






India in the Memoirs of the 19th-Century Mexican Traveler Ignacio Martínez
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Author/s	Óscar Figueroa 	
Affiliation	Professor, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.	
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India in the Memoirs of the 19th-Century Mexican Traveler Ignacio Martínez

Óscar Figueroa

Professor, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Abstract

This is the first study ever on the chapter devoted to India included in the memoirs of the travel around the globe made in the nineteenth century by the Mexican physician and general Ignacio Martínez (1844-1891). Published in two versions, a short one called *Viaje universal* (1886) and a longer one called *Alrededor del mundo* (1888?), Martínez's memoirs are one of the earliest recorded documents of a Mexican traveler in Asia during the independent period. Unlike twentieth-century Mexican intellectual circles, which perceived India as a source of literary, philosophical, and spiritual inspiration, the image displayed in Martínez's account is framed in the ideals of material progress, rational objectivity, and anticlericalism. As I argue, these values guided Martínez's recourse to European Orientalist motifs, but also produced a horizontal appreciation of India in light of his Mexican circumstances. This resulted in an ambivalent representation that fluctuates between appraisal of Indian material merits and deep aversion to its religious life.

Keywords: Ignacio Martínez (1844-1891), *Viaje universal* (1886), Mexican travel literature, India and Mexico, Orientalism.

Introduction

The study of the historical representations of India in the twentieth-century Mexican political and intellectual milieu has been dominated by two figures: on the one hand, the writer and politician José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), who never visited India, but admired its philosophy and wrote about it, notably in his *Estudios Indostánicos* (1920); on the other, the Nobel laureate Octavio Paz (1914-1998), who knew India in depth, especially after serving as ambassador (1962-1968), and produced an influential literary vision of its culture. As one may expect, the enormous importance of both figures for the construction of a Mexican image of India has been well documented.¹ However, this preeminence has overshadowed the interest in other episodes of the Mexico-India cultural encounter. Mexican travelers to Asia during the last decades of the nineteenth century constitute one of those often-ignored episodes. This article is the first study ever on the way India was represented by one of those early Mexican travelers: Ignacio Martínez Elizondo (1844-1891), a medical physician, journalist, and political dissident who between 1883-1885 made a travel around the globe, which included visits to many Asian nations, among them India and Ceylon, and then compiled his day-by-day notes into two book-length narratives, an abbreviated one called *Viaje universal: visita a las cinco partes del mundo* [Universal Voyage, Visit to the Five Parts of the World], and a longer one consisting of two volumes entitled *Alrededor del mundo* [Around the World].

These two books are truly valuable in the context of nineteenth-century Mexican travel literature. Besides that, in relation to early Mexican representations of India, Martínez's portrayal contains motifs that are significant in themselves. As I will show, his views are unusual compared to those disseminated in Mexico during the first decades of the twentieth century by influence of literary movements like Modernism and religious trends like theosophy or the neo-Hindu spirituality of figures like Vivekananda and Tagore. According to that image, India is first and foremost a source of literary, philosophical, and religious inspiration. By contrast, the image displayed in Martínez's account is framed in the ideals of material progress, rational objectivity, and anticlericalism. These values guided Martínez's recourse to European Orientalist motifs, but also produced a horizontal or South-South appreciation of India in light of his Mexican circumstances, a common trait of Latin American orientalism (Klengel & Ortiz-Wallner, 2016, pp. 12-15). This resulted in an ambivalent representation that fluctuates between appraisal of Indian material merits and automatic aversion to its religious beliefs.

Ignacio Martínez: physician, insurrectionist, and traveler

Ignacio Martínez was no doubt a multifaceted figure. I summarize here the main biographic details. He was born in 1844 in Mexico's northeastern state of Tamaulipas. When he was still a child, his family moved to the neighboring state of Nuevo León. In Monterrey, the state's capital, he pursued his studies and in 1865, he became the first graduate of the School of Medicine, institution that also sowed in him the seeds of liberal laicism and philosophical positivism, particularly by influence of his advisor, the renowned physician Eleuterio González. However, due to the political turmoil prevailing in Mexico throughout the nineteenth century, the young physician interrupted many times his professional career in order to join armed movements. Already by the end of 1865, he joined the republican troops fighting against French occupation. After this, his name began to be known in the intellectual circles of the time due to his patriotism, his defense of liberal causes and his personality as a cosmopolitan "librepensador [freethinker]",² as he defined himself (1884, p. 155). Indeed, besides being a physician, he wrote poetry, enjoyed dramatic and operatic performances, spoke English and French, and admired the Encyclopedists, especially Voltaire, whom he considered the greatest thinker of all times (1884, p. 157).

In 1871 Martínez joined the Noria Revolution, an armed revolt led by Porfirio Díaz against President Benito Juárez's attempts at reelection (1884, p. 9). Martínez was confident that Díaz's movement would help to enforce the principles of the 1857 Constitution, including democracy and non-reelection. However, Juárez passed away untimely in 1872 and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, then president of the Supreme Court, was appointed in his place, a legit nomination that dissolved the revolt against reelection, especially since Lerdo de Tejada proclaimed an amnesty to the rebels. Yet, Martínez did not accept the offer—an early expression of absolute loyalty to his ideals—and this decision put him in a difficult situation. "Hoy, todos los que tomamos parte en esa revolución andamos errantes [Today, all of us who participated in that revolution, we must wander from one place to another]", he declared (1884, p. 9). In his case, this brought the opportunity to materialize a deep-rooted desire of traveling around the world, something which he dreamt of since he was a child by influence of travel literature, including Prester John's popular legends about the Orient (1884, p. 1). Thus, in April 1875, with the money earned working as a physician, he set out alone on his first overseas journey. He followed the maritime route Veracruz-

Havana-New York-Liverpool, traversed most of Europe up to San Petersburg, made a brief visit to North Morocco, and returned to Mexico in December of the same year.

The European experience seems to have reinforced his liberal and progressist convictions, for just a few months after his return, in March 1876, he gladly accepted Porfirio Díaz's invitation to take up again the arms, this time to prevent Lerdo de Tejada's attempts at reelection (Cosío Villegas, 2009, pp. 724-725). Known as the Tuxtepec Revolution, this new revolt paved the way for Díaz to become Mexico's President. He was formally elected in May 1877. For his part, Martínez was named general and appointed chief of the military headquarters in Mexico City (1884, p. vii). He sympathized for some time with Díaz's ambitious project to modernize Mexico. However, in 1879, "no estando conforme con la marcha de la Administración [unhappy with the government's course of action]", and especially annoyed by Díaz's growing signs of renegeing on his non-reelection pledge, Martínez resigned and retired "a la vida privada, eligiendo para mi residencia el Puerto de Matamoros [to private life, choosing as my residence the Port of Matamoros]", on the recently created Mexico-Texas border (1884, p. vii). Thus, unlike other liberals who supported Díaz but gradually betrayed their ideals, as soon as the reasons that caused Martínez to fight against Juárez and Lerdo de Tejada resurfaced, he "volvió a la oposición pugnando por la no reelección, sólo que ahora contra Díaz [became again an opponent advocating non-reelection, but now against Díaz]" (Navarro, 1986, p. 65). This made him an enemy of Díaz's dictatorial regime known as the Porfiriato. Once again, it was imperative to flee. Martínez set out on a second overseas travel, much more ambitious and longer than the first one: a two-year voyage—from March 1883 to July 1885—across the five continents.

After his self-imposed exile, he alternated his residence between Matamoros and Brownsville, on the U.S. side of the border, and from there resumed his fight against the Porfiriato. He repudiated the regime writing in oppositionist newspapers like *El mundo*, founded by him in 1886, as well as promoting armed rebellions in the Texan border. This provoked a failed attempt at extradition, military espionage, and finally a murder in Laredo, Texas, on February 3, 1891.

This biographical sketch suggests an independent personality, someone proud of his self-sufficiency, who never relinquished his political and intellectual ideals. Martínez was a man of learning and a revolutionary like other Mexican outstanding figures of the nineteenth century, for example Ignacio Manuel Altamirano or Vicente Riva Palacio. He was also a man of science and a curious observer interested in other cultures along the lines of Mexican positivists of the time like Francisco Bulnes. He was a cosmopolitan progressist and traveler, as well as a declared yet not naïve mason, as he himself recognized (1888, vol. 2, p. 756). All these ingredients are present in the notes he took during his two overseas journeys, later transformed into remarkable publications, contribution, which is important to contextualize within nineteenth-century Mexican travel literature.

The Orient in nineteenth-century Mexican travel literature

As part of the industrial revolution, the accelerated development of the transportation sector during the second half of the nineteenth century, both by train and steamship, changed forever planet's spatial coordinates as travels that a few decades before were out of reach for most people became achievable (Crump, 2007, pp. 209-244). This included the possibility of completing a *tour du monde*, as the French novelist Jules Verne eloquently put it in his 1873 travel book. Travelling

between America and Europe, but also to Asia and Africa, became a sign of the new era with an immediate influence upon travel narratives. Learned accounts full of firsthand ethnographic and naturalist observations soon took the place of the fanciful descriptions of former travel stories.

In a few years, the novelty reached independent Mexico. During the 1870s, several steamship passenger services were launched along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico to cities like Havana, New Orleans and New York (Bonilla, 1962, pp. 412-414). The first educated Mexicans who took advantage of the new form of transportation and wrote about their experience, initially focused on the United States and Europe,³ whereas the Asian continent remained for some years as a feasible, though still exotically remote destination.⁴ In fact, the first Mexican travels beyond Europe were to the Holy Land and North Africa, always travelling through the Atlantic Ocean. Four recorded travels stand out: the two made for religious purposes to Jerusalem by the Franciscan frail José María Guzmán, in 1835, and by the bishop Rafael Sabás Camacho y García, in 1862;⁵ the journey to Egypt and Palestine made in 1871 by the liberal thinker José López Portillo y Rojas, and the 1876 travel to Egypt and the Middle East by the diplomat Luis Malanco. Published in 1882 simply as *Viaje á Oriente*, Malanco's memoirs included a prologue by the famous writer Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834-1893), who summarized the emerging genre in this way: "Redúcese a nueve o diez libros, a lo más [It comprises a mere nine to ten books at the most]", among them, he adds, "los recuerdos de un viaje del general Ignacio Martínez, bello libro redactado con talento e impreso en París [the memoirs of a travel made by General Ignacio Martínez, a beautiful book, skillfully written and printed in Paris]" (quoted by Teixidor, 2002, p. 4). Altamirano refers here to Ignacio Martínez's first travel, which, as I mentioned, took place in 1875 and included visits to the main European capitals and North Morocco. The memoirs of this voyage appeared in 1884 with the title *Recuerdos de un viaje en América, Europa y África* [Memoirs of a Trip to the United States, Europe and Africa].

Up to this point, therefore, Mexican encounters with the Orient were limited to the Middle East and North Africa, whereas the vastness of the Asian continent, including India, remained as an unexplored territory. This changed a few months before Martínez's first travel. In September 1874, with President Lerdo de Tejada's consent, a scientific mission set out for Yokohama, Japan, with the purpose of observing the transit of Venus across the Sun, a phenomenon of great utility to calculate planetary distances, but quite infrequent as it occurs only once every century or so. Formed by five people, the mission followed the Pacific route departing from San Francisco, California. After successfully completing the astronomic observation in Japan, it followed a long maritime route through Asia with layovers in Hong Kong, Saigon, Singapore, Ceylon and Port Said, from whence it reached Europe, returning to Mexico in November 1875. This travel was recorded for posterity in two memoirs. The leader of the mission, the astronomer Francisco Díaz Covarrubias (1833-1889), published one of them in 1876 with a predominantly scientific focus,⁶ though not free of cultural observations (Pineda, 2008, p. 501). This report ends in Japan without describing the incidents of the return trip. The significance of the journey beyond its scientific purpose was literarily captured in a complete version, round trip, in the memoirs of Francisco Bulnes (1847-1924), the mission's official chronicler and a figure having a lot in common with Ignacio Martínez (Tolentino, 2020, p. 129): both received a scientific education, advocated liberal and anticlerical values, believed in the positivistic grading of nations according to their progress level, and finally both participated in Porfirio Díaz's program to modernize the country. Bulnes' memoirs were

published in 1875 with the title *Sobre el Hemisferio Norte once mil leguas: impresiones de viaje a Cuba, los Estados Unidos, el Japón, China, Cochinchina, Egipto y Europa* [Eleven Thousand Leagues across the North Hemisphere: Memoirs of a Trip to Cuba, the United States, Japan, China, Cochinchina, Egypt and Europe].

In nineteenth-century Mexico, the publication of this book meant the entrance of the nation into the prestigious literary tradition of the learned travel to the Orient (Chávez, 2014, pp. 66-72; Gasquet, 2018, p. 141). In this context, Bulnes refers many times to India, particularly in the chapter devoted to Ceylon. However, he did not set foot in the Indian subcontinent. Such merit belongs to Ignacio Martínez. Made only eight years after the scientific expedition to Japan, Martínez's second travel was an achievement even superior in terms of its duration, the distance traversed, and the number of places visited. Sailing first through the Atlantic, it lasted more than two years, the double of the mission to Japan; it covered 27 thousand leagues or 108 thousand kilometers, more than the double of the eleven thousand leagues pompously announced in the title of Bulnes' book, and it included visits not only to India but also to Ceylon, Singapore, Java, Indochina, the Philippines, China, Japan and Australia, from whence Martínez sailed now through the Pacific back to the American continent, which he traversed all the way from California to Chile and Argentina, returning to Mexico by sea from Brazil.

During this amazing journey, Martínez took day-by-day notes and some of his observations became shorter articles that appeared in newspapers throughout Latin America and the United States thanks to the helping hand of his friends in Mexico, including the journalist Ireneo Paz, grandfather of Octavio Paz (1886, p. vii). Later, all this material became the basis of the two book-length narratives about his tour du monde. In 1886 he published *Viaje universal: visita a las cinco partes del mundo* [Universal Voyage, Visit to the Five Parts of the World], which included a map of his trajectory around the globe (see Figures 1 and 2). In his own words, this book was in reality "un anticipo al Viaje Universal, que ilustrado y en forma de diario, como mis Recuerdos de un Viaje, me propongo escribir con más tiempo y detenimiento [an advance version of the *Viaje Universal*, which I plan to write at length when I have more time in the form of an illustrated diary, just like my *Recuerdos de un viaje*]" (1886, p. viii). Published with a different title—*Alrededor del mundo* [Around the World]—, the extended version's two thick volumes contain no printing details, though apparently were printed in 1888 at the typographical headquarters of *El mundo*, the newspaper founded by Martínez in Laredo, Texas (Talavera, 2008, p. 21). The book does not contain the promised illustrations either. All this suggests that Martínez's initial plans could not be accomplished, most probably due to the difficult circumstances he faced under the persecution of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship.

Recuerdos de un viaje, Martínez's first travel narrative, has received some attention, beginning with the words of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (quoted above) up to the publication of a new edition by the National University in Mexico (2008, with a lengthy study by Rosa Talavera). The same cannot be said of his second travel narrative. So far, both versions, the abbreviated one and the extended one, have not been studied in detail⁷ and even remained unknown among scholars despite their significance in the context of nineteenth-century Mexican travel literature. In relation specifically to India, Martínez's visit may be the first one recorded by a Mexican based on an experience in situ.⁸ As far as I know, this article is the first study devoted to that particular section. For now, I base my observations on *Viaje universal*, which I consulted in the Special Collection of

the National Library of Mexico. This library also possesses the second volume of *Alrededor del mundo*, but unfortunately not the first one, in which appears the chapter devoted to India.⁹



Figure 1. Ignacio Martínez's *Viaje universal*, book cover. National Library of Mexico, Special Collection. Photograph by the author.

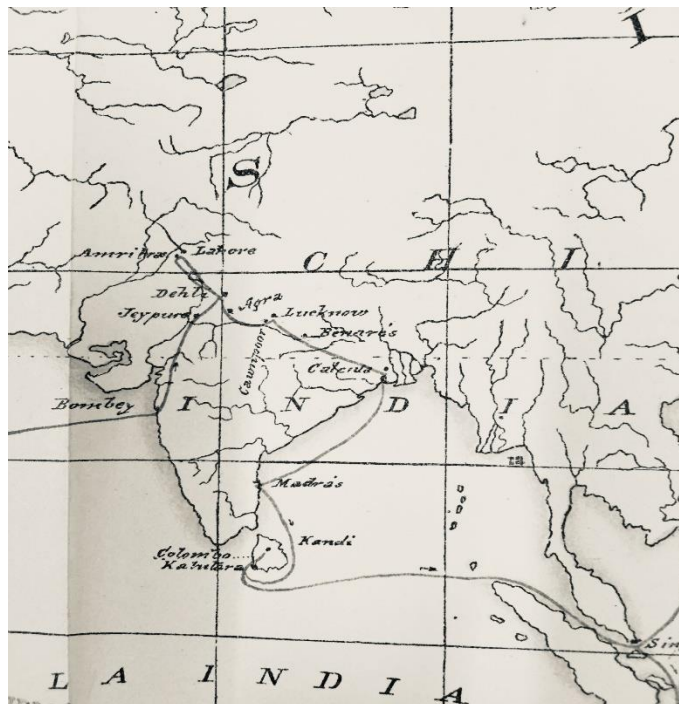


Figure 2: Ignacio Martínez's *Viaje universal*, detail of the map included at the end of the book. National Library of Mexico, Special Collection. Photograph by the author.

The point of departure: self-sufficiency, rationalism, and the “barbarous” Asia

Emerging Mexican travel literature soon spawned interest among late-nineteenth-century intellectual circles, as suggested by the involvement of renowned figures to write reviews and forewords. As I mentioned, Luis Malanco’s memoirs of his travel to Egypt and the Holy Land were prologued by the celebrated writer Ignacio Manuel Altamirano. Along the same lines, Martínez’s *Viaje universal* included a prologue by Vicente Riva Palacio (1832-1896), another figure of renown in the nineteenth-century Mexican political and intellectual milieu.

In his two-page prologue, Riva Palacio mentions the friendship and “comunidad de ideas [similar ideas]” that link him to Martínez. He also outlines the importance of the book in light of the positivistic tendencies of modern travel literature. *Viaje universal* narrates an “interesante y entretenida [interesting and fun]” story. At same time, it is based on “un amor a la verdad [a passion for truth]” and contains “datos exactos [exact data]” and “apreciaciones imparciales [neutral observations]”. Martínez avoids “lo extraño ó maravilloso [the strange and the marvelous]” and this makes his book very different from “los fabulosos relatos, ó fantásticas descripciones [the fabulous tales and fantastic descriptions]” of older times, from all those narratives “que se inventan sin que pueblo alguno las tenga [which are invented although no people has ever experienced them]” with the sole purpose of producing “en los lectores extraviadas ideas” [misguided ideas in the readers] (1886, p. v).

Moreover, Martínez’s search of objectivity is not limited to avoid displays of literary imagination. According to Riva Palacio, it also involves theoretical neutrality in religious, social and even scientific matters, an aspiration embodied by Martínez’s judicious temper both as traveler and writer. He wrote his book “como caminó en esas naciones por donde ha pasado, con toda la sangre fría de un observador juicioso y desapasionado [in the same way he traversed all the nations where he set foot, namely with the cool head of a judicious and detached observer]”. Significantly, Riva Palacio adds that such impartiality includes the avoidance of categories like “barbarous” and “civilized”, so common for judging peoples and individuals (1886, p. v). In this way, as Elliott Young has pointed out: “Riva Palacio’s preface bestowed a particularly modern form of authority on Martínez, that of the dispassionate and objective observer” (2004, p. 157).

Are the pages of *Viaje universal* and specifically Martínez’s portrayal of India in harmony with such high expectations? In his note “Al lector [To the reader]”, as well as in the opening lines of the first chapter and in many other passages, Martínez seems to subscribe the aim of absolute neutrality. For instance, he stated: “La ardiente ambición de un viaje universal [The ardent desire of traveling around the world]” arose “para ver simultáneamente todos los países del mundo, tales como son, y no como los quieren presentar los defensores de tal ó cual idea [to simultaneously see all the countries just the way they are and not the way they are presented on purpose by the advocates of this or that idea]” (1886, p. 9).

As he waited for his departure train in Brownsville, Martínez reflected on his journey’s purpose and in that context connected the ideal of objectivity with his condition as an autonomous, self-sufficient and rational human being, a condition that allows him “decir lo que siento [to say whatever I feel]” without being obliged to “defender tal ó cual principio ó combatir esta ó aquella doctrina [defending this or that principle or fighting against this or that doctrine]”. The ideal of scientific objectivity converges thus with the republican ideal of the free citizen. This

autonomy—especially from the state—finds legitimacy precisely in the claim of being a man who simply “toma nota de lo que vé, en beneficio de la humanidad [reports what he sees for the benefit of humanity]”, without being influenced by his race, nationality, or political stance (1886, p. 11). In the text, this takes the form of a sober narrative with scarce literary references and a marked interest in quantifiable details (population, geographic coordinates, natural scenery, building materials, etc.).

However, the book does contain subjective opinions. Already in his preliminary reflections, Martínez contradicts Riva Palacio and the ideal of absolute neutrality when he says that having seen “los países civilizados del globo [the civilized countries of the globe]”, his main desire was now to know “las naciones que llaman semi-bárbaras [the so-called semi-barbarous nations]” (1886, p. 9), among which first and foremost are the Asian nations. Therefore, by identifying his first travel with an encounter with European “civilized” metropolis as narrated in *Recuerdos de un viaje*, and his new adventure with the “barbarous” Asia, Martínez takes as his point of departure the material inferiority of the mysterious Orient. At the same time, his words suggest some ambivalence. By noting that non-Western nations are typically considered as barbarous, he seems to question such labelling in the very act of making it explicit. This becomes more evident in those passages where, confronted by the injustices of colonial imperialism, he seems to hesitate about modernity and progress, especially as he locates himself in the Mexican periphery and from that position finds certain affinities with colonized Asian nations, despite geographical, religious, or psychological differences (Young, 2004, pp. 167, 173-174). Let us now see the way all these elements are interwoven in Martínez’s description of India.

India between material redemption and religious criticism

On March 3, 1884, almost one year after his departure and after visiting Europe and North Africa for a second time, Martínez boarded at the Port of Suez the steamship that was to take him through the Red Sea up to the city of Bombay (now Mumbai). He arrived thirteen days later and stayed in India almost one month, until April 11. His Indian itinerary was as follows: Bombay-Jaipur-Lahore and Amritsar-Delhi-Agra-Lucknow-Benares-Calcutta and Madras, from where he sailed to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

When he set foot in Bombay, his first impression was of an extremely “heterogénea y kaleidoscópica [heterogeneous and kaleidoscopic]” racial and religious reality (1886, p. 97). However, this promising initial observation is not further developed. Moreover, with regard to the exoticizing glorification of India shared by nineteenth-century European Romanticism and early twentieth-century Latin American Modernism, its presence in Martínez’s description is quite sporadic. It occurs, for instance, when he says that Lahore is an “encantado jardín en un rincón de la misteriosa India [enchanted garden in a corner of mysterious India]” or that the Taj Mahal “no es obra de los hombres sino de seres superiores [was not built by men but by superior beings]” (pp. 98-99).

The truly dominant motif is the extolment of India’s architectural achievements, always in comparison to Europe, conceived as the standard. Monuments, palaces and temples, streets, plazas and gardens, either in Delhi, Calcutta or Jaipur—“la ciudad más bella del Indostán [the most beautiful city of Hindustan]” (p. 98)—receive high praises from the Mexican traveler in as much as they equal or even supersede canonical prototypes in Paris, London or Roma. The rhetoric cannot

be but ambivalent. Both the insistence on the European model and the lack of cultural or historical details about the Indian buildings end up overshadowing the tribute. Even if Indian material achievements are of a higher degree of perfection, they are so always according to European criteria, which are thus asserted. This rhetoric reaches its climax in Martínez's visit to the Taj Mahal, a mausoleum that supersedes "la catedral de Milán, el Alcázar de Sevilla y la Alhambra de Granada [the Milan Cathedral, the Alcazar of Seville and the Alhambra of Granada]", and eclipses "la tumba de los Médicis en Florencia, la de Napoleón en los Inválidos [the tomb of the Medicis in Florence, the tomb of Napoleon in Les Invalides]" (p. 99).

At times, he resorts to the opposite categories civilized-barbarous under the same logic. For example, he praises Delhi's architectural magnificence as something, which places India "muy por encima de las naciones que llamamos civilizadas [far beyond the nations we call civilized]" (p. 98). What redeems India from its supposed barbarism are these emblematic signs of material development, which are nonetheless conceptualized according to European standards. Put differently, he strives to demonstrate that India is civilized, not barbarous, but always assuming that being civilized, that is, being European, is the only paradigm and aspiration. Martínez never challenges the colonialist logic of progress, and therefore his commitment to the modern values of objectivity and universality do not lead to India itself but always to Europe.

Now, as it is well known, Orientalist narratives are typically reversible in the sense that what one says about the other often says more about oneself (Said, 1978, pp. 21-22). Martínez's portrayal of India is no exception. In particular, his manifest interest in India's material greatness presupposes a significant degree of horizontality and correspondence. What Martínez wishes for Mexico guides his interest in India's potential to transcend its supposed barbarism following the path of modern material progress. But again, the affinities between the depicted object and the observer's circumstances ultimately rest upon the superiority of the European civilized order.

Sometimes the correspondence Mexico-India is asserted in a more direct manner. This occurs, for example, when Martínez points out weather or environmental similarities between both nations (p. 101). Or when he condemns colonialist intervention in India after reading on the Bombay Gazette about a British project to build a canal in the Mexican Isthmus of Tehuantepec (p. 98). This indicates a sympathy for India based on its condition as a colonized nation, just like Mexico. But again, also in this case there is some ambivalence. Although he establishes an affinity with Indian political circumstances as he condemns the evils brought by British imperialism to the country, he does not reject the logic of colonialism as embodied in the ideals of material progress and rational order, upon which depend India's greatness. In this context, what Young has said about Martínez's ideas of modernity in general, namely that trying to be both cosmopolitan and nationalist he experienced fragmentation and contradiction (2004, p. 174), is also true concerning his views on India.

However, this is not all the India Martínez saw. At the other end, when his gaze reached beyond impressive monuments and quantifiable details, he was confronted with a perplexing reality. This is epitomized by his experience in Benares, defined according to the religious stereotype as "la ciudad sagrada, la Jerusalén de los indios [the sacred city, the Jerusalem of the Indians]" (1886, p. 101). If his visit to the Taj Mahal represents the climax of India's material redemption, Benares

represents a sort of anticlimactic moment, in which the motifs of discrepancy, lack of understanding and repudiation become dominant.

Benares symbolizes an aspect of India that Martínez is unable to represent in accordance with the civilizational goal shared by modern nations. All the opposite, the city confronts him with the barbarous India. This has mainly to do with the omnipresence of religion, which up to this point the rational observer had managed to avoid or omit. For instance, when Martínez speaks about his visit to the cave temples at Elephanta Island says nothing about their Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds; when he relates his visit to Delhi's mosques he is silent about Islam, and when he praises the Golden Temple in Amritsar he never mentions Sikhism. It was impossible for him to maintain this omission in Benares, where religion is ubiquitous. To some extent, his reaction is predictable. He defines the city as "un inmenso manicomio [a vast madhouse]" inhabited by "doscientos mil locos sin ningún médico [two hundred thousand lunatics, yet no medical doctor]", all of them devoted to their own "monomania":

adorando ya á una roca, y á una piedra, á la que riegan con agua que traen del Ganges, ó acarreando flores de los jardines para arrojarlas á algunos pozos en que creen habitan sus dioses; bañándose en un estanque de lodo, que dicen borra todos los pecados; vistiendo á su dios Siva y á su esposa Káli (p. 99).

[worshipping either a rock or a stone, which they sprinkle with water brought from the Ganges; or bringing flowers from the nearby gardens and throwing them in special wells, which according to their belief are inhabited by their gods; or bathing themselves in a pond of mud, which is said to remove all sins; or getting dressed their gods Shiva and his wife Kali]

Besides calling the deities Śiva and Kālī by their names, probably for the first time in Mexican sources, in the next lines Martínez acknowledges the status of the city as a pilgrimage site, he speaks about the sanctity of the Ganges and refers the significance of dying in Benares "en la creencia de que así alcanzan la santidad [in the belief that this allows people to attain sanctity]". After these few "objective" details, however, he shows no further effort at understanding Indian religiosity, and the "neutral" observer concludes repeating that Benares "es una gran casa de locos [is such a vast madhouse]" (p. 99), cancelling thus the experience of the believers as mere superstition and irrationality.

In the next lines, Martínez restates this Orientalist cliché in hygienic terms. He uses the opposite categories clean-dirty, a constant motif throughout his book, to insinuate a correspondence between the city's religious degradation and its lack of salubriousness (p. 99-100). A more radical extrapolation is then introduced as he finally turns his attention to people's character. He reproduces the opinion of his informants, for whom "la raza hindu" [the Hindu race], a category used in contrast to Muslim, is "falsa: de melosas palabras, su corazón está lleno de perfidia [false, and although it may employ sweet words, its heart is filled with perfidy]". He seems to subscribe this critique, for he does not deny it and simply nuances it regionally: he found the people of Jaipur "kind and sincere", in other parts "llena de ponzoña [filled with venom]" (p. 100).

Therefore, in the final analysis, Martínez's limited efforts to understand Indian society in its own terms, as well as the persistence of positivistic criteria to judge the material, moral and intellectual

merits of all nations, end up blurring both the repeated praises and the signs of horizontal affinity. In fact, his critique locates India in an inferior position with respect to the progressist and liberal aspirations of Independent Mexico. This is suggested towards the end of the chapter, where Martínez seems to justify the fact that, unlike Mexico, India is still a nation subjugated by colonialism. Even though the British Empire rules over the Indian subcontinent “sin derecho alguno” [with no right whatsoever], he states, it is also true that without such a tyranny the country would plunge into chaos and “estaría siempre en lucha [would be fighting all the time] due to “odios intestinos [internal struggles]”. In sum, “los indios no pueden independerse, necesitan del auxilio extranjero [Indians are not fit for Independence, they need foreign help]” (pp. 100-101). Martínez goes even farther and suggests that the foreign tyrant is explained more due to India’s servility and religious fanaticism than to colonial abuse and injustice. After all, he says, if another nation comes to the rescue, Russia for instance, Indians “no harán más que cambiar de dueño [simply will change their master]” (p. 101).

By infantilizing India in this way, depriving it from its capacity of self-determination, Martínez exhibits his more inflexible positivistic side. This dimension of his contradictory personality guides his recourse to European Orientalist motifs, for example echoing the representation of the Indian culture as irremediably despotic and thus unable to fully embrace modernity. Neither the sober observer nor the learned traveler is neutral. Though subtly, Martínez assumes a position of authority over Indian reality, a position subsidiary to European authority. This makes him closer to another nineteenth-century Mexican traveler to Asia, the aforementioned Francisco Bulnes, whose opinions about India are even more severe along the same lines (Figueroa, forthcoming).

In Martínez’s case, however, the chapter’s last lines seem to make a concession and reintroduce the horizontal perspective Mexico-India in the form of hope, another expression of ambivalence. He says:

Ojalá y esta raza digna por mil títulos de consideración y respecto, al educarse, recobre su independencia y dejé á un lado su embrutecedor fanatismo; pues tanto ella como nosotros debemos tener siempre presente que la razón nos manda vivir en el mundo como hombres y no como sectas (1886, p. 101).

[May this race worthy of thousand titles of regard and respect, once it gets educated, recover its independence, and puts aside its stupefying fanaticism. After all, both they and we ourselves must always remember that reason enjoins us to live in this world as men and not as sects].

Conclusion

As Hernán Taboada noted some time ago, the narratives of nineteenth-century Latin American travelers present three main features: a limited knowledge of the visited places, a sense of pride about their origins, yet an identification with the high European culture, whereas their opinions about the Orient tend to be negative (1998, 300-301). Ignacio Martínez’s portrayal of India included in his *Viaje universal* contains all these features. At the same time, however, it offers unique nuances, expressed first and foremost as ambivalence.

On the one hand, his memoirs presuppose a universalism according to which all nations are, to a greater or lesser extent, destined to reach a civilized modernity, questioning thus the tendency to

set aside progress for European nations, seen as superior, while condemning the rest of the world as barbarian. In this view, India is redeemed of its barbarism due to its many expressions of material development worth of admiration in accordance with normative standards. In doing so, Martínez projects his own aspirations as a nineteenth-century Mexican liberal, equating thus India and Mexico.

On the other hand, however, despite Martínez's commitment to objectivity and neutrality, the same ideals predisposed him to pay little attention to and even neglect the non-material and non-quantifiable aspects of Indian culture. This becomes evident when Indian religiosity overwhelmed him during his visit to Benares. Confronted with Benares' intense religious life—an amorphous presence that cannot be rationalized according to European canonical standards and which seems to contribute nothing to the ideal of progress—Martínez experienced profound feelings of dissimilarity and discrepancy. His response was to verbalize what he saw as extravagance and madness. For the anticlerical and freethinker Martínez, Indian complex religious life represented the limits of his curiosity—it reinstated India's barbarous side, excluding that nation from rational modernity, justifying its colonialist submission, and blurring the affinities with Mexico.

But even though Martínez endorsed positivistic paradigms and, in consonance with the nineteenth-century idea that held human races to be at different stages of material and intellectual progress, placed India in an inferior status due to its extravagant religious beliefs, he did not exhibit the radical determinism of Mexican positivists of his time like Francisco Bulnes. This is patent not only in his repeated word of admiration for India's landmarks, but also in his expressions of genuine narrative neutrality under the ideal of illustrating his hypothetical readers—the very goal of the genre as an expression of liberalism—, as well as in the tone of his final notes hoping for a better future for that nation.

All these elements synthesize the singularity of Martínez's narrative about India in the context of the Mexican representations of that culture throughout history. Identified with the tradition of the objective and rationalist traveler, at the other end of the romantic traveler for whom foreign landscapes and customs were the external expression of his own interests and feelings, often of a spiritual type, Martínez chose from the rich European Orientalist archive those motifs that served better his progressist ideals. He did this, however, based on his Mexican circumstances and therefore, confronted with Indian reality, he fluctuated between affinity and perplexity, horizontal receptivity and thoughtless denial.

In relation to Mexican Orientalism, all this places Ignacio Martínez apart from "the allure of India"—as Tenorio-Trillo has called it (2012, p. 248)—that was to dominate the reception of Indian culture a few decades later under the influence of religious movements like theosophy or literary trends like Modernism, both of which reaffirmed the Romantic fascination for the mystical Orient. Moreover, the existence of a perspective like his in the nineteenth century can be illuminating to understand the Mexican indomania of the next decades. Without the cosmopolitan rationalism and materialism of progressists like Martínez or Bulnes in the nineteenth century, the cosmopolitan spiritualism of Mexican modernists like Amado Nervo or José Vasconcelos in the twentieth century cannot be explained properly. In this context, Martínez's narrative about India is not only significant for being one of the first direct testimonials (if not the first one) of a Mexican in that region, but also because it offers new perspectives to understand the history of Mexican

and Latin American representations of India. Concerning this, this article contributes ideas that may prove useful for further research.

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Notes:

¹ In both cases, the references are too many to be enumerated here. On Vasconcelos and India, see the contributions by Ó. Figueroa (2022) and H. Taboada (2007); on Paz and India, those by H. Lambert (2014) and F. Bradu (2012).

² All translations are by the author.

³ Two works published in 1851 are emblematic: *Memorias e impresiones de un viaje a Inglaterra y Escocia*, by Manuel Payno, and *Impresiones de un viaje a los Estados Unidos de América y Canadá*, by Justo Sierra O'Reilly.

⁴ This does not mean, of course, that such a journey was non-existent before the nineteenth century. For two and a half centuries, the Manila galleons sailed the Pacific twice a year, linking Mexico and the Philippines, until they were cancelled in 1815. However, this was primarily a trading service.

⁵ See respectively *Breve y sencilla narracion del viage que hizo a visitar los santos lugares de Jerusalén el P. Fr. Jose Maria Guzman* (1846), *Itinerario de Roma á Jerusalén escrito el año de 1862* (1873) and *Egipto y Palestina, apuntes de viage* (1874).

⁶ *Viaje de la comisión astronómica al Japón para observar el tránsito del planeta Venus por el disco del Sol el 8 de diciembre de 1874*.

⁷ There are a few exceptions: the observations by Adrián Tolentino about Martínez's views on Islam (2020, pp. 129-132); those by Victoria Lerner about his views on the United States (1993, p. 52), and an article by Elliott Young about Martínez's understanding of modernity as reflected in his travel narratives (2004). Note that all these observations are based on *Viaje universal*.

⁸ One may assume that during the two and a half centuries, from 1565 to 1815, when Manila galleons connected Mexico and the Philippines, from where it was possible to reach India, other Mexicans, especially missionaries and traders, visited India. However, except for a few indirect references in colonial literary sources (for example, *Grandeza mexicana*, the 1604 poem by Bernardo de Balbuena, or *Infortunios de Alonso Ramírez*, the 1690 novel by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora), no written documents have been preserved.

⁹ Therefore, my analysis here is preliminary. Apparently, the two volumes of *Alrededor del mundo* can only be found at the Amarillo Public Library (Texas), which I plan to visit this summer.

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Dr Óscar Figueroa (www.oscarfigueroa.org) is Full Professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). His ongoing research focuses on the cultural history of yoga and the representations of India in the Spanish-speaking world.
