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Racial Hybridity and Challenge of Modernity in Post-Colonial Mexico

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Mexico is a graft rather of the wild Arab on the base Indian, than of the Spanish Don on the noble Aztec

Brantz Mayer

Between March and June 1856, one of the founders of modern British anthropology Edward Burnett Tylor traveled on horseback through a large part of Mexico.² Despite Tylor's reputation of the author of social deterministic and relativistic definition of culture (therefore, closer to the concept of Franz Boas than to that Madison Grant), his preoccupation with race and mixing of the races was evident during his pilgrimage in Mexico. Race and racial history presented for him essentially the key to understanding the Mexican society: *"The old types descend, almost unchanged, from generation to generation. Everything that is really Mexican is either Aztec or Spanish. Among the Spanish types we may separate the Moorish. Our knowledge of Mexico is not sufficient to enable us to analyze the Aztec civilization, so we must be content with these three classes. I will not go further into the question here, for occasions will continually occur to show how – for three centuries at least – the inhabitants of Mexico, both white and brown, have taken their ideas at second-hand, always copying but never developing anything."*³

Tylor found so extensive racial miscegenation as in Mexico in no other country. The three main local races, Spaniards, Indians and Blacks, could be

¹ The article constitutes a part of solution of the project SGS 2013-023 of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

² E. B. TYLOR, *Anahuac: Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*, London 1861, p. iii.

³ TYLOR, pp. 50–51.

divided into twenty-five different racial varieties forming a complex graded hierarchy.⁴ Whites living in Mexico were divided into indigenous *creoles*⁵ on one side and *gachupines* or *chapetones*⁶ born in Spain on the other side.⁷ The interface among different racial and social worlds could have been found in Indians and mestizos labeled as *leperos* (also *léperos*), poor urbanites, parasites, beggars and vagabonds, expelled from the wilderness and never become accustomed to civilization, never really settled, not knowing the law, compared to the traditional Neapolitan poor population called *lazzaroni*.⁸ Alexander von Humboldt estimated their number at 200–300,000.⁹

Mestizo that owned a small plot of land in the country was known as *ranchero* or *vaquero*, which was an enthusiastic participant of the Mexican revolutions, coups and guerrilla wars.¹⁰ The descendants of the once great Aztecs succumbed to deplorable degeneration, partly as a result of the system of *repartimientos*, which forced them to the involuntary agricultural work.¹¹ Indians are extremely conservative and resistant to any innovations and social mobility. Indian “*is the enemy of all changes in the modes or utensils of his work. He prefers the old system of drawing water for irrigation; the old system of rooting the earth with the Arab stake instead of the American plough*”.¹² His adherence to tradition reminds the Chinese: “*His character, like that of the Chinese, is one of excessive tenacity for old customs*”¹³ The Indians are still separated mentally from the European culture: “*After three centuries of*

⁴ B. MAYER, *Mexico; Aztec, Spanish and Republican*, Vol, II, Hartford 1853, pp. 39–40.

⁵ The term *creole* could be derived from Spanish word *criollo* (*criar*, “create”, “nurture”).

⁶ Creoles called the people of Spanish origin “*godos*”, metaphorically implying their historical similarity to the barbarian Goths in Roman imperial Hispania.

⁷ MAYER, p. 22.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 26–28; J. H. SMITH, *The War with Mexico*, New York 1919, p. 6.

⁹ SMITH, p. 6.

¹⁰ MAYER, pp. 28–29.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 30.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

Ivo Budil

Racial Hybridity and Challenge of Modernity in Post-Colonial Mexico

constant intercourse with strange races, he still segregates himself from the foreigner; and, nestling in his native village, keeps aloof from the Spaniard."¹⁴ Western civilization had only a very small effect on them: "Up to this period the introduction of the boasted civilization of Europe, as well as of the Catholic religion, has been of but trifling benefit to them, and only a trace here and there of progress to an amelioration of their condition is to be remarked."¹⁵ The coexistence of Indians and Spaniards had a negative impact on both races. The former fell into apathy and historical immobility, while the latter lost interest in the physical work. The contrast to the social conditions in the United States was apparent: "But in Mexico, the position and education of the planter, if he lives constantly on his estate, – which is not universally the case, – are altogether different from those of the North American land-holder."¹⁶

Unlike the French theoretician of race Arthur Gobineau, Edward Burnett Tylor was convinced that the original inhabitants of America reached a stage of civilization independently, without being influenced by the populations of the Old World.¹⁷ Tylor thought that one of the crucial reasons for the backwardness and underdevelopment of Mexico was the fact that the Spaniards had never built proper roads and means of communication. If only half of the funds spent in Mexico on construction of opulent buildings and churches were used for the establishment of good roads, Mexico would have been a great and prosperous country.¹⁸ Mexico annually exported to Europe silver worth five million pounds. According to Tylor, it would be desirable that country would have relied on valuable alternative types of income and production also.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 36.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 34.

¹⁷ TYLOR, pp. 104, 187, 241–243, 288. Edward Burnett Tylor nevertheless admitted the mutual contacts between the Vikings and Irish missionaries and Indian Aborigines before Columbus (pp. 278–280).

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 76.

¹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 105–106.

Mexico was trapped by anarchy caused by the civil war, rebellious army and the Church. Many people remembered with nostalgia the dictatorship of Santa Anna, when the country was allegedly safe as England.²⁰ Educational level was extremely low. Edward Burnett Tylor met a young man who just graduated from seminary in the capital, where he studied theology and philosophy. He was surprised that bullfighting was not performed in the whole of Europe, and he had no idea where England and France were located.²¹ Mexico was isolated country. Mexicans, whose number amounted at the time of Tylor's residence to around eight million, did not travel abroad and only few foreigners visited the country.²²

While Mexico fell into bloody chaos and anarchy, the United States was on the rise and it seemed to be certain that sooner or later it would devour its southern neighbor, which is incapable of independent political existence. The biggest problem, however, consisted in the fact that the American people of Anglo-Saxon origin would never accept the idea of civic equality of Mexicans, even of those with white blood in their veins. Edward Burnett Tylor was convinced that the optimal solution would be a transformation of Mexico into an American protectorate, which would start the construction of roads and railways, enforce the legal protection of life and property, promote the development of trade and disseminate other traits of civilization: *“Every intelligent Mexican must wish for an event so greatly to the advantage of his country and of the world in general.”*²³

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Edward Burnett Tylor was not alone in his pessimistic evaluation of the state of post-colonial Mexican society and racial interpretation of its relative political and economic decline and institutional weakness in the first decades of the

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 117.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 127.

²² Ibidem, p. 176.

²³ Ibidem, p. 329.

nineteenth century. The underdevelopment of Mexico puzzled the foreign observers. In the second half of the eighteenth century, colonial society in Mexico was going through a relatively dynamic development. Territory of New Spain had virtually doubled thanks to the incorporation of extensive plains, desert and mountain environment of today's southwestern part of the United States and the Pacific coast of California. The total area of cultivated land increased significantly, new mines for gold and silver were opened, production of textiles, ceramics and iron grew, and population continuously increased despite plague epidemics. The yield of Mexican mines increased from 3.3 million pesos in 1670 to 27 million pesos in 1804. At the close of the eighteenth century the production of Mexican silver mines was almost as high as the total production in the rest of the world.²⁴

Spanish King Charles III tried to re-establish the Spanish strong position in the economy of world-system and introduced some reforms influenced by the ideology of the Enlightenment (*Ilustración*). They included the (re)creation of the authority of absolutist state, the diminishment of the role of the aristocracy, weakening of the power of the Church, and introducing of the administration based on a more professional salaried bureaucracy.²⁵ His achievements were really impressive considering the real performance of Spanish economy and geo-political conditions. Pierre Chaunu called the period from 1770 till 1800 that of the recovery of Spain.²⁶ Don José de Galvés who became Minister of the Indies in 1776 personified “*the reformist zeal of the Bourbon government*”.²⁷ When he visited Mexico in 1803, Alexander von Humboldt saw a prosperous country riddled with significant social differences.²⁸ However, in a longer perspective Spain was not able to compete with global British ambitions. The

²⁴ O. KAŠPAR, *Dějiny Mexika*, Praha 1999, p. 142.

²⁵ I. WALLERSTEIN, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730–1840s*, New York 1989, p. 215.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ KAŠPAR, p. 145.

Colbertian combination of neoprotectionism and intrainperial liberalism that led to the revived prosperity in the Empire was radically reversed between 1797 and 1814.²⁹ The sharp price inflation in Mexico damaged the confidence of the local elite and increased the discontent of the less-privileged classes.³⁰ The wealthy creoles who distinguished themselves against the native Spaniards (*gachupines*) forming the ruling oligarchy were receptive to the new ideas of the Enlightenment and patriotism. Many creoles worked as parish priests and were thus able to influence the public opinion of wide rural masses.³¹ The weakness of the power structures of colonial administration, a significant decline of the prestige of Spain in the eyes of the creoles, the influence of the radical ideology of the Enlightenment, the impulses of the American and French Revolutions, impact of the events of the Napoleonic wars and fast and chaotic expansion of the Mexican society itself which outgrew the traditional colonial provincialism created explosive mixture.

After the replacement of Charles IV by his son Ferdinand VII and subsequent French intervention in Spain, the centers of power in Latin America turned to the self-government and political independence. The Mexican revolution seemed to be more social radical than the other revolts overseas.³² However, as in other South American countries the local Indians and Blacks were excluded from the process of political emancipation almost completely dominated by the creole elites. An idea of the republic modeled on Western constitutional theories and “*Aztec antiquity as the true origin of the nation*” was abandoned.³³

Unfortunately, the ruling creole elites of the new independent state were not able to cope with the challenges of social development and political self-government. The financial situation of Mexico deteriorated visibly since

²⁹ WALLERSTEIN, p. 249.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ SMITH, p. 7.

³² WALLERSTEIN, p. 250.

³³ Ibidem, pp. 255–256.

Ivo Budil

Racial Hybridity and Challenge of Modernity in Post-Colonial Mexico

the declaration of independence on September 28, 1821. To a large extent this was due to military expenditure for the Mexican army, which, however, during the wars with Texas, United States of America and rebellious Indian tribes (Comanches, Apaches) proved largely to be an ineffective force. The national debt, which amounted in the last years of Spanish colonial rule prior 1821 to 42 million dollars, rose to nearly 150 million dollars in 1849.³⁴ At the time of Spanish hegemony the education in mining (*Real Seminario de Minería*), botany (*Jardín Botánico*) and fine arts (*Escuela de Bellas Artes*) reached a high level of development. That changed. In the early forties of the nineteenth century higher education in Mexico was in ruins. The government allocated less than thirty thousand dollars for the needs of education in 1846, while the army and navy claimed the twenty two million dollars.³⁵ Mexico had a large silver reserves and huge agricultural potential. Yet it became an example of a state that despite considerable natural and human potential failed.³⁶

Modernization without the authentic bearers of modernity destroys the traditional social structures without replacing them with viable social forces, and the result is a civilizational regression and stagnation, which was often interpreted by contemporary observers as the result of fatal racial mixing and degeneration: “*The inheritance from Spain had been unfortunate, but there had been time enough to recover from it; and instead of improving, the*

³⁴ MAYER, pp. 110–111.

³⁵ SMITH, p. 14.

³⁶ “Every reader who has accompanied us thus far in studying the history, geography, resources, and character of Mexico, will scarcely require to be told why it is that the nation has continued disorganized and become impoverished in the midst of such abundance as has been lavished upon it by the beneficence of God [...] Impoverished, haughty, uneducated, defiant, bigoted, disputatious, without financial credit, beaten in arms, far behind the age in mechanical progress or social civilization and loaded with debt, Mexico presents a spectacle in the nineteenth century, which moves the compassion of reflective men even if it does not provoke the cupidity of other races to wrest from her weak grasp a region whose value she neither comprehends nor develops. This compassion is the result of a genuine sympathy with the true patriots who really love their country and know its worth, but whose numbers are too few to cope with the scandalous intriguers and ambitious soldiers by whom the nation has hitherto been converted into a gambling table and its money and offices into prizes.” MAYER, pp. 155–156.

*Mexicans had even degenerated.*³⁷ The foreign visitors and commentators emphasized the excellent the geographical position of Mexico, which, when considered in connection with its agricultural riches and metallic wealth, is perhaps the most remarkable in the world: “*A comparatively narrow strip of land, possessing all the climates of the world, is placed midway between the two great bodies of the northern and southern continents of America, and midway, also, between the continents of Europe and Asia. In its central region it extends only five or six hundred miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific, while, at its southern end, it is swiftly crossed by means of its rivers or by railways, which, it is alleged, may be easily constructed. In the midst of this unrivalled territory, in the lap of the great plateau or the table land, and far removed from unhealthy coasts, lies the beautiful city of Mexico, a natural focus of commerce, wealth and civilization. Such a picture of natural advantages cannot but strike us with admiration and hope. If ever there was a capital destined by nature to form the centre of a great nation, if not to grasp at least a large share of the North American, European, South American and Oriental trade, it unquestionably is the city of Mexico. Raised as she is far above the level of the sea and inaccessible by rivers, the development of her destiny may be postponed until genius shall inlay her valleys and ravines with railways, and thus connect her forever with the two coasts. But can we doubt that this mechanical miracle will be performed?*”³⁸

The obvious discrepancies between the exceptional geographical position of the country and the available natural resources and the low quality of national performance in industry, trade and political stability of its inhabitants questioned the traditional arguments of anthropological environmentalism inherited from the antiquity and paved the way for new racial interpretation.

Brantz Mayer (1809–1879), a writer, traveller and historian from Baltimore, expressed a similar view as Edward Burnett Tylor concerning Mexican social reality. His studies presented Mexico as a laboratory of modern

³⁷ SMITH, p. 57.

³⁸ MAYER, pp. 104–105.

racial theory. Brantz Mayer, a half-forgotten pioneer of racial thinking, considered few years before Arthur Gobineau miscegenation as a crucial cause of economic stagnation and political disorder: *“The kind feelings with which I left Mexico in the winter of 1842 remain unchanged towards her true patriots, and towards the magnificent country which has been so convulsed and torn by the broils, the ambition and avarice of contending factionists. With Religious Toleration, General Education, and entire Domestic Tranquility, what might not Mexico become in a few years under the hand of a strong and virtuous Government! During my residence there and my travels throughout the Republic, I had often to recognize fine talents, good personal qualities, and vast natural resources, but all, generally neglected or denied the opportunity of advancement. I never saw a modern plough on a Mexican farm, a rake in a husbandman’s hand, a wheelbarrow in a laborer’s grasp, a cart bearing the ordinary burthens of trade, or a Bible in a Mexican house! That strange race of antique men in which Celti-Gallic, Celt-Iberian, Carthaginian, Roman, Vandalic, Visigothic and Moorish blood had mingled, was, again, crossed in Mexico by the Indian, and even dashed, in some instances, with the African. It is a mosaic blood and furnishes a curious matter for the study of physiologists. It is a race striving for new things, yet regretting to quit its grasp on the old. In speculation it looks forward; yet, in the Superstitions of Religion and in the crude primitiveness of Art and Trade, it cleaves to the past. Mexico is a graft rather of the wild Arab on the base Indian, than of the Spanish Don on the noble Aztec. From the bondage of superstitious custom, Mexico requires disenthralment. But, to effect this delivery she must have peace imposed on her by a firm hand. Since 1823, no less than seventeen revolutions have succeeded her rejection of the Spanish yoke. Can it be said that such a nation is competent to govern itself? Has it ever governed itself? Nay, has it done so, peacefully, even for a single year? Can such a miscalled democracy have an effective public opinion? With rulers shifting like the winds, what permanent policy can such a government pursue.”*³⁹

³⁹ Ibidem, pp. xi–xii.

Some specific features of Mexican society could be explained by the contribution of Arab blood: *“It was, thus, reserved for the Mexicans, whose blood is mixed with that of an Arab ancestry, to exhibit the spectacle of continual domestic broils, and, latterly of a positive warfare against a nation whose friendly hand was the first to summon them into the pale of national independence.”*⁴⁰ Brantz Mayer stressed that the internal disposition of “Spanish race” defy the challenges and demands of modern civilization: *“The Spanish race, although it has achieved the most wonderful results in discovery, conquest, colonial settlement, diplomacy, feats of arms, and success of domestic power, has proved itself, within the present century, to be one of the few opponents of the progressive principles of our age [...] The blindness of national vanity was made more profound by the universal glare of progressive civilization that surrounded this doomed country, whilst superstitious influences clogged every avenue to progress which have saved and regenerated both the parent and her colonies.”*⁴¹ Some authors linked the Hispanic conservatism and rejection of progress to the concrete historical experience with the excesses of the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, but Brantz Mayer found the real reasons of this restraint in the inherited dispositions of national character:⁴² *“The hope of Mexico must, therefore, repose in the whites alone; and, on this class we might confidently rely as the nucleus around which future numbers and civilization would gather, if we found them orderly, free, united and firm in adherence to their constitution*

⁴⁰ B. MAYER, *History of the War between Mexico and the United States, with a Preliminary View of its Origin*, New York 1848, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 6–7.

⁴² *“It may be urged by the apologists for Spain, that, being nearly as deep in moral, political and social degradation as France was at the period of the revolution, she naturally contemplated such an event with horror, especially when she remembered the sensitive and excitable race that peopled her vallies and sierras, and the likelihood that the bloody dramas of Paris would be frightfully exaggerated in Madrid. But I still believe that the true cause will be found more deeply seated, in the nature of the people; and that Spain, – made up as she is of many nations, incompetent for self-government, uneducated and bigoted, – will ever be content to find her ideal future in her traditionary past.”* *Ibidem*, p. 7.

modified by the indispensable addition of religious liberty and the speedy as well as inflexible administration of justice."⁴³

The Mexican government must therefore implement an active policy to attract to its shores immigrants from Europe, especially from Germany, Ireland, France, England, Italy and Spain, which creates a desirable ethnic homogeneity, which is the basis of viable democratic institutions.⁴⁴ Ruined Spanish colony without the proper people and the self-conscious nation should follow the great example of the United States of America.⁴⁵ Few thoughts and

⁴³ MAYER, *Mexico; Aztec, Spanish*, p. 158.

⁴⁴ "The obvious policy of Mexico, under existing circumstances, is to exhibit a firm, constitutional, orderly, peaceful aspect, which, together with her manifold allurements of soil, climate, and geographical situation, will gradually attract to her shores the eager multitudes who are seeking a new home in America [...] Such meritorious emigrants will not populate Mexico unless she demonstrates her capacity for order and security; and, without these accessions, we have shown that Mexico never will, as she does not now, possess a republican People. She must cultivate the civil idea; she must abandon her military parade; she must discard her habitual bombast and grandiloquence; she must banish the despots who have debauched and plundered her; she must reform her social life and learn to believe that there are other pleasures worthy the notice of men besides gambling, bull baiting and cock fighting; and, above all, she must establish religious liberty. It is an absurd idea that nationality can be preserved by enforcing Catholicity by virtue of the constitution." Ibidem, pp. 160–161.

⁴⁵ "When an orderly and firm government shall have been established, Mexico will be refreshed continually by the energizing blood of a hardy, industrious and enterprising white race from beyond the sea. Germany will send her sons and daughters; Ireland, France, England, Italy and Spain will contribute theirs. The various nations, mingling slowly by marriage with the white Mexicans, will amalgamate and neutralize each other into homogeneous nationality. Mexico may thus gradually congregate a People. The language of the country will, in all likelihood, be preserved; for the white natives who now speak Spanish will of course form, for many years, the bulk of the population, and when they die, their offspring and the offspring of the emigrants will know but one tongue. There will thus be no violent extirpation of races; but a slow and genial modification. Modern inventions, arts, tastes, science, emulation, new forms of thought, new modes of development, will be introduced and implanted by these emigrants. The million of white men, and the two millions of mestizos, will become more prosperous under the increased trade and industry of the nation. A good government will be ensured, for the hardy emigrants fly from the political oppression and poverty of the old world to enjoy peaceful liberty in this. There is nothing in this scheme of progress to which a good man or a republican can object, and if Mexico is sincere in her professions of democracy, and not merely anxious to preserve intact the fragments of a ruined Spanish colony, without a people and without nationality, she will imitate the example of the United States and welcome to her vallies and mountains all who are willing to approach her in the name of order, labor, and liberty. But if she stubbornly adheres to her stupid self-seclusion, and bars the portals

observations made by Brantz Mayer in connection with the racial composition of Mexican society did not appear later in the classic works of Western pioneers of racial thinking.

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Brantz Mayer argued that the hatred felt by Mexicans against its northern neighbor sprung from the deep racial instinct. The future political alliance between the Mexico and the United States of America should be sealed by a racial fusion of Mexican and Anglo-Saxon populations.⁴⁶ Brantz Mayer emphasized that the war which broke out in the spring of 1846 between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic was an event of great importance in the history of the mankind. Since the downfall of Napoleon and with the exception of internal discords in France, Belgium, Poland and Greece profound peace had reigned among Christian nations. Therefore, the civilized world believed that mankind would replace the military conflicts with political agreements for the settlement of international disputes. The recent wars between the French and the Arabs in Algeria and between the British and Indians have been characterized by ferocity and endurance. However, Brantz Mayer underlined that these encounters took place between nations unequal in religion, morals, law, and civilization.⁴⁷

Many authors were convinced that the superiority of the army of the United States of America clearly demonstrated in the war against Mexico in the years from 1846 to 1848 should be attributed to the different racial history and composition of the population. Brantze Mayer believed that the United

of her splendid empire with the revolutionary impediments that are annually scattered over the republic, she will break the beautiful promise given to humanity in the success of her revolution." Ibidem, pp. 161–162.

⁴⁶ *"But if it be the Divine fiat that we are to interfere in Mexicans politics, and that the various bloods of the Mexican race are finally to mingle with the mighty stream of the Anglo-Saxon, which seems destined to fill every vein and artery of this mighty Continent, then, assuredly, will our distracted neighbors, at length, secure to their country tranquility, progress, and glory."* Ibidem, p. xv.

⁴⁷ MAYER, *History of the War*, p. 5.

States of America did not commit errors of social and political integration of Indians and blacks: *“We were all of one blood, and did not fall into the error of amalgamation with Indians and negroes. We were controlled by reason and not governed by passions or instincts. We had nothing but liberty and space; soil and freedom.”*⁴⁸ We could find the causes in the traditional colonial policy. While the Spaniards conquered and pushed for a quick profit, the English relied on annexation and gradual development.⁴⁹

Therefore, the war between the United States and Mexico was the first war in the history of Western civilization that was interpreted and conceptualized as “the racial war”. It was a war between the rising race and declining race, between Anglo-Saxons destined for great future and leading role in the world history, and mestizo race doomed to degenerate and fail. In 1785, John Adams declared that the United States of America was *“destined beyond a doubt to be the greatest power on earth”*.⁵⁰ Thomas Jefferson foretold the emergence of *“a great, free and independent empire on that side of our continent, and that liberty and self-government spreading from that as well as this side, will insure their complete establishment over the whole”*.⁵¹ John Quincy Adams declared that *“the whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs”*.⁵² On the other side, Scottish anatomist and anthropologist Robert Knox anticipated in 1862 the extinction of creole population: *“The original population of Mexico was Indian – the red Indian – a half-civilized barbarian. On this was engrafted the Spanish*

⁴⁸ MAYER, *Mexico; Aztec, Spanish*, p. 160.

⁴⁹ *“Conquest and rapid Fruition, – was the maxim of Spain; Occupation and Development, – the policy of England. The eager Iberian was prompt and headlong in the adventurous life of discovery. The cautious Anglo Saxon followed in his steps, ready to glean and replant the fields that had been hardly reaped of their virgin harvests.”* Ibidem.

⁵⁰ R. HORSMAN, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, Cambridge 1981, p. 86.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 87.

⁵² Ibidem.

stock, itself not pure, being composed of several races, but still energetic, though likewise on the wane. The product was a mulatto, or half breed, whom nature never intended should exist as a race; therefore, having ceased receiving supplies from Old Spain, mulattoes could no longer be generated from that stock; they themselves, the mulattoes, die out and out, I think, in three or four generations, unless crossed and recrossed with some pure blood, white or black; they, therefore, would have ceased to exist; the Indian blood, predominating from the first, would naturally gain the ascendant; but, as that race seemingly dying out when Cortes seized the kingdom, there existed no elements in Mexico to perpetuate the race beyond a few centuries.”⁵³

The first racial vision of the American nation was created by French writer and farmer Hector Saint John de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813). His works are nowadays almost forgotten, but this author belonged to the most influential thinkers of the late eighteenth century. His books were sold in France, the United States, Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. He was born on January 31, 1735, in Caen as Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur (later he changed his name) in provincial aristocratic family whose members held various municipal offices. He was educated at a local Jesuit seminary (*Collège du Mont*). In 1754 he went to England (his relatives lived in Salisbury) and crossed the Atlantic Ocean to arrive to Canada. In Quebec, he joined as a cadet the French colonial troops. The Seven Years War erupted. In August 1757 he participated under the famous French commander Louis-Joseph de Montcalm at a clash of Fort William Henry.⁵⁴

Louis-Auguste Le Tonnelier, baron de Breteuil, who at this time began his political career, recommended Crèvecoeur to the Minister of War to be granted the rank of second lieutenant of Sarre regiment.⁵⁵ Future

⁵³ R. KNOX, *Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry into Influence of Race over the Destinies of Nations*, London 1862, pp. 260–261.

⁵⁴ R. CRÈVECOEUR, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur: Sa vie et ses Ouvrages*, Paris 1883, pp. 6–11.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

famous explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, who served in North America as captain of dragoons, returned to France to remind the importance and indispensability of the colony for the French overseas empire. On this occasion, Bougainville showed to Louis XV a map of interior of Canada created by Crèvecoeur.⁵⁶ In 1760, unlike other soldiers of the defeated French army Crèvecoeur did not return to his homeland. Instead, he first settled on the banks of the Hudson River and changed his name to Saint John, than he moved to Pennsylvania and finally dried and tilled the soil on his own farm in Greycourt in the State of New York. At first he tried to hide his French origin. When he was thirty-four years old, he established a family. He led a simple rural life worthy of the American Hesiod, which he later celebrated in his *Letters from an American Farmer*.⁵⁷ He economically prospered. Crèvecoeur made long expeditions into the wild interior of the country. In 1767 he visited Jamaica and Bermuda. He critically commented about the slavery (although he used the labor of slaves himself).⁵⁸ The War of Independence approached. Crèvecoeur had friends among Englishmen and royalists and believed in the possibility of peace. Violence disgusted him. His house was burned by the Indians in the English service. Crèvecoeur decided to return to France. In May of 1781 he anchored in London where he sold to publishers for thirty pounds manuscript of his famous book *Letters from an American Farmer*.

On the eve of the French Revolution Crèvecoeur sought to combine the Enlightenment belief in the positive influence of liberal political institutions and productive work with reflections on ethnic processes occurring overseas. He created an optimistic vision of a new American race, bringing the hope of future revival of mankind. For Crèvecoeur “*men are like plants; the goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow. We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we*

⁵⁶ Ibidem, pp. 14–15.

⁵⁷ H. S. J. CRÈVECOEUR, *Letters from an American Farmer*, LONDON.

⁵⁸ CRÈVECOEUR, *Saint John de Crèvecoeur*, pp. 49–51.

profess, and the nature of our employment".⁵⁹ Crèvecoeur's work showed that traditional environmentalism contaminated by Rousseau prevailed in the discussions on ethnic and racial collective identities in the decade before the outbreak of the French Revolution.⁶⁰ Biological racial essentialism, which was characteristic of the politically assertive racial thinking of the nineteenth century, and which appeared in pre-revolutionary studies of John Pinkerton and Volney, represented still a relatively marginal phenomenon.

Hector Saint John Crèvecoeur wrote in *Letters from an American Farmer* that a new productive human race should emerge in America affecting all humanity: "*They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans have arisen [...] The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American.*"⁶¹ Thus, for Crèvecoeur the American was a new type of man, governed by new principles and adhering to new ideas. Racial mixing and creative freedom of the New World represented clearly positive process. Crèvecoeur was not able to think about ethnic processes in degenerative terms. People who became Americans were characterized by cultivated habits and manners, love of learning, skill and diligence. In their original homeland they were never real people. They were the social outcast, exploited, abused and enslaved by tradition, religion and rich oligarchy. What made them the most creative race of human history? Good laws and free labor. Crèvecoeur was an admirer of the Abbe Raynal, and believed that human material liveliness and trading activity are universal force that should overcome all historical,

⁵⁹ CRÈVECOEUR, *Letters*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ "*Those who live near the sea, feed more on fish than on flesh, and often encounter that boisterous element. This renders them more bold and enterprising; this leads them to neglect the confined occupations of the land.*" Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem, pp. 22–23.

religious, political and ethnic particularisms. Shared work should be the highest source of mutual loyalty (*Ubi panis ibi Patria*).⁶² Utopian Arcadia in America will not emerge from harmony between man and nature or from religious or political revival, but from sweat of free local farmers.⁶³

The war between the United States and Mexico from 1846 till 1848 was represented as a racial struggle between the progressive Anglo-Saxon race and the degenerative mestizo race. The contemporary observers were convinced that racial history should explain the striking differences between the economic prosperity and political stability of the North and economic stagnation and political chaos of the South. The racial idiom on the rise of Anglo-Saxon and the fall of mestizos was the metaphorical discourse reflecting the dramatic changes in the world-system at the beginning of the nineteenth century involving the global hegemony of the Great Britain and regional dominance of the United States and the relative eclipse of France and marginalization of Spain and its former overseas colonies.

⁶² “Misguided religion, tyranny, and absurd laws everywhere depress and afflict mankind. Here we have in some measure regained the ancient dignity of our species; our laws are simple and just, we are a race of cultivators, our cultivation is unrestrained, and just, we are a race of cultivators, our cultivation is unrestrained, and therefore everything is prosperous and flourishing. For my part I had rather admire the ample barn of one of our opulent farmers, who himself felled the first tree in his plantation, and was the first founder of his settlement, than study the dimension of the temple of Ceres. I had rather record the progressive steps of this industrious farmer, throughout all the stages of his labours and other operations, than examine how modern Italian convents can be supported without doing anything but singing and praying.” Ibidem, pp. 11–12.

⁶³ “Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury [...] We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory, communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws, without dreading their power, because they are equitable. We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself.” Ibidem, p. 21.

Abstract

The emergence of the modern racial ideology should be studied in the context of the concrete political events and transformation of the global world-system at the dawn of the modern era. Racial discourse presented somatic metaphor of asymmetrical distribution of political, economic and symbolic power in hierarchy of the world-system. Therefore, the development of the post-colonial Mexican society and the war between the United States of America and Mexico were interpreted and conceptualized by contemporary authors by terminology and logic of racial imagination involving the picture of the racial rise of Anglo-Saxons and the decline of mestizos and creoles.

Keywords

History of Mexico, Race, Mestizo, Anglo-Saxon Race, History of the United States of America, Edward Burnett Tylor, Brantz Mayer, Hector Saint John Crèvecoeur

