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El Pueblo and Its Problems: Democracy of, by, and for Whom?

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I thought I would speak this evening on the “need” not so much for a “new political party” as for a “new politics,” a new conception of politics, a new conception of government, and of the relation of the government to the people.

—John Dewey, “Needed—A New Politics”¹

The Aztec term *altepetl* and the Mayan term *Amaq'* refer to the “community” or the *pueblo*, and even vividly to the “we” that has been forgotten by modern, Western experience. As a result, in Latin America—through the indigenous influence that permeates the continent—the word *pueblo* means something more profound than merely “the people.”

—Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*²

THE RECENT SURGE OF INTEREST in developing philosophical conversations across the Americas has often taken democracy as its theme. For example, in October 2010 the inaugural issue of the *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* was published, leading off with an article by Guillermo Hurtado: “El diálogo filosófico interamericano como un diálogo para la democracia” (“Inter-American Philosophical Dialogue as a Dialogue for Democracy”). Hurtado proposes that “one of the guiding lines of the dialogue be democracy understood not simply as a form of government but also as an ideal of our life together” (10). No one associated with the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (SAAP) needs to be convinced that North American philosophy has a great deal to contribute in this regard. Simply scanning the paper and panel titles of the SAAP 2011 Conference indicates that democracy will be treated from the perspectives of James, Royce, Dewey, Addams, Follett, Du Bois, King, and Rorty. In response to Hurtado and others who have called for philosophical dialogue across the Americas,³ my article focuses on some aspects of democracy that appear when considering the concept of *el pueblo* and its role in the Latin American liberation philosophy of Enrique Dussel.

As is the case with “the people”—its English counterpart—*el pueblo* refers paradoxically to the subject and the object of democracy, understood both as a form of government and as what Dewey and others have called “a way of life.”⁴ While I do not wish to set up a hard and fast opposition between North American and Latin American philosophies, I would like to suggest that there is much to gain from Latin American discussions of *el pueblo* for linguistic, historical, and philosophical reasons, which I address respectively in the three sections of my paper:

- I. Section I makes a *linguistic* claim: We are less likely to lose sight of the genuinely communal nature or collective identity of “the people” when considering *el pueblo* because it is unambiguously singular, grammatically speaking.
- II. Section II makes a *historical* claim: For North American philosophers, looking at the micro-history of a particular pueblo in Mexico’s Yucatán allows the familiar idea of “the people” to become strange, enabling us to pay more attention to the complex concrete, historical, and genealogical dimensions of *el pueblo*.
- III. Since I do not want to set up a barrier between the linguistic/historical and the *philosophical*, my brief concluding section considers what philosophical resources Latin American discourses of *el pueblo* might contribute to the project of questioning the self-evidence of the individualistic ethical, political, and ontological claims made by neoliberal globalization.⁵ I also suggest that careful historical work is necessary to understand the role that *el pueblo* plays in Latin American philosophies of liberation.

I. Linguistic Considerations: The People vs. *El Pueblo*

Since “We, the people of the United States” conferred authority on the United States Constitution well over two hundred years ago, the previously radical notion of popular sovereignty as the only basis of legitimate government has become a commonplace.⁶ Nonetheless, the words written in 1652 by the English Royalist Sir Robert Filmer to support the divine right of kings still ring true: “What the word people means is not agreed upon.”⁷ More recently, the political theorist Margaret Canovan has distinguished three ambiguous senses that “the people” shares with its equivalents in other European languages (including *el pueblo* in Spanish): “the people as sovereign, peoples as nations, and the people as opposed to the ruling elite” (2).⁸ While each of

these senses is problematic, they are united by virtue of the fact that they are all ways of conceiving *collective* realities.

However, within the Anglophone discourse that has exerted great force upon conceptions of democratic politics, the word “people” (usually without an article) can also refer to individuals in general. Moreover, I want to suggest that this sense has increasingly pushed the *collective* meaning of “the people” into the background. We can see evidence in the way that we tend to use verbs that mark the word “people” as plural rather than singular. For instance, we are much more likely to say “American people distrust politicians” than we are to say “the American people distrusts politicians.” In fact, our preference to conceive of “people” in the plural even seems to hold in some cases where the article “the” is present. The phrase “The American people have many rights” sounds less awkward than “The American people has many rights,” even though both are technically correct.⁹

To be sure, the ambiguity of “people” in English has led to some profoundly positive political effects, since it implies that “people,” and at least some of their rights, are universal. In other words, a person has certain rights simply by virtue of being an individual. But as this notion of individual rights has gained traction, the *collective* meaning of “the people” has become more abstract and perhaps even mysterious. “We, the people of the United States” makes sense to most of us as a hodgepodge of ever-changing individuals, but it seems more problematic when considered as something that continues to transcend and outlive its individual members.¹⁰

Of course, many of the classical North American philosophers worked to establish the notions of the people, the community, or the public as intelligible collective nouns whose existence is not *merely* nominal. They recognized that the relations between persons and a people, the public and the private, or the body and its members lay at the center of real ethical and political problems.¹¹ Nonetheless, they did not manage to stem the rising tide of individualism, which in its typical and uncritical form assumes the ultimate reality of atomistic individuals, effectively turning collective realities into puzzles. In any case, whether we understand the grammatical tendency to use “people” in the plural as a *cause* or as an *effect* of the more general shift toward individualism in US culture, it is worth noting that the Spanish term *el pueblo* is not subject to the same ambiguity: grammatically, it is a singular collective entity. (I confess that as a non-native Spanish speaker, the force of this linguistic difference continues to give me trouble as I have to fight against my urge to use a plural verb with a subject that remains stubbornly singular—*el pueblo tiene muchos derechos*—

even though I always want to say *tienen*. While this is a linguistic problem for me personally, I want to suggest that it points to a deeper conceptual problem that pervades the Anglophone tradition of democratic thought).

In other words, I want to argue that *el pueblo* offers a pragmatic advantage when it comes to establishing the people as a collective reality. Linguistically, *el pueblo* evades a metaphysical Humpty Dumpty problem, wherein we assume fragmented individuals, and then have to puzzle over how to glue them all back together again. I do not deny the very real forces that have isolated individuals and led to more tenuous experiences of collective identity, nor do I wish to affirm collectivism as an unrestricted good, nor do I ignore the real dangers of claims made in the name of *el pueblo*. But I do insist that there are genuine cases of pueblos whose sense of collective identity is both meaningful and intact, so that we must not dismiss them as fictions or atavistic instances of mythological thinking. This moral imperative is even more relevant given that pueblos have often been violently dismissed in precisely this way, which brings me to my second section.

II. Historical Considerations:

El Pueblo de Hunucmá

I have been speaking in very broad terms about *el pueblo*. Since it is a notoriously slippery term, I will now focus upon a particular pueblo to consider its complex genealogy and the process by which its collective identity has been practically denied while being verbally affirmed. My discussion draws heavily and persistently from the book by anthropologist and historian Paul Eiss: *In the Name of El Pueblo: Place, Community, and the Politics of History in Yucatán*. This work demonstrates a keen philosophical sensibility as it scrutinizes the complex undercurrents below the various struggles that indigenous Maya, non-indigenous townspeople, landowners, merchants, rebels, and government officials have each undertaken in the name of *el pueblo*. By considering a particular pueblo in the Hunucmá Region of Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, Eiss's work self-consciously seeks to avoid the mistake that many political philosophers make by turning *el pueblo* into an abstraction.¹² While my first section argued that we could gain something intellectually by focusing upon *el pueblo* as a singular collective noun, this section shows how *el pueblo* is said in many ways at the local level, even while remaining grammatically singular.¹³

El pueblo de Hunucmá is geographically, ethnographically, historically, and politically complex.¹⁴ In Yucatán, *el pueblo* refers ambiguously to geographical

locations, communities, and a collective political subject and object. Geographically speaking, people in Yucatán refer to settlements based upon their size. From small to large, they speak of *haciendas*, *pueblos*, *villas*, and *cuidades* (i.e., “estates,” “small villages,” “towns,” and “cities”). However, while *pueblo* technically refers to a small village, Hunucmá’s inhabitants tend to refer to all settlements as *pueblos* regardless of their size. Likewise, all public facilities, including schools, town squares, *ejidos* (i.e., “collective lands”), and even spiritual possessions like local saints are generally referred as being *del pueblo* (i.e., “of the pueblo”). *El pueblo* stretches even further through the migrants who work in Cancún or Los Angeles, but still consider themselves to be part of *el pueblo de Hunucmá*. Political contests at every level are waged in the name of *el pueblo*, with each party claiming to represent the true interest of *el pueblo* against its adversaries or the government. In short, the words *el pueblo* are used in Hunucmá to refer to everything from the most intimate forms of communal life to the broadest mobilizations of partisan and popular politics, thus fitting the two senses of democracy distinguished by Guillermo Hurtado above.

However, this practical linguistic agreement about the range of *el pueblo* masks a complicated historical and geographical genealogy. The Spanish term *el pueblo* was first used to refer to rural settlements and populations in Spain beginning in the twelfth century. Not until the late eighteenth century does *el pueblo* begin to refer to republican political subjects in movements of national independence based upon popular sovereignty. And the oldest genealogical strain, which is admittedly hardest to pin down, has its roots in pre-modern indigenous societies and their manifold forms and understandings of community, territory, and sovereignty. All of these strains (and more) lie underneath the ubiquitous use of the term *el pueblo* in Yucatán today, although Eiss claims that it did not acquire its current usage until the early twentieth century during the Mexican Revolution. As the revolution entered full swing, people as diverse as capitalist modernizers, indigenous insurgents, liberal reformers, socialists, populists, and anarchists were all taking action under the same banner of liberating *el pueblo*! In other words, the contemporary discourses of liberation and of *el pueblo* are coeval, which is why I believe these considerations are so relevant to contemporary discussions in Latin American liberation philosophy.¹⁵

In the first section, I claimed that it makes sense to speak of *el pueblo* as a real collective entity, and were there sufficient time, I would review the detailed history of how the voice of this collective entity has been effectively denied as different rulers have nonetheless claimed to govern in its name.¹⁶

But since I am most interested in Dussel's claim that the pre-modern history of *el pueblo* gives it a deeper meaning than "the people," I will focus on the first part of Eiss's book, since it explains how fifteenth century Mayan conceptions of *kah* and eighteenth century Spanish conceptions of *común* inform the meaning of *el pueblo* that emerged in twentieth century discourses of liberation in Yucatán.

In the fifteenth century, the Hunucmá region was inhabited by Maya who settled in small groups. Each settlement was called a *kah*, and each *kah* was ruled by leaders called *batabs*, who were members of noble families. Almost all lands and other resources like salt pools belonged to the *kahs* as communal possessions, although some were held by the nobles. In the sixteenth century the *kahs* took the shape of *pueblos* as Spanish colonizers forced indigenous groups to settle in authorized *pueblos* organized on a grid pattern centered upon a church plaza in order to facilitate religious conversion and the collection of tributes. Since there was no gold or silver to mine, Yucatán was spared the influx of European immigration that affected other regions, but the indigenous population was still devastated by contagious diseases. Nonetheless, each *kah* continued to communally possess the surrounding forests and other resources, and the *batabs* retained many of their political powers: adjudicating disputes, regulating communal agriculture, and overseeing the tribute system (Eiss 21).

As time went on, Hunucmá became important to the Spanish not just for tribute, but also for land. Beginning in the 1700s, local town councils run by indigenous nobles raised funds by selling land to Spaniards with the crucial proviso that the lands were not needed for communal subsistence. To make a long story short, the colonial forms of exploitation, the rise of a commercial economy, and even the formation of large *haciendas* and cattle ranches in formerly communal lands did not destroy the *kahs*, nor did it eliminate their self-government. Nonetheless, properties held by the *kahs* were slowly seized and sold, leading to more non-indigenous *vecinos* (Spanish for "residents"). This blurred the boundaries of what had once, at least in theory, constituted separate Spanish and indigenous republics, leading to more mixed or *mestizo* populations.¹⁷ All of these changes led to increasing disputes over land, as local *mestizos* attempted to gain wealth by expanding their holdings. The *kahs* submitted elaborate documents to prove their right to communal lands. After the arrival of the Spanish, Mayan scribes had produced ambulatory texts narrating multi-day walks through forests and fields while noting the presence of boundary markers, effectively expressing their communal territory, sovereignty, and history. While these documents once

held legal weight, they were increasingly dismissed as what one judge called “confused maps, made by Indians or unqualified people” (Eiss 27).¹⁸

After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, mestizo elites set to what they called “the great task of improving our commerce and agriculture,” which practically meant seizing more communal lands to expand cattle ranches and haciendas (Eiss 28). Yucatán’s new government passed a law limiting communal lands to *ejidos* located within a one-league radius around the pueblos, classifying lands outside that radius as wastelands eligible for purchase. Whatever it may have done for the mestizos, political independence from Spain generally made for *less* power and independence for indigenous Maya.¹⁹ At the same time, political independence increased the interdependence of indigenous residents of the kah and the mestizo *vecinos*, creating a new form of *el pueblo* referred to as *el común*. The Spanish term *común* had a long history as a way of simultaneously referring to two things: communal lands and resources as well as the community that claimed those resources (Eiss 34). Legally speaking, there were laws and customs in Spain and the Americas that related the size of the común to population size and subsistence needs. This meant that populations could claim lands based upon need or deprivation, not just on the basis of prior possession like the kahs. So even though the común was a place-based communal entity just like the kah, the común was closer to a corporate *class* identity than it was to a corporate *ethnic* identity, embracing both the subjects of the indigenous republics and working class mestizos. Eventually, the común took on a new political significance as “a foundation of liberal conceptions of right, popular sovereignty, and commonweal” (Eiss 34).

El pueblo thus took up its old battle for communal rights to land and other resources using the new political language of liberty. In 1837, as a response to one landowner’s appropriation of alleged wastelands, kah officials protested that

those woodlands belong to the común of *el pueblo* . . . and one of our duties is to avoid any harm that may be done to the común. . . . If the pueblo of Kinchil has grown large in its number of inhabitants; if from the ejidos that border it, its vecinos provide themselves with wood, charcoal, and other necessities of life; if its lands are scarcely enough to cultivate the grains upon which they depend—is it not clear that the proposal of a few private landowners to buy or rent those lands is to kill [Kinchil’s inhabitants] or at least enslave them, making them the vassals of the buyer? Is this not clearly opposed to the liberty that the free and philanthropic Government that we enjoy offers, and to the pueblo’s possession, since time immemorial, of its lands? (Eiss 35)

These words represent thoroughly hybrid versions of Mayan, Spanish, and liberal frameworks through which indigenous officials could contest the so-called “progress” that was being forced upon them by stripping them of their lands. At the same time, wealthier *hacendados* called those that opposed their appropriation of communal lands “agents of ruin” who had lost all respect for “things even as sacred as property” (Eiss 41).²⁰ Thus, as working class mestizos were coming to share in the condition and predicament of the indigenous, they formed a collective class that could protest the dispossession of *el común* in the name of genuine liberty and public property. But this communalist vision of *el pueblo* was effectively suppressed by a vision “founded in communal dispossession, racial subjugation, forced labor, and unbridled exploitation” (Eiss 43). Both visions appealed to the sacredness of liberty and property, but only one believed that these things could be held in common by *el pueblo* rather than by individuals.

From the 1870s until the Mexican Revolution, Hunucmá underwent another dramatic transformation, as Porfirio Díaz pursued a policy of modernization based upon export-oriented industry and commercial agriculture (Eiss 46–47). In Yucatán, both were based upon the growth of henequen plants, from which twine and rope were made. The demand for twine and rope was being driven by westward expansion in the United States, so Díaz opened the Yucatán to the foreign capital of US companies. The shift to henequen production depended not just upon continuing to appropriate the ancient lands of the kah, but also upon cheap labor. Fortunately for the hacendados, cheap labor was a natural product of the process of taking communal farming lands from *el común*.²¹ Remarkably, the hacendados as well as the regional and national governments hailed this as progress for *el pueblo*, since progress was understood in terms of modern infrastructure like railroads, telegraphs, and schools. As Eiss writes: “History, for [Hunucmá’s hacendados], had become a story of possession. For working indigenous and mestizo pueblo residents, however, that history was predicated on the eradication of the claims of kah and común and thus had become a record of dispossession” (74). It was this dispute over the claims of the kah and común that led to violent revolts of indigenous and working-class pueblo residents, but when reference was made to history by the newspapers, it was not the story of dispossession, but rather of a savage and destructive indigenous people that did not respect possessions since they were “enemies of civilization and of progress itself” (Eiss 67). Now that the communal possessions of the kahs had already been taken, the language of possession could be safely spoken by various elites to counter *el común’s* narrative of dispossession.

To review, we have considered two historical undercurrents that continue to circulate in references to *el pueblo* in Hunucmá. First, there is the story of the indigenous Maya *possession* of ancient lands and resources held in common by the kah. Second, there is the story of the *dispossession* of these lands that undergirds the struggles of indigenous and working-class mestizos for the lands that rightly belong to *el común*. The third historical undercurrent comes to the surface during the Mexican revolution, when the term *el pueblo* assumes its present sense. As Porfirio Díaz was losing power, there was an economic crisis caused by a drop in henequen fiber prices brought about by the monopolistic consolidation of North American harvesting machine companies. After the fall of Díaz, the Yucatán's new governor visited Hunucmá to promote a new governmental decree that annulled workers' debts, outlawed physical punishments, and established freedom of movement for hacienda workers. This decree was framed as a discourse of liberation "couched in the language of universal rights and sweeping political change" (Eiss 107).²² Henequen production became a state monopoly, and monies from it were put toward initiatives aimed at fostering agricultural, industrial, and social modernization, all in the name of liberating *el pueblo* from unsatisfactory living conditions.²³ But this was neither the idea of a land held in common nor the idea of liberation that the leaders of the kah and común were looking for, as evidenced by the fact that there was no mention of the restoration of communal lands.²⁴ Reviewing the rhetoric of the Mexican revolution, Eiss points to a remarkable linguistic agreement: "Government officials, gentry, and indigenous workers all declared their determination to break with times of slavery and inaugurate future times of liberty. They all avowed a desire to repossess the pueblo and thereby to reshape the relationship between pueblo and government" (116). Of course, their visions of the future of *el pueblo* were incompatible. While the revolutionary government defined *el pueblo* as an object of governance, *el pueblo* would continue to view itself as an insurgent political subject. In turn, the established wealthier classes would continue to read the actions of *el pueblo* in terms of savagery, even as the violence of the government was rationalized as necessary for the revolution.²⁵

Struggles over the land continue. In the 1970s, amidst a financial, social, and political crisis, Mexico's national government undertook a shift toward neoliberal politics (Eiss 177). The "reorganization" of the previously state-controlled Henequen Industry shifted government resources from henequen production to *maquiladoras*, duty-free factories owned by foreign transnational corporations (Eiss 179). In the early 1990s, President Carlos Salinas identified the remaining *ejido* system of communal lands as the source of

many economic problems. He proclaimed yet another “new State-pueblo relationship” to be defined not by the communal possession of land nor by a shared history of dispossession, but by the individual private appropriation of resources. Nonetheless, some members of *el pueblo* continue to see themselves as members of a *collective* body that invokes the former possessions of the kah and the narrative of *el común’s* dispossession by making demands for the material, political, and spiritual liberation of *el pueblo*.

III. Parting Philosophical Considerations: *El Pueblo* as Political Subject

Returning to where we started, the Mexican philosopher Guillermo Hurtado has called for an Inter-American philosophical dialogue for democracy. Liberation philosophers like Enrique Dussel have called for a new understanding of *el pueblo*, not merely as the object of political activities carried out in its name by the government, but as a political subject. Indeed, in Dussel’s recent *Twenty Theses on Politics*, one can scarcely find a page on which the words *el pueblo* do not appear, which makes sense given that it is arguably the concept most basic to his political philosophy, where *el pueblo* appears as the political actor *par excellence*. And yet, even though Dussel’s *Twenty Theses* move from the abstract to the concrete, *el pueblo* never becomes all that concrete, since Dussel is attempting to lay out a general political philosophy. Still, the epigraph from Dussel seems to indicate his recognition that there is something particular about the concept of *el pueblo*, especially given its pre-modern indigenous dimensions in Latin America. Of course, if these are the dimensions that we should be focusing upon, rendering *el pueblo* in Spanish may already represent an act of colonialism. Thus, the kind of linguistic analysis performed along English-Spanish lines in the first section of this paper would need to be repeated along Spanish-Yucatec Maya lines—an intellectual move that I am not capable of making.²⁶

In any case, to be perfectly honest, I am still not sure what to make of all this philosophically. Further concretizing *el pueblo* in the way that Paul Eiss has done may or may not fundamentally change Dussel’s political philosophy, but I do believe that it begins to fill what many have seen as a lacuna in Dussel’s thought. Bringing together the first two sections of this paper, we might say that the problem of *el pueblo de Hunucmá* is that it needs to manifest itself as a real, *collective* political subject. But in a world increasingly dominated by individualistic neoliberal assumptions, *el pueblo* cannot easily

appear as anything more than a name. Thus, when someone like Dussel comes along and insists that *el pueblo* is the genuine subject not just the object of democratic government, he is often charged with inventing a metaphysical entity.²⁷ But the fact that Dussel attributes the profundity of the concept of *el pueblo* at least in part to the continuing indigenous presence in Latin America suggests that he is thinking more historically and concretely than he is often given credit for, especially given his training and academic writings as a historian.²⁸ Undoubtedly, history matters for understanding *el pueblo* as the subject of liberation philosophy, and its communal reality will likewise seem less magical if we engage in the process of providing a genealogy.

In any case, the ongoing practical question is whether *el pueblo* will be treated primarily as the object or the subject of government. In today's age, government will inevitably be proclaimed to be *for* the people, and government representatives will routinely act in the name of *el pueblo*. What remains to be seen is in what sense government might also be *by* the people.²⁹ For most North American philosophers, the problem may be what Dewey called the eclipse of the public or what Royce saw as the weakening of any meaningful sense of belonging to a larger community, but this must not blind us to the fact that there are *pueblos* with a sense of history, a current sense of belonging, and an ongoing desire to govern themselves, all voiced in a discourse of liberation.

NOTES

1. Following the convention of many John Dewey scholars, I indicate *Late Works* (LW), *Middle Works* (MW), or *Early Works* (EW) by abbreviations, followed by volume and page numbers. This epigraph is from LW11:274.

2. Dussel, *Twenty Theses* 74.

3. See, for instance, Mendieta, *Latin American Philosophy* 5.

4. Hurtado cites Dewey as a North American philosopher who made a lasting contribution to the notion of democracy as a way of life. Tragically, the Latin American philosophers that Hurtado mentions as having achieved equally important insights on this topic—Antonio Caso and Luis Villoro—are virtually unknown to North American philosophers (17n7).

5. See Eduardo Mendieta's introduction to Dussel, *Twenty Theses*. I would argue that *neoliberalism* is the present-day socioeconomic manifestation of the kind of individualism that many classical US-American philosophers were worried about because it destroys the conditions that make for both genuine individuals and genuine communities.

6. Dewey recognizes that the claim "that government exists to serve its community, and that this purpose cannot be achieved unless the community itself shares in selecting its governors and determining its policies" is now a permanent part of our thinking (LW2:327). We may also note the decidedly communitarian language in the preamble

to the United States Constitution: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

7. Cited in Canovan, *The People* 2.

8. In its own way, each European language draws upon the tendency of ancient Roman politicians to claim the consent of the *populus* for their projects. See Dewey, MW11:19.

9. In fact, my word-processing software has flagged a grammatical usage problem with the second phrase and suggested that I replace it with the first!

10. For an excellent historical treatment of why "the people" seems abstract and mysterious, see Morgan, *Inventing the People*. As the title suggests, Morgan's thesis is that "the people" as a collective entity is a fiction designed to justify the government of the many by the few.

11. Dewey, for instance, describes the historical situation of modernity in these terms:

If the individual had gained a new sense of himself as an individual, he also found himself enmeshed in national states of a power constantly increasing in range and intensity. The problem of the moral theorists was to reconcile these two tendencies, the individualistic and that of political centralization. . . . [T]he problem of the relation of the individual and the social, the private and the public, was soon forced into prominence; a problem which in one form or other has been the central problem of modern ethical theory. (MW5:204)

12. Eiss writes: "In projecting *el pueblo*, as an abstract, purely political subject, however, the philosophers may be purifying that entity of its complex entanglements in the material and social worlds in which it holds meaning and power" (6).

13. According to Eiss, the multivalence of *el pueblo* is a function of not just history but also geography: "*El pueblo* is a phenomenon that is hemispheric in scope but embedded in locality, making it necessary to transcend the kinds of separation that typically distinguish local or case studies from those broader in compass" (8). Thus, while presenting his work as a microhistory, Eiss simultaneously claims that the Hunucmá region "offers an opportunity to find the large writ small" (10).

14. Philosophers, and I do not mean to exclude myself, are typically best at articulating complexity at a high level of abstraction. Eiss's scholarly talent as an anthropologist and historian lies in his articulation of the concrete as part of a larger historical and geographical narrative.

15. For instance, when Dussel speaks of liberating *el pueblo*, he is invoking a historical discourse that, while not restricted to Mexico, has a peculiarly Mexican dimension. This dimension extends through indigenous roots, which are not just historical but also living (as suggested in the epigraph from Dussel).

16. While it certainly involves reaching, I believe than an Inter-American philosophical dialogue about democracy could connect these historical facts to Peirce's worries about *nominalism* or Royce's attempt to demonstrate the metaphysical reality of community.

17. While the population was still mostly indigenous, there were now more *pardos* (Africans or mixed African and indigenous) and *mestizos* (mixed Spanish and indigenous). The wealthiest identified with Spanish cultural institutions and wore European clothing. The indigenous called them *usuls*, which originally meant foreigner but came to have

status and racial/ethnic connotations conveying wealth, privilege, and lightness in skin color (Eiss 25).

18. In short, as government officials came to view indigenous documents like maps, treaties, and the testimony of elders with contempt, the mestizo gentry used their intimate local knowledge and expertise in Maya and Spanish to create other kinds of documentation that they could use to usurp communal lands. They produced fascinating hybrids of the elaborate ritual walks of the Mayan scribes and more modern methods of surveying lands.

19. Eiss writes: “Notwithstanding their race-blind rhetoric of citizenship, the Yucatecan government segregated local governance, concentrating most power in the hands of the local gentry” (29).

20. We might compare this to Dewey’s analysis of the way that, as traditional religious objects disappeared, religious sentiments increasingly attached themselves to institutional forms of democracy. For instance, Dewey notes that private property is treated as something “holy” in the sense of “that which is not to be approached nor touched” (LW2:341).

21. Taking this land necessitated a new efficiency in the bureaucratic process:

No longer did surveyors engage in lengthy negotiations with indigenous populations regarding the location and history of communal lands. Instead, engineers quickly surveyed the land and then drew up topographical maps. . . . The hacienda boundaries on every side were labeled ‘lands *said to be* of Hunucmá’ (emphasis added), as if laying the groundwork for future expansion, against the claims of that pueblo, now relegated to a questioned orality. (Eiss 48)

22. Nonetheless, in Hunucmá the attempts of the national and regional governments to impose order and maintain hacienda production were ineffective, as revolutionary violence broke out: “As much as the attacks were of a piece with the preceding struggles in defense of the común, by 1911 there was clear evidence they were also a part of a different kind of movement—a revolutionary struggle, waged under the banner of emancipation” (Eiss 85).

23. In the new emancipatory rhetoric, “*el pueblo* figured most significantly as an object of governance; that is, as a framework for social and political control” (Eiss 109). To take but one example, the education and Mexicanization of the indigenous was claimed by Governor Alvarado to “liberate them from their brutish state” (Eiss 119).

24. Eiss describes a remarkable document written in 1915, a plea in the name of *el pueblo* to bring “justice” and “liberty” to *el pueblo*, a plea that was based upon a rambling history recounting the taking of communal lands and appealing for their restoration. Signed by three hundred people (many of whom could not sign on their own behalf), Eiss refers to it as “an act of statecraft from below” framed as an entreaty for “salvation from above” (106). *El pueblo* presented itself as a new collective entity—“the needy class”—addressing another new entity: *el gobierno* (“the government”).

25. For instance, one government official said that Hunucmá was a perfect instance of how the Mexican Revolution “in certain cases, must destroy, in order to build upon solid foundations” (as cited in Eiss 127).

26. In contrast, Eiss’s anthropological fieldwork was conducted in Yucatec Maya, and its terms appear throughout his work, even as they are taken up into a larger Spanish discourse of *el pueblo*.

27. This criticism of Dussel’s concept of *el pueblo* as a “metaphysical-rhetorical over-

simplification” has been made most comprehensively by Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg. Phrasing a very similar criticism as a caution, Ofelia Schutte writes: “[T]he meaning of *el pueblo* can easily slip from the context of an empirical reference to that of a normatively constructed ideal. In the latter case, it is possible to lose sight of the sense of a people as a set of differentially situated political actors in a given society, for whom the terms ‘liberation’ and ‘oppression’ will not have a uniform meaning” (162).

28. See the introduction to Alcoff and Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside of History*.

29. Dewey’s “What Is Democracy?” highlights the same preposition: “Another great American democrat, Abraham Lincoln, left as his heritage the statement that democracy is Government of, for, and *by* the people. I have italicized the preposition ‘by’ because government cannot possibly be by the people save when and where the freedom of intelligence is publicly and actively supported” (LW17:434).

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