonging. The project is further convoluted by the fact that it was apparently in need of support from the Salvadoran government, belying any sense of innateness to the feeling of national honor.

of the national consciousness. María de Barratta’s *Cuzcatlán típico*, a collection of folkloric songs and other cultural pieces collected from indigenous groups, written in the 1930s and published in 1951, would align with Uriarte’s vision. See López Bernal 42-44. Leiva plays with the idea of folklore in the novel’s second half, as a performer arrives in Juan’s town to recite a play about the *Conquista*. Juan finds connection in this play to his and Soledad’s situation, as the conquistador protagonist of the work departs for Spain at the poem’s close, leaving his indigenous bride behind, much as Juan will eventually leave his homeland without his indigenous beloved.

The portrayal of civil responsibility is further plagued here by the neglect paid to the class differences that were prominent during this period of El Salvador's history. While sections from the first part of the book, dedicated to "cultura moral," work through social ills that were generally treated as maladies of the lower classes, such as alcoholism and illegitimacy, these are treated in universal terms with little concern for their specific causes within the Salvadoran social structure. Instead, the nature of civic morality emerges from concerns divorced from a specifically Salvadoran context, grounded in a constellating of national, religious, and social structures, of which nationalism lies at the head. In a certain sense, the work presents Salvadoran society as existing as a unified, homogenized whole, in which class, economic, and racial differences are not to be found, a departure from his earlier *Apuntamientos sobre la topografía física de la República del Salvador* (1883), in which Guzmán dedicates the final five chapters to discussion of the characteristics, history, and social ills of the indigenous population.¹²

Among those social issues of greatest concern to Guzmán, and those most telling in their link to Leiva's work, is the structure and construction of the family. As he describes it, marriage "procede de nuestra naturaleza, la ley civil lo perfecciona y la religión lo santifica" (89), yet it is through this institution's relationship to the nation that Guzmán will offer a vision that clashes with both Masferrer and Leiva. Marriage is innate in human nature, but as he presents in the passage cited above, the inherent human desire toward marriage is fomented within the citizen's love of the nation. Nationalism is thus the *sine qua non* of human existence and identity, ontologically constructing the individual through the link to a specific sense of national belonging that is unchanging and inalterable, though possible to be undone through the social ills that draw the individual from their link to their homeland. (This would include "extreme" ideas, such as socialism and anti-militarism, as well as self-destructive ideas,

¹² The gradual effacing of the indigenous population was part of an unofficial project that stretched back to the late 19th century, in the works of major Salvadoran intellectuals and writers, including Francisco Gavidia, Arturo Ambrogi, and Miguel Ángel Espino, among others. Following the 1932 *Matanza*, the government pushed the notion of El Salvador as a wholly *mestizo* nation (despite the presence of indigenous individuals in various parts of the nation, in particular in the western half, to this day). While the standard narrative reads that this *mestizo* identity appeared following the *Matanza*, the intellectual underpinnings of it were in place decades earlier, rooted in part in the use of the Salvadoran Indian as an abstraction of nationalism and aided in no small way by the lack of engagement with that population, as seen in Guzmán by the 1910s, continued in Masferrer, and ultimately in line with the (admittedly positive) abstract creation of Leiva. See Zelaya.

including the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other narcotics, pornography, avarice, and suicide.)

The morality pushed by Guzmán is not necessarily far in some particulars from that of Masferrer, promoting ideas of education, cleanliness, temperance, and justice, though presented in greater terms as a matter of human dignity in the works of the younger writer. Through his philosophical system of *Vitalismo*, as most clearly laid-out in his best-known essay, *El mínimo vital*, published in 1929, he allowed for nine primordial needs to be shared by all individuals. Within these he included “Justicia pronta, fácil e igualmente accesible a todos,” combined with the right of all to live in a clean environment or to have access to education. *Vitalismo* was presented in terms of universal rights, born out of human dignity and equal for individuals from all classes, provided for through governmental structures. Much the same as Guzmán, he homogenizes the nation within this work, providing for no distinction in the origins of separate socioeconomic classes, or their specific natures. The point of emphasis for social justice lies in the peasant, “el trabajador,” whose concerns are ultimately no different than those of any individual in society, given that Masferrer is explicit in placing all those who work under the same banner of “el trabajador, el proletariado, el asalariado” (62). In a fundamental sense, the nation is composed of a unified set of individuals, all of whom require the same basic rights to survive; indeed Masferrer’s project extends beyond the borders of the nation, a call to all those throughout the world who work and struggle.

The escape from nationalism that runs through Masferrer’s writings creates the greatest separation between his writings and those of Guzmán. He places the obligation for fulfilling the inherent basic needs of individuals within a political structure, yet turns Guzmán’s system on its head by specifically rooting the origins of all sense of social identity within the family, due to the familial obligation to its own members. He writes that meeting the basic needs of all “*se realiza constantemente en la familia*. Toda familia normalmente constituida atiende, en primer término, a obtener y mantener para cada uno de sus miembros el Mínium Vital” (65, italics in original). This is followed by a declaration that all needs that can be met within the family are just as capable of being met by the nation, as its duty is to provide for justice and the basic needs of its citizens. While the nation might not have considered meeting these needs in its citizenry at a given point, it nevertheless follows from the moral duty that the nation has, as grounded and organized at its core through the familial structure, to maintain the “Mínium Vital” for its inhabitants.

These two competing systems, both rooted in notions of morality and the desire to repair the social ills facing the nation, are presented through opposing constructions of national consciousness, with family giving rise to nation or nation giving rise to family, and yet both exclusionary of the nature of nation and family depicted in *El indio Juan*. In Leiva's novel, the goals of moral justice never waver in the mind of the protagonist, but that protagonist's identity is constructed both outside of the family structure (half-orphaned at birth and fully orphaned by his adolescence) and the nation (raised outside of his unnamed homeland, and with no absolute need to accept it as his). In a further turn against social institutions, even religion maintains no fixed hold on Juan, who is not an atheist, but feels no obligation to marry through the Catholic Church, thus dooming his relationship with Soledad at the novel's close. Leiva's project presents a direct repudiation of social ideologies as moral structures, wherein the individual actively constructs an identity within the existing social realm, and yet can manipulate and alter that identity as circumstances warrant.

Conclusion – the Moral Construction of El indio Juan

Leiva's placement of his protagonist outside of the normal social structures related to family and nation would hardly seem accidental, as he wrote the novel during a period when discourses on morality were actively pushed and propagandized by the government through the voices of diverse intellectuals. The writings of figures such as Masferrer, who did not directly serve as government mouthpieces during the 1910s and 20s through his writings, achieved sufficiently high levels of distribution to serve as an effective counterpoint to government-sponsored writings, though in many ways they likewise followed elements of the prevailing discourses, such as in the disappearance of the indigenous population. Leiva's use of an ostensibly indigenous figure as the clearest possible model for moral behavior would have appeared as an affront to both intellectuals and the government had it been promulgated in sufficient numbers as to reach the attention of public figures. The novel's inexcusable racism aside, its overall vision of morality, grounded in hard work, charity, and a distrust of those who would do harm to the nation, could only be seen as a threat to those who adopted ideological postures that had been subverted by the great dangers shared by other intellectuals of the time: covetousness toward money, alignment with imperialist powers, and personal advancement over the good of the people. The placement of this discourse in the person of an indigenous youth who inherently comprehends the distrust to be held by those who would do harm to him and his nation of origin and

adoption functions as a counter to discourses of Guzmán, who would propose a nationalism that would have no need for categories of indigeneity (at least in his later, government-sponsored writings), or Masferrer, whose concern for the lower classes would override his desire to speak of an indigenous presence in the nation. Its abstraction through a figure designed to represent, rather than to dialogically exist, largely demonstrates Leiva's limitations as a narrator and his turn to rhetorical strategies that fail to move the novel too far beyond prevailing discourses.

Where the novel functions most strongly, and where its discourse moves most concertededly away from its contemporary intellectual production, lies with its vision of a nation entirely stagnated by its corrupt government and disregard for the individuals living within. Leiva's critiques extend from politicians who accept bribes, to the failure of the government to foresee the implications of a one-crop system, to the dangers of alignment with the United States and other imperialist powers. While the protagonist finds no inviolable fealty to his home nation, willingly departing at the work's close to find some better environment elsewhere, his break with his indigenous beloved, a circumstance that would move entirely away from even a twisted notion of a "foundational fiction," signifies that there is no new beginning, indigenous or otherwise, to be anticipated, as the nation has been irrevocably broken by its ruling class. Here Leiva's use of the stereotype is instructive, where the brooding, melancholy Indian, acting fully within his inescapable nature, embodies the moral uprightness sorely needed within the *Polis*, and yet even the desired attachment to another of his same social class cannot salvage what has been made impossible in a fundamentally broken nation.

Bibliography

- Acevedo, Ramón Luis. *La novela centroamericana*. Río Piedras (Puerto Rico): Editorial Universitaria, 1982.
- Amaya Banegas, Jorge Alberto. *Los judíos en Honduras*. Tegucigalpa: Guaymuras, 2000.
- Burns, E. Bradford. "The Intellectual Infrastructure of Modernization in El Salvador, 1870-1900." *The Americas* 41:3 (January 1985): 57-82.

- Casaús Arzú, Marta Elena. "La influencia de Alberto Masferrer en la creación de redes teosóficas y vitalistas en América Central (1920-1930)." *Cuadernos Americanos* 99:3 (May-June 2003): 197-238.
- Castellanos, Juan Mario. *El Salvador 1930-1960. Antecedentes históricos de la guerra civil*. San Salvador: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impresos, 2001.
- Cevallos, José Antonio. *Recuerdos salvadoreños, tomo 1*. 2nd edition. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación, 1961.
- Craft, Linda J. *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997.
- Gallegos Valdés, Luis. *Panorama de la literatura salvadoreña*. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 1962.
- Guzmán, David J. *Apuntamientos sobre la topografía Física de la República del Salvador*. San Salvador: Tipografía "El Cometa," 1883.
- _____. *Comentarios sobre instrucción cívica y moral práctica y social*. San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1914.
- _____. *Obras esgocidas*, ed. Carlos Castro. San Salvador: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impresos, 2000.
- La Prensa Gráfica. *El libro de diamante, tomo I: 1915-1958*. San Salvador: La Prensa Gráfica, 1990.
- Leiva, José. *El indio Juan*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1933.
- López Bernal, Carlos Gregorio. "Identidad nacional, historia e invención de tradiciones en El Salvador en la década de 1920." *Revista Historia* 45 (enero-junio 2002): 35-71.
- López Vallecillos, Italo. *El periodismo en El Salvador*. San Salvador: Editorial Universitaria, 1964.
- Masferrer, Alberto. *Ensayos*. San Salvador: Concultura, 1996.
- Racine, Karen. "Alberto Masferrer and the Vital Minimum: The Life and Thought of a Salvadoran Journalist (1868-1932)." *The Americas* 54:2 (October 1997): 209-237.
- Rodríguez, Ana Patricia. *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures & Cultures*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- Toruño, Juan Felipe. *Desarrollo literario del Salvador*. San Salvador: Ministerio de Cultura, 1957.

- Walter, Knut. "Prólogo" to Wilson, Everett Alan. *La crisis de la integración nacional en El Salvador, 1919-1935*, trans. Carmen Dueñas. San Salvador: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impresos, 2004. 9-14.
- Wilson, Everett Alan. *La crisis de la integracion nacional en El Salvador, 1919-1935*, trans. Carmen Dueñas. San Salvador: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impresos, 2004.
- Zelaya, Karina. *Cuzcatlán reapropiada: El indígena y su mitología en la construcción de la identidad nacional salvadoreña en el siglo XX*. Diss. Ann Arbor: Proquest, 2013.