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# The Open Veins of Guayasamín's Paintings

Maria Otero

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**THE OPEN VEINS OF GUAYASAMÍN'S PAINTINGS**

**by**

**MARÍA OTERO**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
Art History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2011**

## *DEDICATION*

To my parents, Charlene and Frank Otero.  
This thesis is but one example of the many wonderful things you have made possible for me.

## *ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

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# THE OPEN VEINS OF GUAYASAMÍN'S PAINTINGS

By

**María Otero**

**B.F.A., Art History, University of New Mexico, 2007**

**M.A., Art History, University of New Mexico, 2011**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on several of the smaller series that make up Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín's *La Edad de la Ira* series, using them as examples of the main themes of this body of work. These themes include representations of oppressors and the oppressed, which is a regularly occurring opposition created throughout *La Edad de la Ira*. The first chapter will explore images of series consisting only of oppressors in the context of Latin America's actual history by relating it to Eduardo Galeano's famous book *Open Veins of Latin America*. I do so in order to explore how Guayasamín's images embody and illuminate the larger systems of inequality, such as those functioning within neo-colonial formations, that economically disadvantage the majority of Latin Americans on whose behalf he paints. In Chapter Two *Las Manos* series will be the site of concentration, as it is a rare series that features both oppressor and oppressed within the same series. This allows us to read it almost as a representation of the entire series, thus enabling a close reading of the visual language in order to approach Guayasamín's aesthetic and intentions with greater rigor. In this venture I will take on the criticism leveled at Guayasamín by the art critic Marta Traba, who felt modern art should not give undue attention to social themes, as did Guayasamín's work. I argue that Guayasamín's blend of modern visual elements with social commentary effectively utilizes modernist



techniques to deepen his message in a way that is essentially transnational. The final chapter will switch focus to a series that depicts the oppressed, an indeterminate group that can either be quite specific or rather symbolic depending on the series. In this case the series by Guayasamín was inspired by Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* and so deals with the victims of French colonialism in Algeria, but they can simultaneously be read as connecting the paintings to other forms of colonial or neo-colonial oppression, thus establishing important connections about the interconnectedness of international systems of oppression throughout history.

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

The art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín has been both praised and criticized for its mixture of modern artistic forms with a militant social message. Creating artworks in a variety of media, such as painting, sculpture, and printmaking, Guayasamín had an extensive artistic career, spanning from the 1930s to the 1990s and throughout this time the modernist idiom of his work evolved to incorporate more abstract forms, including elements of Expressionism and Cubism. His paintings are generally divided into four major phases: beginning with the more social realist *Indigenismo* style of his earliest years, followed by the more abstract style and wider focus of *Huaycañán*, then to the conception of his uniquely abstract but still figural, expressionistic style and transnational content of *La Edad de la Ira* series, ending with the less overtly social and more personal *La Edad de la Ternura* series. This thesis will center on *La Edad de la Ira*, generally accepted as his most powerful body of work.

*La Edad de la Ira* series consists of over a hundred paintings grouped into smaller series, making a thorough examination of the entire cycle implausible for a thesis this size<sup>1</sup>. Instead I will focus on several of the smaller series that make up *La Edad de la Ira*, using them as examples of the main themes of this body of work. These themes include representations of oppressors and the oppressed, which is a regularly occurring opposition created throughout *La Edad de la Ira*, usually confined to separate series. The first chapter will explore serial images consisting only of oppressors in the context of Latin America's actual history by relating it to Eduardo Galeano's famous book *Open*

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<sup>1</sup> I have found a variety of different totals given for the number of canvases in *La Edad de la Ira* series, ranging from 130 to 250. In personal correspondence, the Fundación Guayasamín provided the following information on *La Edad de la Ira*: "Esta es la segunda gran serie, clasificada también como colección o etapa pictórica, con aproximadamente 130 cuadros" (Minda, Fundación Guayasamín, 2 March, 2011).

*Veins of Latin America*. I do so in order to explore how Guayasamín's images embody and illuminate the larger systems of inequality, such as those functioning within neo-colonial formations, that economically disadvantage the majority of Latin Americans on whose behalf he paints. In Chapter Two *Las Manos* series will be the site of concentration, as it is a rare cycle that features both oppressor and oppressed within the same series. This allows us to read it almost as a representation of the entire series, thus enabling a close reading of the visual language in order to approach Guayasamín's aesthetic and intentions with greater rigor. In this venture I will take on the criticism leveled at Guayasamín by the art critic Marta Traba, who felt modern art should not give undue attention to social themes, as did Guayasamín's work. I argue that Guayasamín's blend of modern visual elements with social commentary effectively utilizes modernist techniques to deepen his message in a way that is essentially transnational. The final chapter will switch focus to a series that depicts the oppressed, an indeterminate group that can either be quite specific or rather symbolic depending on the series. In this case the series by Guayasamín was inspired by Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* and so deals with the victims of French colonialism in Algeria, but they can simultaneously be read as linking the paintings to other forms of colonial or neo-colonial oppression, thus establishing important connections about the interconnectedness of international systems of oppression throughout history. To begin this exploration, we need to know more about Guayasamín's history and artistic evolution, and this is how I begin.

The first of ten children to an indigenous father and *mestiza* mother, artist Oswaldo Guayasamín was born in Quito, Ecuador on July 6, 1919 (Craven, 2006, 230). His father worked as a carpenter and taxi driver and his family lived in great poverty (ed.

Lassaigne, 83). In 1932, against his father's wishes, Guayasamín entered the *Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes* in Quito, where he began his artistic training. His first major work, done while in school, was *Los Niños Muertos* of 1932 (ed. Lassaigne, 83). This work depicts a heap of four dead children, naked and splayed across the ground and each other. The tones consist of different shades of muted browns painted in soft, thick strokes that make up the exposed bodies of the children. While done in a more social-realist style than his later abstract works, here Guayasamín already uses a sense of contortion in the figures to convey a sense of intense suffering. This is an element which would continue to stylistically develop throughout his artistic career. The children's long skinny bodies are on full display, demonstrating the humiliation and abuses they have endured. Guayasamín painted this in response to the *Guerra de los Cuatro Días*, or in English, the Four Days War, which was a “violent uprising of workers” in Quito at the time (ed. Lassaigne, 83). A friend from his neighborhood, Manjarrés, was killed in the violence. “Being a witness of this event, which later on inspires his work *Los niños muertos* (Dead Children), leaves a profound impression on him, and it decisively influences his vision of people and society” (ed. Lassaigne, 83). Guayasamín himself recounts the tale in the book *El Tiempo Que Me Ha Tocado a Vivir*, “En el año 32, en la Guerra de los Cuatro Días, a las 6 o 7 de la tarde, los muchachos salíamos a ver los muertos...” (Guayasamín, 1988, following Fig. 10)<sup>2</sup>. Guayasamín would continue throughout his career to address issues of injustice that he saw happening in Latin

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<sup>2</sup> Guayasamín continues the story of this event, “En la calle del cementerio amontonaban los cadáveres y en uno de esos montones, estaba el amigo Manjarrés, inmensamente grande, verde azulado. Yo era muy religioso y no podía entender, todavía no puedo entender, no entenderé jamás y ya no me interesa: ¿Cómo es posible que habiendo un Dios que maneja todas las cosas, cómo es posible que una persona tan buena, tan humilde, mí único amigo, en fin, puede haber muerto sin culpa? Esa fue mi ruptura con Dios.” (Guayasamín, 1988, following Fig. 10)

America and all over the world. After being expelled from the art school Guayasamín eventually returned and graduated in 1941 with a degree in painting and sculpture (ed. Lassaigne, 83).

In 1942 Guayasamín's career took an international turn, when Nelson Rockefeller traveled to Ecuador and bought five of the artist's paintings. Due to this Guayasamín traveled outside of his country for the first time after he received an invitation from the U.S. State Department to visit the United States (Craven, 2006, 230). Guayasamín visited many museums while in the U.S. where he was introduced to many sources of artistic inspiration, two in particular, El Greco and Cézanne (Camón Aznar, 1973, 21). José Camón Aznar writes specifically on how Guayasamín was impressed by the paintings of El Greco, “...su formas que se estilizan hasta los últimos límites del arrobo, es la lección del pintor toledano...las que Guayasamín quiere actualizar encarnando en ellas las inquietudes de nuestro tiempo” (1973, 25). Elements of this influence can be seen in certain figures within *La Edad de la Ira* series, such as those of the *Espera* series. The full length figures have long stretched out bodies, recalling the towering figures painted by El Greco. Guayasamín's figures exude a completely different energy than the holy figures of El Greco, though, for in Guayasamín's paintings the figures' attenuated proportions enhance the negative emotions being conveyed. Katherine Manthorne reads the painting *La Espera #10* as an “interminable wait...with no foreseeable relief” (58). The exaggerated body of the figure looks skeletal, the giant torso curling over, as if this immense body is about to crumble from its unending anguish. Cézanne was of course an influence on Guayasamín as he was on so many modernist painters. One venue we can observe this in is Guayasamín's landscapes of Quito, of which he painted 14 in different

predominate, almost monochromatic colors (Craven, 2006, 231). In describing *Quito noir*, an image in which the city and landscape are constituted of ominous blacks and greys, David Craven writes, “The artist has given us a remote, bird's-eye view of Quito that is semi-Cubist in character, even as natural forces painted in a dynamic Expressionist manner engulf it” (2006, 231). Craven also notes that Guayasamín himself saw these painted landscapes of his hometown as “*varaderos autorretratos* (“self-portrait docks”) that register his own personal associations with the cityscapes” (2006, 230). From observations and connections made by Craven we can draw some parallels with Cézanne's approach to later landscapes which appear like precursors to Cubism by breaking the landscape up, abstracting it and revealing the artist's physical and visual relation to it. Guayasamín's version of Quito also functions in this manner, with the city being considerably flattened out and the buildings reduced to geometric shapes. This idea of sensory perception and reconfigured landscape, which has been discussed by scholars in relation to Cézanne, could be explored in Guayasamín's landscapes of Quito as well.

Following his trip to the United States, Guayasamín visited Mexico and worked with Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco. Orozco would become one of the major influences in Guayasamín's work, which will be discussed more thoroughly in a later chapter. From 1944 – 45, Guayasamín worked as one of Ecuador's cultural attachés and visited many countries in South America, including, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil (Craven, 2006, 230). All the poverty and oppression he witnessed would have profound effect on his work. His impressions from this experience would play out in his first major series *Huacayñán*, also known as *El Camino del Llanto* or *The*

*Trail of Tears*, 1946 – 1952. His first trip to Europe was not until 1956. Throughout the late '50s Guayasamín became well connected with important figures in artistic and political spheres of Latin America. Fidel Castro invited Guayasamín to Cuba in 1961 to see for himself the aftermath of the United States' invasion at Playa Girón (Guayasamín & Castro, "Visitas A Cuba De Guayasamín, para. 1). He would travel there again in 1962 and continue to form friendships with international leaders (Miller, 133)<sup>3</sup>.

Guayasamín's major series was *La Edad de la Ira*, begun in the 1960s and continuing through the 1990s, ended only by the artist's death in 1999. Concerning this series Guayasamín claimed, "I will end the cycle only when violence is ended. But it is not all that easy to accomplish. For that reason, as long as I live I shall go on painting canvases for the "Time of Wrath" [*La Edad de la Ira*]" (Guayasamín as quoted in Manthorne, 58). This he did and he also began two other large projects. Contrasting with the horrors depicted in *La Edad de la Ira* Guayasamín painted *La Edad de la Ternura*, also known as *Mientras Viva Siempre Te Recuerdo*. Translated in English to *The Age of Tenderness* or *While I Live I Will Always Remember You*, the paintings in this series were homage to his mother and to all the mothers of the world. The images of this series focus on women and children. Yet even here Guayasamín still commented on the inequities of the world, since as Geoffrey Matthews notes, "Guayasamín regards them as an homage to Latin American women who endure poverty and its accompanying violence..." (Matthews, 106). Throughout this time Guayasamín also worked on mural commissions in Madrid, São Paulo, and in the Legislative Palace in Quito. Particularly in the latter mural, Guayasamín continued to illuminate both the culprits and the victims of atrocities,

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<sup>3</sup> Guayasamín would make many other trips to Cuba years later in 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1999 (Guayasamín & Castro, "Visitas A Cuba De Guayasamín).



causing controversy with the US Government during the late 1980's (Fitzgerald and Rodríguez, 4 – 6). The last major project Guayasamín began was *La Capilla del Hombre*. This monumental work combines architecture, painting, and sculpture as a tribute to Latin American people from the Pre-Colombian to the modern day. Guayasamín began planning the work in 1985 and left it unfinished with his death in 1999 (Mayor Zaragoza, Capilla del Hombre website – “La Capilla” – “Reseña” – “El sueño”). His death was felt by many, as evidenced by this verbal salute from his long time friend Fidel Castro,

The loss is irreparable because men of his high moral stature are not repeated. Ecuador has lost a Teacher, a notable and illustrious son. Cuba has lost a loyal and sincere friend. Latin America has lost an honorable American who knew how to reflect in his art not only the suffering of his compatriots but also their cultures and virtues... We cannot admit that he died because men like him do not die. They multiply among their people. (Castro from Guayasamín website – “Oswaldo Guayasamín” – “About Guayasamín” – “Fidel Castro Ruz”)

## ***CHAPTER ONE: Analogies Between the Paintings of Guayasamín and the Writings of Eduardo Galeano***

*Let us think before entering his [Guayasamín's] art, because it will not be easy for us to go back*

- Pablo Neruda

A comparison of the socially concerned paintings of the Ecuadorian Oswaldo Guayasamín with a famous text by the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano provides valuable lessons about Latin America's past oppression and the connection to its present. Relating these to the ideas of Peruvian philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui demonstrates that colonialism and post-colonialism/neo-colonialism were burning issues for many intellectuals from the diverse Latin American countries as they sought social justice in their nations. Retracing their current 20<sup>th</sup> century preoccupations to Latin America's remote past and then to the recent past through the powerful paintings of Guayasamín, we find the beginnings of Latin America's troubled history in the advent of the early modern world around 1500. In the 1600s a virtual river of silver exploded out of the *cerro de Potosí*, a great Andean mountain in modern day Bolivia. The silver surged into the hands of the Spanish conquerors who fervently desired its extraction. But like water, it quickly ran through their fingers into the reservoirs of other European bankers and traders, who profited the most from this "primitive accumulation" of capital and in this manner set the stage for Europe's eventual industrialization, as well as the growth of the economic imbalance between the West (including the US) and Latin America<sup>4</sup>. Eduardo Galeano

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<sup>4</sup> Galeano discusses this in detail from pages 20- 38, but Paul M. Sweezy in "Center, Periphery, and the Crisis of the System" also explains this primitive accumulation of capital. He writes, "For a number of

reminds us that great wealth accumulates only at the expense of another's devastating poverty, and so these beginnings of an international division of labor and the plunder of raw materials were subsequently a major source of the eventual neo-colonialism that would often keep Latin America underdeveloped and economically oppressed up to the era in which Oswaldo Guayasamín responded with his socially charged paintings.

Eduardo Galeano, in his book *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina*, or in English, *Open Veins of Latin America*, presents this and many other penetrating examples of how Latin America's natural resources and raw materials have been sucked dry, only to make Europe and the United States rich at the direct expense of most Latin Americans, while plunging the latter into increasing poverty (Galeano, Chapters 1 – 5). Consequently, social consciousness has played an important role in the visual arts of these post-independence countries in the Americas.

The Andean region is an especially poignant example, out of which emerged different types of pictorial *Indigenismo* in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a movement of various tendencies actively engaged in illuminating the social conditions of the Indigenous peoples that make up much of the population. Artist Oswaldo Guayasamín (1919 – 1999), from the small Andean country of Ecuador, began his career by responding to *Indigenismo* and various social aspects of this would continue to be present in his work as it stylistically evolved and the scope of his ideas expanded. Like Galeano, Guayasamín was concerned with addressing the issue of oppression and in his *La Edad de la Ira* series he approaches this complicated subject through many images of the oppressed, and a few

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reasons...the situation in Western Europe was propitious, and the region got something of a head start, two aspects of which were the development of superior technologies in navigation and firepower. These, in turn, enabled Europe to embark on a career of pillage and conquest that transferred vast amounts of wealth to their homelands and, at the same time, stunted or actually destroyed the development potential of rival areas" (Sweezy, 211).

of the oppressors, in hundreds of large-scale canvases. Like Galeano's sociological epic, *Open Veins of Latin America*, Guayasamín's vast series of paintings recounts an immense history of grinding poverty, unremunerated labor, punishing living conditions, sporadic violence and persistent racism.

While this is a large part of the story of Latin America, it has world-wide connections and implications, and this is an essential point made by both Galeano and Guayasamín in their respective oeuvres. Shaped by an emerging capitalism based in Europe and the US, the international sphere spawned the abuses eloquently explained by Galeano and so compellingly invoked in Guayasamín's *La Edad de la Ira*, which deals with 20<sup>th</sup> century abuses in Latin America as well as across the globe. This chapter will be dedicated to several examples of Guayasamín's images of the oppressors by tying them to Latin America's peculiar history. Though few in number, these latter paintings visualize some of the characters implicated with the types of injustices mentioned earlier and to be elaborated upon. The paintings, *Serie Los Culpables #1 - #4*, *Reunión en el Pentágono #1 - #5*, and *Los Malditos, Pinochet*, when viewed in relation to Galeano's revisionist textual history will allow an exploration of how these images function within the aims of *La Edad de la Ira* series, as a revisionist pictorial history. At issue will be whether or not these images actually illuminate the larger structures of oppression in order to be socially effective. In turn such an inquiry will enable us to launch into other themes within subsequent chapters, which discuss images of the disenfranchised, and one unique series which includes both perpetrators and victims, all the while expanding the frame of reference from Latin America to more international subjects and even more

symbolic themes, in order to examine the class-based social awareness and stylistic ferocity of Guayasamín's most well-known series.

Since both author and artist center their attentions on the complex issues causing oppression, and this will be a central theme throughout this thesis, my examination can only begin with an attempt at a more concrete understanding of what is meant by this term. "Oppression" (and the many words used in its place) is multifaceted, including elements of race, class, gender, sexuality, among others. Hardiman and Jackson's definition asserts that, "social oppression...is an interlocking system that involves ideological control of the social institutions and resources of the society, resulting in a condition of privilege for the agent group relative to the disenfranchisement and exploitation of the target group[s]" (Hardiman & Jackson as quoted in Quiñones Rosada, 76). This definition recognizes both the psychological and physical manifestations of oppression that function in tandem to orchestrate the variety of repressive structures that have been and often continue to persist in the world. Guayasamín's work, emerging out of the varied indigenous cultures and stark contrasts between wealth and poverty of the Andean nation of Ecuador, certainly interrelates race, class, and gender, while his figures communicate emotively both the psychological and physical symptoms of an unjust world. Representations of figures with indigenous appearances and other people who have an overworked and emaciated appearance are some of the visual tactics that the artist summons into his paintings.

Raul Quiñones Rosada stresses that when dealt with adequately the elements of racism, classism, and sexism (among others) are interwoven, "Together, these systems create an intricate network of structures and self-perpetuating processes that, in effect,

constitute an all encompassing matrix of domination” (78). The matrix of domination that has controlled Latin America is what Eduardo Galeano wants to illuminate and expose through a collection of actual stories and factual histories from all the effected countries. For Galeano the emphasis is more on causes and effects in the interrelated economic and social spheres. Guayasamín also attacks the 20<sup>th</sup> century forces of domination; though while his visual approach is through pictorial narrative, it is not necessarily illustrative, and so it communicates in a less historically detailed but perhaps more impactful manner through the emotional imagery Guayasamín evokes. A comparison with Galeano’s historically expansive study helps us to connect it with Guayasamín’s deeply intimate images of suffering, centered on the humbled human figure, in order to understand how precisely these paintings are responding to Latin America’s particular place in an international matrix of domination.

Galeano’s *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina* was published in 1971, thus overlapping with the period in which Guayasamín worked on *La Edad de la Ira* series (from the 1960s until his death in 1999)<sup>5</sup>. Fischlin and Nandorfy note of Galeano that he creates “...a sobering critique of the way in which literary culture must rethink its relation to the public sphere” (1). This is also a further point of comparison with Guayasamín, who navigated the intersection between the “high art” of painting on canvas with a decidedly popular commentary, which often finds a social voice in media with more mass accessibility, such as prints. This blending of a type of cosmopolitan modernism with social critique would become a point of contention between Guayasamín and the art critic Marta Traba – a controversy concerning the effectiveness of his art, which will be further elaborated upon in Chapter Two. In both cases though, these

<sup>5</sup> Galeano wrote *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina* in only 3 months in 1970.

similarities between Galeano and Guayasamín, also recall the writings of the Peruvian intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui, who insisted that art could not divorce itself from the social sphere if it wanted to be relevant for modern Latin America (Greet, 70).

In a Foreword for *Open Veins of Latin America*, Chilean author Isabel Allende captures the tone of Galeano's influential work when she writes, "Galeano denounces exploitation with uncompromising ferocity, yet this book is almost poetic in its description of solidarity and the human capacity for survival in the midst of the worst kind of despoliation" (Allende, xii). This resilient hope amidst all the wreckage is also evident in the paintings of Guayasamín – though not in *Edad de la Ira* series as much as it is in *La Edad de la Ternura*. The latter is not a focus of this thesis, but it will prove to be an interesting point of comparison. Returning to *Open Veins of Latin America*, exploitation is indeed the major theme of this book, and Galeano has no shortage of examples from which to draw in demonstrating how international economic structures since the colonial period and into modern neo-colonialism have created the imbalances in which Latin America has consistently ended up with far less, though their resources are plentiful. Tracing several Latin American resources, such as gold, silver, coffee, cacao, minerals, and oil among others, he demonstrates how their manic extraction or mono-dimensional agricultural emphasis has undermined the naturally fertile lands of Latin America in ways that disfurnish the local populations. The forces of oppression in Galeano's revisionist history are clearly and unflinchingly pointed out to the reader so that there is an inversion of mainstream history, as it is the rich, the powerful, the most prominent figures (those who usually write histories and enforce them on others) who are revealed here as the marauders.

Though he often moves freely between time and place, Galeano does begin with the period of the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of Latin America. *El cerro rico de Potosí*, which we began with, is one such example where those who were able to briefly enjoy the short-lived wealth of Potosí were not the same people as those who were extracting the silver out of the mines of course; that labor was reserved for the indigenous peoples who had been conquered and whose land had been overtaken. Many of the Indians worked in the *mitayo* system, as Galeano informs us, “A *mitayo* is an Indian who pays a *mita*, or tribute, usually in the form of forced labor in public works, especially in the mines” (32). In this example Galeano introduces a couple of sources of exploitation: clearly marked social stratification along ethnic lines, with class and race being virtually synonymous, and the introduction of a new, feudal economic system into the societies of Latin America. It is instructive here that Guayasamín had traveled to Potosí, and later he painted the interior of the cupola of his monumental project *La Capilla del Hombre* with the skeletal bodies of the miners of Potosí reaching for the sunlight beaming in through the top of the cupola (Jáuregui & Fischer, 26), alluding to the world of darkness they were subsumed by while extracting silver from the bowels of the *cerro*. In a speech in Havana, Cuba Guayasamín described the intense echoes of suffering over the centuries that he witnessed there:

Y llegamos a Potosí, al cerro maldito, al cerro centro conmocional del dolor del hombre en América, al cerro donde desde hace más de 450 años, 4 millones de hombres, mujeres y niños indios fueron tragados por el miedo y la avaricia de los españoles, después los mestizos y ahora los gringos... (Guayasamín & Castro, “Sobre La Deuda Externa”, “Palabras



de Guayasamín en el Encuentro Sobre la Deuda Externa de América Latina y el Caribe”, para. 3).

In this statement, the connection between past and present abuses and abusers is stressed, as Galeano also does in his writing. As the speech moved forward, Guayasamín continued to emphasize the interrelatedness of Latin America’s history of oppression and he names some of the oppressors, who will also appear in his paintings: first there were the conquerors, then various *mestizo* leaders of the Independence period, and now the *gringos* – specifically, the ruling elite in the United States.

Returning to the roots of Latin America’s economic problems, one of Peru’s most influential thinkers, José Carlos Mariátegui (1894 – 1930), developed his understanding of imperialism and neo-colonial exploitation in a specifically Andean context that is consistent with Galeano’s later research, and Mariátegui’s dissident writings illuminate the environment out of which Guayasamín emerged. According to Marc Becker, Mariátegui saw the pre-conquest Inca Empire as a materially prosperous communitarian society: “Their material gains had been destroyed by the Spanish conquest, and the feudal legacy of Spanish colonialism meant the ongoing exploitation of the indigenous masses” (Becker, 45). For both Mariátegui and Galeano the introduction of emergent European mercantile capitalism with feudal-like social structures into Latin America would begin the uneven development of the economy that would carry forward into the post-independence period and be no match for Europe’s powerful industrialization and the unequal exchange brought with it. Owing to this history, Guayasamín rejected any idea of celebrating the Quincentenary, the 500 years after Columbus’ arrival, by saying,

How can we celebrate an event that was, at its own historical moment, so terrible and damaging for all our great pre-Colombian cultures?

(Guayasamín in Murphy & Guayasamín, 61).

One of his earlier works, painted in 1948 in the *Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana* of Quito, Ecuador, directly addressed the confrontation between the Inca and the Spanish conquistadors and it is one of Guayasamín's earliest representations of an oppressor figure. This mural, titled *El Incario y La Conquista*, presents an image of military oppressors that is visually quite distinct from the later ones in *La Edad de la Ira* (Fig. 1). The image is reflective of his later stylistic development and also of the distinct characters of pre and post-independence abuses he addressed at different periods. A major difference is that this mural is clearly a self-contained and rather descriptive narrative, much in keeping with the great mural traditions of Mexico, with which Guayasamín's earlier work was often compared.

On the right side of the mural the dark figures of three European conquerors gallop into the scene on horseback. Jagged mountains, pale in color, sweep down beside them and mimic the shape of the glinting sword held in one of their hands. This section visually seems to intrude harshly on the rest of the mural which contains great trees, magnificent blocks of stone, fruitful agriculture and other less foreboding mountains. Harmoniously blending into this side of the scene are the Inca people, who consist of sober, muscular men and warm, bare-chested women. The women melt into the field of crops, through the use of brown and yellow along with the roundness of the blossoming plants and the women's breasts. The men (plus one woman dressed in white and another kneeling) are in the center of the mural. They too echo the shape of a background that is

formed by a large stone structure. With smooth sides, it is distinct from the form of the mountains and it clearly reads as stone, which has been carved by the hands of man, an allusion to the immense stone architecture of the Inca. The men's dark bodies stand out against it, they are strong and stocky, and their shoulders trace the shape of the building, speaking to their prominence and considerable strength. In the group of the conquistadors we recognize elements of both the military and the church through the dress of the figures, two in steel colored armor and one in a black hood. Their presence is important, because as Galeano writes, "The epic of the Spaniards and Portuguese in America combined propagation of the Christian faith with usurpation and plunder of native wealth" (14).

The conquistador furthest away visually from the viewer is the most interesting character, his body is so subsumed by his armor that even his face appears gray and hard and his eye is replaced with a lifeless black hole, making him look more like a machine than a human being. This visual tactic seems to derive from one of José Clemente Orozco's previous murals, titled *The Spanish Conquest of Mexico*, in *Hospicio Cabañas* in Guadalajara, Mexico, which he painted between 1938 and 1939 (Fig. 2). Orozco's mural depicts a conquistador figure riding a horse, both of which are completely industrial and mechanical in appearance, the visual similarities are quite clear. Guayasamín had in fact spent several months in Mexico with Orozco while he was learning the technique of fresco in 1943. It is important to note that this was directly after Guayasamín's first trip outside of Ecuador to the United States at the invitation of the US State Department, which had been due to a fortunate connection with Nelson Rockefeller. This is noteworthy because at this point in Guayasamín's artistic career his paintings

were more focused on the indigenous civilizations and European colonialisms, than upon engaging with the neo-colonial reality after Independence, in which he would later implicate the United States as an oppressor. Returning to Guayasamín's mural, the epic narrative and visual configuration also relate to the compositions of one of the other Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera. It is perhaps understandable why so often scholars and critics have exaggerated the claim that Guayasamín's work is in the vein of the Mexican muralist style. Of all the muralists though, Guayasamín's work shares the most stylistic similarity with the intense expressionism of Orozco; both artists' work register potent expressionistic elements, use dark somber color palettes, and feature emotionally provocative imagery. The common trope of the conquerors as cold mechanistic warriors by Orozco and Guayasamín also introduces several ideas, including usurpation of the land and the abrupt introduction of new social formations with different values and divergent desires. Along with this representation of the Spaniards using advanced technology of the time, was an implicit reference to the continually advancing technology of industrialization, as well as other 20<sup>th</sup> century developments that would continue to give the neo-colonizers an advantage over the underdeveloping countries of Latin America.

The location and date of this mural by Guayasamín gives us a deeper understanding of the significance of its subject matter. *La Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana* is "a semiautonomous institution that would receive governmental subsidies" (Handelsman, 82). It was founded in 1944 by Ecuadorian Benajmín Carrión with the help of the Velasco Ibarra government. Its main goal was that, "...cultural policies ought to be an integral part of modern Ecuador's social and political agenda"

(Handelsman, 83) and it “...embraced [mainstream] Indigenism as a symbol of cultural autonomy and national renewal” (Greet, 176). In this same decade, one of the *Indigenista* styles, which we might relate to Guayasamín’s mural, was changing from a more typical European *avant garde* practice to an official style embraced by the governmental institutions of many Andean countries. It is therefore not surprising to find this subject and style in the *Casa de la Cultura*, which was interested in promoting imagery that evoked a specifically Ecuadorian identity based on Native American peoples, as opposed to European identities. As Michele Greet notes, this conventional *Indigenista* style became absorbed by institutions of power and it lost favor among artists otherwise committed to social justice for indigenous peoples (Greet, 176). Such a break is evident in the stylistic and conceptual evolution of Guayasamín’s art. For, shortly after this he would begin working in a far more abstract and geometric style in the 1950s in his first major series, *Huacayñán*. Then in the 1960’s he would branch his ideas out further to depict many types of human suffering and exploitation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century beyond Latin America. This is clear in *La Edad del la Ira* series, in which he would consolidate his particular style through a synthesis of various modernisms like Expressionism and Cubism, while retaining Pre-Colombian elements to create a type of cosmopolitan modernism peculiar to the Americas. Greet notes that the social nature of the works of *La Edad de la Ira* still owed much to the early types of *Indigenismo*, and it is interesting to note that the *Casa de la Cultura* and Benjamín Carrión would continue to be important supporters of Guayasamín throughout his career (Greet, 195 – 196).

Focusing on the indigenous of the Andean region as he conceived a plan for the socialist transformation in Peru, Mariátegui observed the ongoing problems of the

indigenous peoples in terms of class. Becker clarifies this point by saying, “It was not because of their race but because of their feudal economic situation that the indigenous people were oppressed” (Becker, 47). Galeano identifies several systems with colonial origins, such as the *encomienda* and the *latifundio*, which concentrated the best land in the hands of wealthy foreigners while also indenturing indigenous labor to work the land, so that there is an afterlife to these systems which continue into the present day (42). In the creation of these exploitative systems, Galeano reveals countless 20<sup>th</sup> century examples in which the Indians have continued to be driven from their homes to the most inhospitable places, precisely because their land was so rich in natural resources. He emphasizes how, “The Indians have suffered, and continue to suffer, the curse of their own wealth; that is the drama of all Latin America” (Galeano, 47). Guayasamín personally witnessed this abject situation in many countries when he undertook a massive trip through Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru, making hundreds of sketches which would result in *Huacayñán*. The latter entailed an exploration of what he had seen through his depictions of the Indigenous, black, and *mestizo* cultures of the region.

Like the Indians who, “...participate in an economic and social order which assigns them the role of victim – the most exploited of the exploited”, the nations of Latin America have also been forced into this role after Independence (Galeano, 49 – 50). Latin America’s former colonizers were replaced with neo-colonizers, European countries, such as England, and later the United States who would largely control the production, movement, and prices of many Latin American goods and resources, for their own benefit and at the expense of the producing countries, so that again we see how oppression continues to be a class issue. This type of activity fits a general definition of

neo-colonialism, which Ghosh gathers from *The Third African People's Conference* of 1961, in which neo-colonialism is

...the survival of the colonial system [economically] in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries, which became victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical [forces] (190).

More specifically Ghosh includes, "...political devices, economic instruments, treaties and agreements, arms trade, technology transfer, military mechanisms and cultural mechanisms" (191) as some of the main means of neo-colonialism in a post-colonial and post-independence world.

Galeano assigns one source of the blame for this neo-colonial system to the stranglehold of monoculture agricultural production in post-Independence Latin America, in which a single product, such as coffee, cacao, or bananas, is the overwhelming export. Using the most productive land exclusively for products that are desired and consumed by a European and US market, instead of growing food staples for their own nation, the countries of Latin America are trapped in an economic pitfall in which they make very little money in comparison to what they spend, owing to the unequal economic exchange that results. This also happens with mineral resources, in which rich countries, like the United States, can buy raw materials, such as iron, cheaper from a Latin American country than by mining its own. Because of more advanced industrialization and technology, US companies can then turn the raw materials into products which are sold back to Latin America at a far greater value than the price of the raw materials, so the cost is almost prohibitive for locals. If the government of a Latin American country

decides not to submit to this foreign domination, however, military interventions by the powerful Western nations are often the response. Guayasamín's home country, Ecuador, had similarly fallen into this trap of economic subservience and the uneven development it causes. Michael Handelsman writes that, "Because Ecuador has always been primarily an exporter of raw materials, the country continues to be susceptible to the ebb and flow of international markets and prices. Cacao, bananas, and oil have determined every aspect of Ecuadorian society since the late nineteenth century", and this in turn has led to economic immiseration and political instability – another re-occurring problem in many Latin American countries (Handelsman, 12). These cycles keep the nations of Latin America subordinate to the economically powerful capitalist countries in the North, which are only so powerful because the structure of the worldwide economic system has been historically to their advantage. This is one of the structuralist definitions of neo-colonial oppression for Galeano in *Open Veins of Latin America*, and he points the accusatory finger at the oppressive nations whom he identifies as Europe, the United States (perhaps the most so at the time), and he also singles out the bourgeoisie of the Latin American countries themselves (whom Guayasamín tends to identify as the *mestizos* in the speech quoted earlier). These latter citizens of Latin America cooperate with this imposed foreign system to their own benefit and the detriment of the rest of the population in their nation.

In Guayasamín's *Los Culpables* series, translated in English as *The Guilty*, painted from 1964 to 1967, the artist gives a symbolic face to these class-based perpetrators, and they are virtually the same characters we find in Galeano's history of Latin America (Fig. 3). Guayasamín labels them specifically as *El Cura*, *El Macuto*, *El*



*Presidente*, and *El Gamonal*, in English, the Priest, the Militant, the President, and the Chief. Interestingly, the Militant and the Priest are oppressors whom we found in Guayasamín's mural *El Incario y La Conquista* as well, thus revealing the interconnectedness of Latin America's past with its present and the ongoing omnipresence of both the Catholic Church and the military system in many of Latin America's countries. The difference, though, is that in *Los Culpables* series, these are not foreign exploiters but local ones; the powerful leaders in Latin America itself, who are complicit and even encouraging of the foreign domination which enriches their own pockets and positions. In this series the viewer is confronted with four grotesque, bodiless heads in large scale. Two, the chief and the president, are presented in a three-quarter view, thus emulating the tropes of elite portraiture from Europe as well as the former Spanish colonies, to signify their high status and huge egoism all at once. The militant confronts the viewer head on with an unwavering and unfeeling gaze, playing on the general reputation of soldiers as confrontational and order-obeying. *El Cura*, the priest, is the only figure whose face is indistinguishable, for his head is turned away from the viewer (Fig. 4). The implications of this positioning allude to the Catholic Church's complex and controversial history in Latin America. As Galeano describes the role of the Christian faith in colonial Latin America, he highlights the terrible inconsistencies of an institution that, while claiming to help the indigenous peoples, simultaneously degraded their culture ideologically and also benefited from profits that came through exploitation (38 – 42). Guayasamín's priest figure literally turns his back on the viewer, and then symbolically, on the people. Simultaneously, *El Cura's* posture causes the priest to read as a cowardly accomplice in the oppression against Native Americans by the

governmental authorities and military force whose company he keeps, literally in the paintings, as in reality; his avarice is more disguised, however, since his institution claims to work in the name of charity and compassion, making our inability to recognize his face in the image quite telling.

While these paintings have the semblance of portraiture by highlighting singular figures with distinct appearances, these are not specific individuals. They are symbolic figures of what Guayasamín wants the viewer to recognize as the local agents of institutional oppression in Latin America. They have the appearance of wanted posters used for criminals and in this case the crime is greed, a cause of the immense suffering Guayasamín depicts so wretchedly in his multitude of paintings of the oppressed. In his book *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*, Michael Taussig's discussion of the human face proves helpful in approaching Guayasamín's painted faces, which are the sole subject of these particular canvases. The first and most important point Taussig makes is that "...the face never exists alone; fated in its very being to be only when faced by another face" (225). Each canvas in the massive series of *La Edad de la Ira* engages in a dialog with the other faces of the other canvases, and in this sense they create a complete history out of the different characters' stories. To bring this narrative into the realm of social affectivity, the outside and active viewer's face is then required. For not only do we give the faces painted by Guayasamín life, but they in turn acknowledge our faces, making us aware of our own presence, their message, and our own potential to act on it. Taussig discusses this face of the Other as, "...that Other to whom one's oneness stands in debt and to whom one submits one's being as a social being" (224). We may realize that in terms of our own personal histories we are distinct

from these “Other” faces of *La Edad de la Ira*, but simultaneously we are forced to connect with them. But the way we relate to Guayasamín’s images of the oppressed and images of the oppressors is quite distinct. Taussig also describes the potential of the face as either a “mask” or “window [on]to the soul” (224). Though abstracted and stylized in a manner that may appear formally as mask-like, Guayasamín's faces, because of their emotive qualities function more as a window onto the soul, than as a mask for it. It is through their physical aspects that we are able to read them as either being oppressor or oppressed. The faces of the oppressors betray them for what they are, and their disfigurement is of a different variety than that of the oppressed, as is clear in *Los Culpables*.

Gaunt, skeletal, starving, and impoverished is how we might describe the bodies and faces of the oppressed figures of *La Edad de la Ira*. None of these words fit *Los Culpables* though; indeed the latter are the complete opposite. Fat, bulging, and with an excess of flesh, these are attributes that are far more appropriate for this group. Even though they are just heads, in terms of color and form Guayasamín has used his artistic means to create the engorged mass of these figures. Thick lines and dark shadows are used to emphasize their skin, which hangs in heaping rolls. Along with this, the hues of the background serve to highlight other colors within the faces of each figure, enhancing their grotesqueness. *El Cura* displays this visual effect well; the priest's sagging, bald, and pink head stands out against the red background, which is muted in some areas with darker hued reds. Yet the color of his background calls attention to the red strokes of paint that have been scored and scraped across the head by Guayasamín's paintbrush. The effect is potentially displeasing, as the red strokes appear, when viewed figuratively,

like wounds or raw irritated skin located mostly around the hanging and wrinkled flesh clinging to this figure's head. From these bloated figures it seems that the religious institutions, the government, and the military are thriving while the rest of the population struggles to survive. The institutional powers are not just thriving; they are consuming so much that they have a sickeningly overindulged pallor. Through the physicality of these figures, as structural homologies, Guayasamín has engaged with the larger structures of oppression that Galeano invokes in *Open Veins of Latin America*. In brief, he represents the consumption of Latin America's resources by the countries of Europe and the United States aided by the governments, militaries, and religious institutions of the Latin American countries, either through indulgent passivity or active participation, which also has allowed these local figures to become bloated through the poverty of the people. This is a smaller scale model of a global system of power, as Galeano writes, "The industrial bourgeoisie is a dominant class dominated in turn from abroad" (213). So Guayasamín implores the viewer to consider the role these local figures of authority have played within global exploitation, by presenting us with these bodiless heads. Their faces betray their negative role, but their lack of a body also reveals their lack of control and power. Their heads float like puppets, waiting to be manipulated by a more powerful agent, revealing that *Los Culpables* are but one part of a larger system of oppression.

Guayasamín's fixation on government and military figures, such as we find in *Los Culpables*, is not surprising considering Ecuador's history during the time frame in which he painted these works, the 1960s. The country had two major agricultural export periods, cacao, between the 1860s and 1920s, and bananas, between the 1940s and 1970s

(Andrade & North, 424)<sup>6</sup>. In recalling that Galeano singles out Latin America's dependence on mono-agricultural exports as a major factor in their economic instability, these periods in Ecuador offer just such an example. Andrade and North expand on the different effects of these two eras, but specifically about the banana era they write:

The banana boom thus distributed its profits more broadly than cacao had done, but the basic patterns of social inequality remained intact and the political system highly exclusionary. Indeed, in the highlands, indigenous peoples, who formed the majority of the rural population, remained disenfranchised and subjects to servile labor relations: the triad of the prefect, the priest, and the landlord continued to control the lives of the rural people (425).

Also during this time Ecuador was controlled by a succession of several military regimes allowed into power through U.S. interventions. These events led to the consolidation of wealth in the hands of elite coastal and highland business families as a result of the country's reliance on monoculture exports. This is the historical atmosphere that would have surrounded Guayasamín while he worked on this series.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1970s, when Galeano wrote *Open Veins of Latin America*, the main foreign violator of Latin America was the United States, whose imperialist and capitalist aims, along with Cold War mentality, had infiltrated and interfered with many Latin American

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<sup>6</sup> For more detailed information on this and the United Fruit Company's history in Latin America see Peter Chapman's *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*. Edinburgh, New York: Canongate, Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Pablo Andrade A. and Liisa L. North elaborate on cacao and banana exports in a chapter dedicated to Ecuador's history, "Ecuador: Political Turmoil, Social Mobilization, and Frustrated Reform" from the book *Latin America: Its Problems and Its Promise* edited by Jan Knippers Black, in which they make connections between these products and the growing economic gap between oligarchic families and the majority of the population who work these plantations.

countries' economic and political infrastructures. Coffee and fruit produced in Latin America has often been controlled by U.S. corporations, resulting in the laborers being economically marginalized. A glaring example of this is the United Fruit Company, which has monopolized Ecuador's banana production and exportation (Galeano, 100), a situation that Guayasamín would have known about. From these countries come many examples of how the U.S. military ensured that U.S. corporations would continue to prosper at the expense of locals. Central America is one of the most horrific examples of the continued interference in the politics of these countries for the benefit of U.S. corporate capitalism. Galeano writes,

U.S. concerns took over lands, customs houses, treasuries, and governments; Marines landed here, there, and everywhere to “protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens”...(108).

He deftly quotes U.S. General Smedley D. Butler, who affirms that during his military service in Central America,

“...I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism...” (108).

On multiple occasions Guayasamín acknowledges his anger at the debilitating U.S. interference in Latin America, and in *La Edad de la Ira*, this anger visually takes form in the series *Reunión en el Pentágono*, in English, *Reunion in the Pentagon*, which denounces the US as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's worst violators of human rights and civil liberties (Fig. 5).

This latter series, painted between 1966 and 1970, consists of five large canvases, each depicting a single ominous figure in a form which is consistent with that of *Los Culpables*. Though separated, the figures read as a single group through their shared somber colors and the line which creates the shape of a desk, behind which each of the figures sit. The title informs us that we are looking at a meeting at the Pentagon, home of the United States Department of Defense. This is further alluded to through the military style hat worn by *Figure V*, under which he glares menacingly, as well as symbolically in the five canvases. Each canvas measures 184 x 184 cm, or just over 6 feet by 6 feet, and only half of these figures subsume almost this entire space, making their densely compacted bodies much larger than life size. Their colossal scale correlates with the enormous power they wield and their hands are represented and visible, which also implies a sense of activeness and control, which was lacking in the puppet heads of *Los Culpables*; to recognize the historical effects of this power one need only to recall the list of examples from throughout Latin America of progressive socialist governments which were sabotaged, through US covert activities when a US corporation's "right" to exploit was threatened. In a *Los Angeles Times* article Guayasamín affirms this when he says,

“...the attitude of the government – of the U.S. governments – has been quite tragic for Latin America. There are repeated examples: Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico” and “We have all been more or less victims, in one form or another, of the U.S. government” (Guayasamín as quoted in Smith, Los Angeles Times website, page 2 of 5, para.6).

The United States' ongoing fear of socialism in the Cold War, related to its fear of losing its chance to grow wealthy and wasteful off of the resources of others, all of this is clearly illustrated in Ecuador's own historical reality from 1960 to 1963.

The year 1959 was a monumental one, when one of the first successful social revolutions in Latin America occurred: the Cuban Revolution. Prior to this, the United States had enjoyed considerable control over the island nation, much of it in the form of trade. Cuba, like so many other Latin American countries during this period was locked into the stranglehold of the monocultural production of sugar. Most of this sugar went to supply the demand of the United States, which in turn provided the Cuban ruling elite with all the necessities it was not producing by submitting all of its viable land to sugar production. Entrenched in such a system, the trap of poverty was inevitable. This situation continued until the Revolution of 1959, which challenged the very foundations of this system of exploitation based in the West. Cuba's rejection of US capitalism and Western imperialism, led to the US' economic embargo of Cuba in 1960, including a complete embargo beginning in 1962 (Schwab, 15). Guayasamín was invited to Cuba in 1961, and it was there, after witnessing firsthand the way that Cuba had been decimated by foreign imperialism, and how it continued to be persecuted by the United States, that he was inspired to begin *La Edad de la Ira series* (Camón Aznar, 1977, 75). In this series Guayasamín addressed many instances of poverty, exploitation, violence, and suffering caused by the international economic system of corporate capitalism in which nations vie for economic control and power over each other. Guayasamín greatly admired Fidel Castro's accomplishments in Cuba calling him "...el hombre más genial de América Latina, uno de los hombres más grandes que ha producido la humanidad y nuestro más



grande héroe” (Guayasamín & Castro, “De Guayasamín Para Fidel” “Frasas Tomadas de Entrevistas Realizadas por el Periodista de Radio Habana Cuba, Pedro Martínez Pérez, al Pintor Oswaldo Guayasamín, en Quito y La Habana, para.12). This of course complicated Guayasamín’s relationship with the United States and from this point on he would not have a significant show in the US again until 2008, almost a decade after his death. For Ecuador, another country economically debilitated by monoculture and disadvantaged relationships with economic superpowers like the US, its relationship with Cuba would make it subject to unwanted US intervention as well.

In 1960, the José María Velasco Ibarra populist government was doomed from the outset by US backed CIA activity in the country<sup>8</sup>. William Blum writes that Velasco Ibarra,

...earned the wrath of the US State Department and the CIA by his unyielding opposition to the two stated priorities of American policy in Ecuador: breaking relations with Cuba, and clamping down hard on activists of the Communist Party and those to their left (153).

In the subsequent years Ecuador was infiltrated by CIA activity on all sides, with the intention of breaking their relationship with Cuba and terminating any leftist activity. The covert creation of anti-leftist news media by the CIA was one tactic used, as well as the clandestine bombing of churches and right-wing organizations in order to frame leftist organizations (Blum, 154). In 1961, the CIA instigated military action that resulted in the resignation of Velasco Ibarra, who was then replaced by Vice-President Carlos Julio

<sup>8</sup> Earlier in Chapter 1, José María Velasco Ibarra was mentioned as president of Ecuador during the creation of the *Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana* in 1944. Michael Handelsman clarifies this in *Culture and Customs of Ecuador*, “...José María Velasco Ibarra (1893 – 1979) became Ecuador’s most dominant political figure of the twentieth century. He was president or dictator five times, completing only one term without being ousted by the military (1952 – 1956)” (Handelsman, 13).

Arosemana. When the new president also refused to break relations with Cuba, military pressure was again put on him until he complied. Angered citizens began a small popular uprising, though US press reports greatly exaggerated the number of people in the uprising and made it sound as if they had been armed by Cuba, when in reality they were no match for the battalion of US paratroopers sent to stop them from restoring a democratically elected government (Blum, 155). Arosemana did not last long either and in 1963 the national military with CIA backing surrounded the presidential palace and a military junta took control.

Their first act of business?

...to outlaw communism; “communists” and other “extreme” leftists were rounded up and jailed, the arrests campaign being facilitated by data from the CIA’s Subversive Control Watch List...Civil liberties were suspended; the 1964 elections canceled (Blum, 155).

Handelsman also identifies the military junta of 1963 to 1966 as a period of repression, along with the creation of the National Security Act, which,

...gave the Government the ability to squelch all forms of opposition that might be associated with Castro and his sympathizers... (15).

Galeano notes one of the economic implications of the new leadership’s ideology,

In 1964 Ecuador proclaimed another agrarian reform that deserves recognition: the government distributed unproductive land only, while facilitating the concentration of better land in the grip of the big landlords (128).

The military junta, both politically and economically clearly fell in line with the capitalist policies favored by the US government.

While he traveled across the world, Guayasamín always maintained his permanent home in Quito, Ecuador and here the repressive power of the military junta hit him personally. Carlos A. Jáuregui and Edward F. Fischer describe these events, “In 1963, Guayasamín was arrested in Ecuador and held for several days on charges of subversion; in 1965, his son Pablo Guayasamín Monteverde... was detained, confined for a year, and tortured by the military government” (30 – 32). Quito is also where Guayasamín painted the entire *La Edad de la Ira series* (Minda, Fundación Guayasamín, 2 March, 2011) so it is no coincidence that he developed this series at a time, when political, social, and economic oppression could be felt so close. The relentless attacks by the US on Cuba, both ideologically, and literally through the *Playa Girón* invasion in 1961, also fed Guayasamín’s anger against the colossus of the North. He even painted a large canvas on the subject (Fig. 6). The painting *Playa Girón*, 1963, is of three emaciated figures, one of whom lies lifelessly on the ground, with the other two bent over him in grief made obvious through their gestures. The dark black background is broken by a central block of grey, right behind the deceased figure, and the religious symbolism is clear with its notable similarity to an image of Christ’s descent from the cross. Using Catholic imagery for his paintings of the oppressed would be a feature of many of Guayasamín’s strongest works and a point of contrast with the manner in which he portrays oppressors. By the mid 1960s he began work on *Reunión en el Pentágono*, and the visual depiction of these figures exudes their cruelty. One stares us down, a couple cannot hold our gaze, others are lost in evil thoughts, and here color plays an evocative

role in how the viewer understands these gruesome characters. Each is painted in an off-white beige or gray tone, which is lacerated with marks of more gray and black. The murky colors make them appear sullied and stained, perhaps a reference to the destruction their decisions and actions have caused. Other parts of their bodies are also subsumed by great black shadows, making them appear to emerge from the ominous darkness of the background.

Guayasamín's treatment of this series is distinct from that of *Los Culpables* series, with its proliferation of flesh. Even though some do have sagging and puffy faces, such as *III* and *IV*, the bland color in which *Reunión en el Pentágono* has been painted has drained the life out of them. They are not devoid of flesh as are Guayasamín's images of the oppressed, nor is their fleshiness being particularly emphasized. Rather these bodies are quite large, still alluding to their great consumption, but with little detail. They are mostly blocky expanses of the off-white, gray, and black, giving them an almost stony appearance. It is as if they are not even human and this makes them completely different from Guayasamín's images of the oppressed. For even when the oppressed are stripped first of all material things and then even of their very own skin, so that we feel we are looking more at their flayed insides than their outer appearance, we immediately recognize them as living and suffering beings. And perhaps this is Guayasamín's commentary: that these figures of the oppressors, in this case specifically with the United States as oppressor, do not have human interests in mind for they themselves are hardly even human, so emotionless and lifeless are they.

A noteworthy feature of *Reunión en el Pentágono* and all of Guayasamín's paintings of oppressors, a few of which have been examined here, is that the figures are

exclusively of men. When Guayasamín paints images of women, they are either in the form of the oppressed, as in *La Edad de la Ira* series or they serve as protagonists, as in *La Edad de la Ternura* series. Paintings from *La Edad de la Ternura*, also known as *Mientras Viva Siempre Te Recuerdo*, in English, *The Age of Tenderness* or *While I Live I Will Always Remember You*, painted in the 1980s and 90s, contrast strongly with the oppressors from the earlier *La Edad de la Ira*, while retaining the emotional content that is such an essential feature of *La Edad de la Ira*. Significantly, these female figures are also infused with a sense of power and hope. Guayasamín intended the series *La Edad de la Ternura* as homage to his own mother and to many other Latin American women of whom he has said, “I think it is women who most feel the impact of violence in all its guises on our continent” (Guayasamín as quoted in Matthews, 106). Guayasamín clearly disassociates women from the role of oppressor in this statement, assigning it almost exclusively to men as evidenced in the paintings themselves. Enacting the *machismo* and *marianismo* attitudes, stemming from the colonial days but enduring to the present day, which relegated women to the private world of the home and men to the public world of work and money, generally prevented women from entering into positions of power in which they could act as oppressors, like men. In this sense, Guayasamín’s images of women do tend to fall in line with this *marianismo* conception of the woman as based on the example of the Virgin Mary, with her primary role as mother, but for Guayasamín women simultaneously use this position of humanity as a symbol of greater power than that held by the males who oppress most humans, through hegemonic structures.

An immediate difference between the mothers and the tyrants is that the figures of *Los Culpables* and *Reunión en le Pentágono* are isolated, each one is confined to their

own canvas and does not interact with others. Conversely, the great majority of paintings from *La Edad de la Ternura* feature two figures together, often a mother and child or two lovers. Inseparable through love is how we could describe the bodies of these figures who warmly connect, even when there are elements that signify some type of sadness or suffering. And from this love emanates great strength, which is physically represented through the intertwined bodies of the figures. *Abrazo* of 1986 - 87 shows a mother, whose child is so wrapped in her arms that its body has melted into hers and only his head is distinguishable at the center of her chest (Fig. 7). The composition of their bodies, with her head leaning across the child's and her arm squarely tucking him in, creates a solid shape which projects a sense of the protective safety that these two figures enjoy with each other. This is the complete opposite of the figures of *Los Culpables* and *Reunión en el Pentágono*, whose isolation makes them appear vulnerable in comparison. Alone in the confines of their canvases, their weakness is exposed. The colors of *Abrazo* are also distinct, rich warm oranges, reds, and browns, with a deep blue background to enhance them that enlivens the faces and bodies of the mother and child. These harmonious colors also promote a sense of humanity and tranquility, a far cry from the inhuman cold grays and forbidding black of *Reunión en el Pentágono* or the clashing fleshy tones of *Los Culpables*. The colors of this painting also speak to the sense of hope in *La Edad de la Ternura* series, which is hardly present in *La Edad de la Ira*, in which both the oppressors and oppressed are painted with sobering shades of black, gray, and white, along with other intensely contrasting but somber colors.

In Guayasamín's earlier *Huacayñán* series mothers and children also proliferate; an example from the Indian section of the series is *Cansancio* of 1945, in which a father

is also included, but he is not intertwined the way the mother and child are. Also before this series, in his more mainstream *Indigenista* period, Guayasamín painted various Indigenous mothers holding their babies tightly to their chests. Yet these mothers and children have clear roots in conventional Catholic religious imagery, such as the common images of Mary and the Christ child throughout the former Spanish colonies. Here Guayasamín's appropriation of this composition for a secular subject is relatable far beyond the art-savvy public. In *Abrazo*, the everyday woman is elevated by Guayasamín to the position of Mary and every child suddenly becomes the manifestation of "God" in Guayasamín's depiction. While Guayasamín does put women in the traditional position of mother and caretaker, it is simultaneously a powerful position which offers sanctuary, strength, and potential for progression. As we have seen, paintings of the oppressed in *La Edad de la Ira* also draw on some aspects of religious imagery, whether one means the look of martyrs or the countenance of Christ's descent from the cross, as in *Playa Girón*. Religious discourses translated into secular visual languages of 20<sup>th</sup> century suffering is then an important part of Guayasamín's paintings of the downtrodden, and he did so in a manner that imbues the subjects with enduring secular significance. In this way, the mothers of *La Edad de la Ternura* are connected to the images of the sufferers through bringing an element of hope to an otherwise bleak narrative. In contrast, *Los Culpables* and *Reunión en el Pentágono* have no identifiable visual relation to religious imagery and instead appear more like wanted posters from mass culture, thus degrading them instead of lauding them. The visual language of the oppressors uses a brute physicality to communicate the unspeakable deeds and callousness of the figures, and these figures are specifically named for the viewer.

In a completely distinct piece, Guayasamín visually attacks one of Latin America's worst dictators. In a section titled "Seven Years Later", Galeano reflects on what he wrote in 1970 in *The Open Veins of Latin America* and updates his readers on how some of these stories have progressed, or regressed as might be the case. He writes of the events of September 11, 1973 in Chile, when the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende was overthrown by a *coup d'état* supported and encouraged by the United States (Miller, 133)<sup>9</sup>. This ushered in the beginning of the nightmarish Pinochet dictatorship, which "...submerged Chile in a bath of blood" (Galeano, 271 – 272). Subsequently Peter Kornbluh's *The Pinochet File*, has detailed, using declassified U.S. Government documents on Chile, the role of the U.S. in the overthrow of democracy and the support of a regime known for some of the most brutal human rights violations in human history. These documents include information on, "...Project FUBELT, the CIA's covert action to block Salvador Allende from becoming president of Chile in the fall of 1970...U.S. strategy and operations to destabilize the Allende government; the degree of American support for the coup..." and more (Kornbluh, xvii – xviii).

After the 1973 coup, Pinochet's dictatorship would last until 1990 and Guayasamín responded to this violent period with a unique work from *La Edad de la Ira*. While the paintings in this series usually consist of oil on canvas, this is a painting with a hyper-pictorial, even sculptural quality. Titled *Los Malditos, Pinochet*, and created in 1978, it consists of a large flat piece of wood cut into an uneven, rectangular, disfigured shape featuring the face of the dictator in acrylic (Fig.8). This piece is meant to be suspended with a thick rope that loops around the neck of Pinochet through two holes cut in the

<sup>9</sup> Guayasamín had met and become friends with Salvador Allende in Cuba in 1962.



wood. From another hole at the top of the wood the rope is tied in the unmistakable fashion of a noose.

This is actually one of the most graphic depictions of violence within *La Edad de la Ira* series. While many pieces allude to some type of violence as having occurred through the portrayal of a disfigured body, this is one of the few in which a violent act is shown happening and aimed at the subject. In this case Guayasamín depicts something that did not actually happen, since Pinochet died of a heart attack before he could be brought to justice by the multiple court cases against him (Reel & Smith, para. 1), yet Guayasamín painted this image in 1978, when Pinochet was still maintaining his reign of terror in Chile<sup>10</sup>. His crimes against humanity include the murder and torture of thousands of citizens,

...with thousands more subjected to savage abuses such as torture, arbitrary incarceration, forced exile, and other forms of state-sponsored terror....The Junta quickly banned all political activities, closed Congress, suspended political parties, nullified electoral roles, took over universities, and shut down all but the most right-wing, pro-putsch media outlets in a clear effort to impose a military dictatorship (Kornbluh, 154)

Perhaps we can see Guayasamín's painting as an attempt to bring the dictator to justice once and for all by creating a likeness, or even an effigy, in a painting of him that is then punished through being hung on the wall. María José Falcón y Tella and Fernando Falcón y Tella, in their book *Punishment and Culture: A Right to Punish?*, explain that the punishment of effigies as a substitute for the punishment of a criminal who had

<sup>10</sup> See Christopher Hitchens's article "Augusto Pinochet, 1915 – 2006: Farewell to the perpetrator of one of the most shocking crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century".

escaped has a long history, and it was a practice used even in the Spanish Inquisition. Such defiled effigies consisted of, “...dolls or drawings representing him [the criminal] as faithfully as possible...” and they were punished exactly as the human would have been (Falcón y Tella & Falcón y Tella, 79).

In *Defacement*, Michael Taussig discusses a similar idea that we can relate to *Los Malditos, Pinochet* as a punished effigy. This is the notion of defacement, which one might also call the desecration of a thing (Taussig, 1). He discusses the effectiveness of defacement in relation to sympathetic magic, “...in which the copy seems to acquire the properties of what it's a copy of...” (Taussig, 24). This life-imbuing sympathetic magic could be said to be at work here in Guayasamín's negative image of Pinochet. As noted above by Falcón y Tella and Falcón y Tella, it is the likeness that is important for transferring the punishment to the actual person for whom the punishment is intended. Taussig also notes the importance of the mimetic quality of an object being defaced, he writes, “...a mimetic repetition, reproducing the object of critique, gaining power in that very act of copying, only then to immolate the mimicry in a violent gesture of anti-mimicry, the defacement itself” (44). Guayasamín's image of Pinochet has many of these aspects of defacement and violent retribution that enable us to accept it as an attempt to bring justice for the thousands of lives destroyed by Pinochet's dictatorship and the larger international economic system that enabled him to take power. This is one of the few works of Guayasamín's in *La Edad de la Ira* that does not require much knowledge of the title in order to become aware of the specificity of its subject matter. The image is certainly a clear likeness of Pinochet, and it could even be called a portrait. And Guayasamín did indeed paint many portraits over his lengthy career, often for important

figures and friends, which made him particularly adept at capturing features in his distinctive abstracted style. Even the details of the collar of Pinochet's shirt reveal to the viewer that he is a military figure, and these aspects correspond to the military regalia he frequently donned. If for some reason the viewer harbored any further doubt as to who this figure is, his name is written in yellow letters at the bottom left hand corner of the image, as elsewhere, with word plays that create negative meanings. Falcón y Tella and Falcón y Tella also note that the name of a person, understood as a double of his body, could also be damaged in order to exact punishment on him (79 – 82). It is the specific portrait-like quality that is part of what makes the work especially effective. With the real noose squeezing in around the faithful image of Pinochet's neck, the viewer is almost given the impression that we are witnessing the actual punishment of this criminal. And Guayasamín wants us to recall his crimes as well. Pinochet's face is soaked and smeared with blood stains and the background is also a shrill red color. Blood curdles around each horrible jagged tooth and leaks out, overflowing and spilling down his lips and chin. And while Pinochet was never brought to justice historically, Guayasamín has painted his own revisionist history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century perhaps allowing Guayasamín's paintings not only to relate the story of suffering in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but even in some instances to help to reshape it.

An examination of several images of oppressors from *La Edad de la Ira* reveals Guayasamín's real engagement with the historical realities and systems of oppression that would result in what he called "the most monstrous century that humanity has ever endured" (Guayasamín quoted in Smith, Los Angeles Times website, page 3 of 5, para. 2). From representing the blood soaked face of a real dictator, to painting the chalky

cruel faces of the Western nations who backed the installation in power of that dictator (among many other tragic events in Latin America), to the bloated faces symbolizing agents and sites of power from Latin American countries who permit the exploitation of their people, Guayasamín has approached Latin America's complex historical reality pictorially in a way that deserves a comparison with Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America*. Both the artist's and the author's histories disclose a system of economic exploitation and social debilitation that has resulted in the appalling conditions of the Latin American countries through neo-colonization. Guayasamín's anger at the countless examples of these atrocities, some which have been recounted here, resulted in non-narrative paintings in which, through the very physicality of the figures who make up the oppressors, he has evoked the economic and military structures that have created so much suffering in these countries.

Both Guayasamín's paintings and Galeano's book are a call to social consciousness. Each forces the viewer or reader to become aware of a gruesome history and the forces that have caused it. Simultaneously each is also a call to action. As such they both remind us of the work of another 20<sup>th</sup> century figure, Frantz Fanon, whose book *Les Damnés de la Terre*, would later inspire Guayasamín to paint another series, this time of the oppressed, in a different, colonial context in Africa – and to whom we return in a later chapter.

## ***CHAPTER TWO: An Analysis of Guayasamín's Las Manos Series and a Response to Marta Traba's Criticisms***

Why was it almost obligatory for foreign heads of state visiting Ecuador to seek out the studio of the 20<sup>th</sup> century artist Oswaldo Guayasamín in Quito? This rare situation reveals the international renown Guayasamín enjoyed as he hosted visitors such as Fidel Castro, Salvador Allende, Daniel Ortega, Francois Mitterrand and other prominent guests. At the same time that his work was admired internationally he was also harshly judged by the powerful Latin American art critic Marta Traba, whose disapproval of his work is evidenced in her many criticisms of him throughout her publications as well as his virtual absence in her last and widely regarded book *Art of Latin America 1900 – 1980*. Guayasamín's work is often characterized by a social message delivered in an Expressionist style that was uniquely his own, and this is exactly what Traba took offense to. Marta Traba had a limited view of what constituted successful social art, believing that the plastic qualities were always of primary importance and she did not feel that Guayasamín accomplished this. By closely examining Guayasamín's *Las Manos* series, 1963 – 1968, from *La Edad de la Ira* series, I will explore how the visual elements of these paintings effectively embody Guayasamín's social concerns. In so doing I wish to explore one of the few works that includes both oppressor and oppressed within the same set of images to examine the differences and similarities between the interaction of these characters as compared to the separate series in which Guayasamín usually sequesters them. With this decidedly social work of art, an emphasis on the formal elements of the *Manos* series will be of the most importance as I

also seek to set Guayasamín's work into an art historical context in which Traba's criticism can then be challenged. Despite Traba's skepticism to the contrary, Guayasamín's visual language convincingly depicts the emotional plight of the oppressed and is fundamental to fostering the kind of awareness that makes social change possible, while simultaneously creating a visual language that is both transnational and expressive of Latin America in particular.

*Las Manos de la Protesta*, an oil on canvas painting from 1968, is a component of the *Manos* series of thirteen paintings that is incorporated into the larger series *La Edad de la Ira* or *The Age of Anger*. More specifically, Guayasamín says that *The Age of Anger* series expresses all the general tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the concentration camps, World War II, the Spanish Civil War, and atomic bombs, while also entailing references to specific events in Latin America, such as the dictatorships of the Southern Cone and the death squads of Central America. Thus Guayasamín saw his works as rejecting “...all the violence that the incalculable forces of money have created in this world” (Guayasamín in Murphy & Guayasamín, 62).

Focusing largely on figural images, Guayasamín nonetheless abstracts them by using formal devices associated with Expressionism as well as some elements of Cubism. This manifests in the almost personal level of emotion that is created in the images and the distortions of the faces and hands, as if we are seeing them from several angles at once, with the effect of further exaggerating the symbolized emotions. The *Manos* series consists of thirteen individual paintings focusing on hands. All of the paintings are 122 x 122 cm except for *Las Manos de la Protesta*, which measures 244 x 122 cm. The resulting rectangle shape of *Las Manos de la Protesta*, as opposed to the square shape of

the other canvases, along with its greater size, makes an even more dynamic image in which the hands seem to burst out of the picture plane. This along with its placement at the end of the series and in addition to the other formal elements makes it by far the most commanding image of the series. This could perhaps be related to Guayasamín's own approach to art making, which, as we can see from the above quotation he felt was a pictorial forum for making a statement. Simultaneously, beginning with the *Huacayñán* series and definitely in *La Edad de la Ira* series, Guayasamín used formal experimentations and synthesis of different styles, engaging with a modernist vocabulary and utilizing it to heighten the effectiveness of his social message.

This was the anti-thesis of the art critic Marta Traba's artistic project. Traba's interest was in a universal art in which the formal elements superseded the content of the artwork, making her a strong supporter of International Modernism. As Michele Greet points out in detail, this made Traba's opinion of pictorial *Indigenismo*, a style Guayasamín's early work is connected to, extremely negative. She disliked its emphasis on social concerns as well as what she perceived of as its regionalism (Greet, 193 – 196). In order to explain the differences between the *Indigenismo* of the Andean countries and the more European modernist styles adopted by the countries of the Southern Cone, Traba formulated a theory of 'closed' and 'open' countries. Greet elaborates on Traba's theory in which Traba describes the 'closed' countries from which *Indigenismo* emanated as “isolated, inbred, unable to progress, and detached from international trends” (Greet, 196). Throughout her book *Beyond National Identity: Pictorial Indigenism as a Modernist Strategy in Andean Art, 1920 – 1960*, Greet disproves this assumption of Traba's by exploring the many ways in which *Indigenismo* developed through *Indigenista*

artists' international interactions and artistic developments, as well as the *avant garde* nature of *Indigenismo* in its inception. Traba's theory displays the extremism of her views, which is further evidenced in her contention that modernism and social or political concerns were independent of each other (Greet, 193). Florencia Bazzano-Nelson illustrates Traba's approach to the artist as genius with a quote from one of Traba's 1956 articles in which she wrote that the artist was, "eminently apolitical, asocial, disinterested in the contingent, a being that is in the midst of history as a disquieting island and for whom words like progress, civilization, justice, have no meaning whatsoever" (Bazzano Nelson, 2005, 87). Bazzano-Nelson does remind us that Traba re-evaluated some of these views in the 1960s and 1970s (2000, 4), though her definition of how the two should interact was still very circumscribed. Nonetheless her battle against the art of Guayasamín raged on well into these decades.

A major source of the art Traba disdained so greatly was Mexican Muralism, a movement that Guayasamín's more abstracted work is often linked too in terms of its social qualities (Bazzano Nelson, 2005, 87). Traba's insistence on the separation of modern pictorial forms from social content explains why she considered Guayasamín, "...one of the worst culprits, and she took special pleasure in denigrating the artist for his amalgamation of modernist visual languages with a social message" (Greet, 194). In her book, *Dos Décadas Vulnerables en las Artes Plásticas Latinoamericanas, 1950 – 1970*, Traba wrote a special paragraph denouncing Guayasamín's work in several ways. To begin with, she clearly associates him with *Indigenismo* and the negative connotation she ascribes to it; though by the time she wrote this Guayasamín's paintings had long since evolved beyond this style. Here it is important to remember that Marta Traba did believe



that modern art could carry social meaning, but this must continue to be embedded within the form of the work. Describing the series *Huacayñán*, she acknowledges Guayasamín's use of modern stylistic elements borrowed from Picasso and his followers, who, she emphasizes, are the artists who used them properly, implying that Guayasamín's use of these stylistic elements was inadequate. Her next point of attack is to assert that Guayasamín's work was also a reduced version of what the Mexican Muralists did. For Traba this association with *Los Tres Grandes* was not a compliment, for their popular and figurative styles were some of the major targets of her criticism. There is also a tone implying that she disliked the intense emotionality of Guayasamín's work as well. Traba describes it with words like 'terror', 'violence', and 'brutal' (Traba, *Dos Décadas...c2005*, 88 – 89), revealing that she felt Guayasamín's work relied more on sloganeering than on embodying these social concerns within the formal language of the work. Traba and Guayasamin's feud would only gain momentum over the years and Traba's criticism would grow to labeling Guayasamín's, "...design simplistic, his colors crude, the dimensions of his canvases exaggerated, his themes melodramatic and superficial, and his entire approach archaic" (Greet, 195).

The strict definition Traba proposed for the interaction of modern and social art certainly sets these two figures at odds, though they both were interested in the creation of a "Latin American art". This is best evidenced in the work of Guayasamín from his *Huacayñán* series, in which he would find the source for a "Latin American art" in the Latin American *experience*, while Traba would insist that it was in a Latin American *style* of art. Again this reveals a distinction between content and form. But upon closer inspection, despite these differences, both Traba and Guayasamín sought out a certain

transnationality in art. They did so in completely distinct ways, for Traba, this art is based on form and for Guayasamín it is a combination of form and content. This transnational aspect in the goals of the art critic and the artist are what merit further investigation in order to see which approach was the more successful. This investigation will center on Guayasamín's *Manos* series, a body of work that depicts both oppressor and oppressed, in which it seems to unite two major elements of the larger *La Edad de la Ira* series that are usually separated. It is also the most symbolic of the series thus far explored in this thesis, making it a good example of an artwork not tied to a specific location or historical experience while simultaneously maintaining the importance of content. Examining this series through an in-depth formal analysis will allow us to assess how successful it is in terms of the effectiveness of Guayasamín's cosmopolitan modernist style to communicate a social message rooted in popular experience and thus displaying *La Edad de la Ira* series' transnational emphasis, allowing us to engage the formalist as well as universalist interests of Marta Traba in order to dispel her criticism.

The *Manos* series is meant to be viewed as a whole unit (Fig. 9). The thirteen canvases are placed right against each other so that they form a large rectangle without spaces in-between, creating a mural-like presentation. It can be assumed that the positioning of the canvases was intended by Guayasamín because the series' permanent home is in the *Museo Guayasamín* in Quito, Ecuador, which the artist initiated and oversaw while living. Seen together in this configuration, the combined canvases measure 28 feet x 8 feet. This large size alone gives the series monumentality, but it is the fact that the canvases connect with each other without being broken apart by the wall behind that truly makes it appear like a mural. The only visual breaks between the

images are the wooden frames which surround each. This is a necessary element though, because had each figure been painted on one large canvas they would appear like floating heads and hands, small in comparison to the blue space that would have engulfed them, and they would have lost the poignancy they currently have. Because the images are largely symbolic, the frames also root each figure in space, thus giving more solidity to the image and highlighting the emotion being conveyed. Speaking of Guayasamín's work in general, Claude Sabsay calls attention to an effect the artist uses in much of his work, namely, how, "Only one emotion per figure increases the intensity of the desired expression" (Sabsay, 9). Certainly this is the case in the *Manos* series, where this is further enhanced by concentrating on a single figure in each canvas delineated by the frame, thus allowing the isolated emotion to be the sole focus of the image. Because of this each figure takes over the entire space it has been given, in some cases seeming too large for the confines of the canvas or bursting out of it, and this monumentalizes each emotion in itself. Furthermore, the series is hung low to the ground, setting the images below, at, and above eye-level simultaneously. The effect is that the entire series encompasses the viewer from all angles, drawing them into the deeply personal depictions of each image. Suddenly hands and faces that would otherwise seem gigantic compared to human scale are put on the same level as the viewer, simultaneously making the emotion more impactful and allowing us to access them in a human to human relation.

In the *Manos* series, the dominant feature of each canvas is a pair of hands, often accompanied by a face, which gesticulate intense emotions, responses, or character traits (Fig. 9). They are interwoven and seem to move from negative to positive. Starting from

the left on the upper register, these include the hands of the insatiable, of the beggar, of silence, of fear, of tears, of anger, of terror, on the bottom register, the hands of screams, of tenderness, of prayer, of meditation, of hope, and of protest. All consist of the same color palette, which is dominated by white, black, shades of gray and a vivid blue background. The colors stand in stark contrast to each other, causing the figures to stand out clearly. The blue also emits an emotional quality which befits all the different emotions depicted, whether they are considered positive or negative. Goethe described the color blue as one which recedes from the eye, a color which does not come towards us but rather, "...draws us after it" (Goethe as quoted in Barasch, 336). This effect can be seen in *Las Manos* series in the way that each blue background serves to push the lighter hued figure towards the viewer, while also pulling the viewer towards it. This also visually allies the viewer with the figures, asking us to relate to them through the common medium of emotions.

Starting with the first canvas of the hands of the insatiable, we are confronted with the only figure who does not appear to be a victim of the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 10). Instead we see the hands of one of the oppressors: he who already has and yet wants more. We know this because of the title given to the work but it is also manifested through the visual language presented by Guayasamín in this particular pair of hands. This is the only figure without even a hint of a face, and this is of significance. By depersonalizing the character, the lack of any face seems to assign the flaw of insatiability to not just one particular person but to many. The Argentine art critic Rafael Squirru, whose opinion of Guayasamín is quite the opposite of Traba's, recognizes the way certain figures are called out in this way by referring to Guayasamín as "...a witness

in the archaic sense of martyr (one who gives testimony), he passes judgment, and in judging points the accusing finger” (Squirru, 13). Gregorio Ortega of *Prensa Latina* also observes this in the work of Guayasamín, calling it “Painting which fights, grasps its enemies and nails them on the canvas” (Ortega as quoted in ed. Lassaigne, 85). In this painting from the *Manos* series an accusation is made in a distinct manner from other images of oppressors in *La Edad de la Ira* series, which tend to be more specific and include faces. This image is more symbolic, the hands not necessarily denoting specificity the way a face might, but also acting as a common human element and having exceptional expressive capability.

Enhancing the assignation of blame, the physical appearance of these hands stands out in great contrast to all the other hands of the series, mirroring the contrast between other images of the oppressors and oppressed throughout *La Edad de la Ira* series through similar visual means. The other hands in this series are long and attenuated, while the hands of the insatiable are fleshy and round, appearing almost like grub worms. A dichotomy is set up between the images; these are the hands of someone who has more than enough, while the others are the hands of those who do not have enough and who toil for even that. The bloated hands of the insatiable are shown from the side, reaching up to the top of the canvas. The lines outlining the fat fingers curl up on themselves, caught in a perpetual moment of grabbing. Using abstraction, this essence is enhanced so that with the pointed triangular nails they appear almost like jaws ready to latch on and devour everything in sight. There is even a visual similarity to some of the vicious smiles of jagged teeth from the faces of Guayasamín’s *Reunión en el Pentágono*, in these dangerous nails. The black used to create shadow on these hands, is done in

some areas with scratchy lines of hatching and cross hatching, more pronounced in this image than in the others. The effect is quite distinct, making the hands of the insatiable appear soiled in a most unappealing manner. Though there are deep shadows on all the hands, the others appear more like hands that have toiled hard, only the hands of the insatiable have this sullied appearance. Here, as in other images, there are dabs of red on the fingers. This reads as blood throughout the series, but taken into the context of this pair of hands it can be read as if they are stained with the blood of others in a manner that recalls the blood soaked image of *Los Malditos, Pinochet*. Like the paintings of oppressors that were explored in Chapter One, the tarnished appearance of these hands certainly seems like an accusation by the artist of all of those whose greed has created much of the suffering of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which we see evidence of in the other afflicted figures in the *Manos* series, again referencing the culprit of economic disparity.

A contrasting visual counterpart to the hands of the insatiable are the hands of hope (Fig. 11). The composition is similar but because of choices made by Guayasamín in the visual language of this canvas, it emits an entirely different message. Both images are of hands reaching up to the top of the canvas and beyond, yet they are complete opposites in the emotions and characters being conveyed. While the hands of the insatiable are thick and round, the hands of hope are long and thin, visually flat in their delicacy. The fingers of the figure's right hand are so abstracted that while the palm seems to be depicted from a side view the fingers are depicted as they appear when the palm is seen from straight on, a position impossible in a real hand, which elevates the movement of the hands and makes them appear almost like the skyward reaching branches of a bare tree. Aided by the blue background, the fingertips reach up beyond

the frame of the canvas to what we can imagine is the sky. This is quite different from the hands of the insatiable, whose fingers curl inwards, as if their only concern is themselves. The upward reach of the hands of hope is similar to another canvas in the *Manos* series, the hands of prayer, in which Guayasamín certainly borrows Catholic religious forms and bolsters them with the visual forms of several modernisms. It is the combination in these images that heightens the forcefulness of the emotions and responses being symbolized by exaggerating recognizable forms instead of portraying them realistically. Even the length of the gently bent, unbroken lines which create the hands of hope add to the upwards movement of this image. The ascending reach is counterbalanced by the almost frail appearance of these hands, and it is this visual language that communicates the complexity of hope, revealing both the dire situation of this individual and yet the perseverance of some faith.

Already markedly different images, the distinction between the hands of hope and the hands of the insatiable is furthered by the addition of a face in the hands of hope. The face peaks out between the raised hands, also delicately featured, with an air of calm surrender about it. The eyes are upturned, combining with the stretching hands to further this sense of hope for something more, something which has yet to come. Here there seems to be some recognizable influence by El Greco, whose work was a source of inspiration for Guayasamín (Camón Aznar, 1973, 21 – 25). The elongation and the upturned eyes recall El Greco's saints and reminds us that Guayasamín adapted these types of religious images in order to confer greater esteem to the secular subjects he painted. Having a particular face, the figure is also personalized, and the viewer is made to identify with the tangible emotion of one of the sufferers. Using a similar composition

but with a radically different visual language, the hands of the insatiable and the hands of hope stand in startling opposition to one another.

Why are the hands such effective tools to relate these ideas? Hands are often appreciated for their expressive qualities, with certain gestures acting as a source of communication even without words, making them well-suited to the medium of paintings. They are also a locus of activity that constantly work and shape our daily lives. Hands equal action, and they can manifest both good and bad actions, as we have seen the difference between the hands of the insatiable and those of hope. The association between hands and labor could have been a reason why Guayasamín chose hands as a powerful symbol for the poor working class on whose behalf he fights, as well. Thinking specifically in terms of the last canvas in the *Manos* series, *Las Manos de la Protesta*, this connection between hands and action can also be carried over to the idea of active protest. In the *Manos* series Guayasamín has chosen to explore how he can manipulate gesture to communicate emotions and responses. The titles of each canvas help us to understand in a more explicit way what exact emotion he is tackling, but even without them the hands invoke certain reactions. The beggar's hands stretch forward and beseech us; the hands of anger clench and pound against each other as if ready to explode in confrontation, as the hands of prayer clutch each other and reach pleadingly towards the heavens.

In a catalog from several 1993 exhibitions of Guayasamín's work in Argentina, the artist himself writes about the topic of hands in a one page essay titled “Con Nuestras Manos”(Guayasamín 1993, 9). In the essay Guayasamín begins by confirming that the fight against colonization continues to this day, and in this he is not just referring to the



colonization by the European conquistadors but of modern neo-colonial imperialism as well, a theme explored in Chapter One. Following this, Guayasamín then discusses the need for a governing capital city of Indoamerica, without religion, a task that is difficult but possible. The term 'Indoamerica' is the preferred term used by some Latin American intellectuals to stand in for 'Latin America' with the emphasis on its indigenous, rather than European, heritage. Guayasamín's use of this term also emphasizes the necessity of the unity of all the Latin America countries, an idea he is known to espouse in other interviews as well. The Pan Latin American sentiment here is clear, as it is pictorially in Guayasamín's series *Huacayñán*, which consists of paintings of the three major ethnic groups of Latin America, the Indigenous, the *Mestizo*, and the Black. The series, begun after his *Indigenista* period and engaging in several modernist visual vocabularies, still carries many of the same intentions that the *Indigenista* artists had in fighting for social justice for the indigenous though the form is changed and the subject broadened to encompass other disenfranchised peoples across Latin America. In this way the work attempts to unify the experiences of these three groups through the economic oppression each experienced. *La Edad de la Ira* would take this further in terms of the development of Guayasamín's abstract figurative style as well as by broadening to a more transnational and global focus, which will be expanded upon in an exploration of one of Guayasamín's series in Chapter Three. Returning to Guayasamín's essay and Pan Latin Americanism as a reaction against foreign imperialism, Guayasamín mentions several names of Latin American heroes and martyrs who continue this ongoing protest against imperialism, with the goal of making the dream of equality a reality. This is significant because it

demonstrates Guayasamín's consistent engagement with and knowledge of Latin American history, as he paints his own revisionist history in *La Edad de la Ira*.

It is at this point in the essay that Guayasamín launches into a paragraph specifically about hands, beginning it with a wish to hear a grand symphony of all the harmonies of nature and culture together, again drawing attention to the idea of a pan-Latin American unity. When writing about hands Guayasamín posits them as creative forces that are the source for all the great artistic works of Latin America, beginning with those associated with the Pre-Colombian tradition and onwards. He writes, “con nuestras manos”, “with our hands”, which due to the previous paragraphs we can assume the term 'our' refers to Latin Americans, which is followed by a descriptive term for the hands, then an action, and resulting in what the hands have created. Some examples include,

Con nuestras manos duras y limpias estamos construyendo el templo recordatorio de Sechín, los inmensos dibujos de Nazca...con nuestras manos antiguas trasladamos gigantescos bloques de piedra para construir Sacsaihuamán y Macchu Picchu y estamos labrando la piedra de San Francisco, la Compañía en la mitad del mundo... (Guayasamín 1993, 9).

Throughout the paragraph Guayasamín describes “our hands” as gentle, vibrant, lasting, clean, ancient, of fire, simple, humid, tender, and of coagulated blood. These descriptions, and their associations with time and essentiality connect with other notions held about the works he attributes to them, most pre-dating the Conquest of the Americas and Pre-Colombian in origin (one of Latin America's many identities) though he does also include some post-conquest structures. Yet the way he introduces the colonial structure (“San Francisco, la Compañía”) still implies that they were built with the same

hands that constructed the indigenous artworks, implying that native labor had been utilized in the construction of colonial buildings. The Pre-Colombian was always an important element of Guayasamín's work throughout his career. Not only in terms of subject matter, for Guayasamín did see *La Edad de la Ira* series as dedicated to the suffering of humanity, and most certainly included within this is the subjugation of native peoples in Latin America, but also in terms of stylistic quality and plastic approach. Most interestingly, Guayasamín finishes the essay by saying, “Porque con estas mismas manos de sangre, de fuego, de ternura, de esperanza, estamos creando “Huacayñán”, “La Edad de la Ira”, ó “Mientras Vivo Siempre Te Recuerdo”” (Guayasamín 1993, 9). The last three are Guayasamín's three major series, so by including them he attributed his work not just to his own hands but to the hands of many, the hands of those on whose behalf he painted these images. It also associates Guayasamín's paintings with the indigenous, as well as situates the work in this history of lasting Ecuadorian cultural contributions and works of art. Specifically in terms of the Precolumbian, Guayasamín claimed that after visiting the Precolumbian site of Sechín, which shall be discussed in more detail further in the paper, “...I felt that I had already been there, that I had already worked in that land, and had molded the tears of the faces of the women” (Guayasamín as quoted in Miller, 136). Connecting himself to an ancient past Guayasamín acknowledged the history and traditions of the Precolumbian cultures that shaped him and his work. This is not an unusual assertion of Guaysamin's as he is also quoted as saying, “Vengo pintando desde hace tres o cinco mil años, más o menos” (Guayasamín 1988, between “Prologo” and Fig. 1). This is another manner in which he establishes some type of authority for the voice of his paintings, and this authority is rooted in Ecuador's particular

history. Furthermore, we can connect the manner in which he speaks about hands to the wish with which he began the paragraph. In it he spoke of a cultural symphony and this is exactly what he creates in his presentation of hands as the source of the great cultural works of Latin America. *Las Manos* series also has this symphonic quality in the way it intermingles so many different emotions or responses, while unifying them through the medium of the hands.

In the individual canvases of the *Manos* series Guayasamín does not depict a narrative event but focuses each canvas on one moment and the feeling of being in that moment. When combined, the paintings seem to articulate the possibility of different responses to a troubled world. From fear to hope they seem then to explode into the last and largest canvas, that of protest (Fig. 12). Thus a narrative exists, not explicitly, but through the serial generation of an idea that we watch grow from canvas to canvas. This effect mimics that of the larger *La Edad de la Ira* series in which each of the hundreds of paintings add up to a greater narrative about the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Viewing *Las Manos* in this manner, as the end of one narrative, perhaps the artist is suggesting that protest, as the final canvas in the series, is the most effective response to trying times. While never a member of a particular political party, Guayasamín was a devoted leftist and a humanist; he used his art to actively speak out against social tribulations in a visually gut-wrenching manner. In a *Los Angeles Times* article he is quoted as saying, ““This is my form of fighting,” he said, showing his works-in-progress in his studio. “I cannot take up a rifle but, damn it, I fight this way”” (Guayasamín as quoted in Smith, *Los Angeles Times* website, page 2 of 5, para. 9). The sentiment of this quote reveals both Guayasamín's pacifism (“I cannot take up a rifle”) as well as his desire to fight against injustice in a

another manner, which we may interpret as protest. Following this train of thought we can conceive of the entire *Age of Anger* series as a protest manifested in painting against the horrors of inhumanity in modern history.

Keeping the theme of protest in mind, as we return to a closer look at the *Manos* series, in terms of placement another canvas seems to confront the hands of the insatiable, but this time more aggressively. Set up diagonally from each other, the first and the last canvases seem to duel. The last canvas depicts the hands of protest and it is the only canvas in the series in the shape of a large rectangle, which overwhelms the other twelve smaller square canvases. It is a natural inclination to compare and contrast the first image to the last image, the beginning of the narrative to the end of it, thinking of the many metamorphoses along the way. The hands have undergone so many transformations, including emotions and actions considered undesirable to those that are generally deemed good. Some seem to be tragic but unavoidable responses to the terrible events and situations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, others accept and make the best of the worst situations, but it is the final canvas of protest that appears to be the most direct response to the first canvas. Its visual language also establishes it as the most active of all the hands, and instead of pulling in towards itself like the hands of the insatiable do, the hands of protest reach out to grab and engage the viewer. The hands of protest is the only image in the series that engages in a mental and physical response to the problems endured by many in this century, making its social content straightforward. It is this image that I shall focus on in greater detail in order to delve into Guayasamín's social and modernist art as a point from which to dispute Marta Traba's reading of his work.

*Las Manos de la Protesta* consists of a single figure whose hands and mouth dominate and animate the scene. The background is painted in deep blues, darker in some areas, which fosters an ambiguous and foreboding atmosphere. The figure's body is conveyed by a simple, solid, and flat black form that blends into the dark background and further emphasizes the brightness of its active face and hands, aiming our attention to the most dynamically emotional elements of the image. The face and hands are painted in sharp shades of white, beige, and gray, with accents of black providing detail. This color choice is arresting because of the stark contrast to the surrounding darkness in the image, immediately triggering a sense of tension between these two opposites. Referring to Guayasamín's body of work, Rafael Squirru says that this use of a limited color palette is in itself symbolic of how “Unlike the tortured and oppressed, who are painted with the most limited of palettes (whites, blacks, grays), the oppressors are portrayed, symbolically, in the bright hues of the rainbow, since it is they who play the star roles in the drama of life” (15). This is sometimes the case; if we recall the example of *Los Culpables* from Chapter One, we find that they were painted in a greater range of colors creating a distinct impression from the minimal hues used in *Las Manos*. Furthermore in *Las Manos de la Protesta* flecks of red coalesce in lines and patches across this figure's skin, which visually read as specks of blood, an element which adds to the emotional drama of the scene, suggesting injury or anger, or both. The prevailing colors, blue, black, and white make up the three main planes in the painting. This creates a straightforward and legible image with the impact of raw nerve. An example is the gaping mouth, the interior of which is painted in the same black as the body of the figure.

This causes the opening to visually recede and appear like a deep cavern out of which emanates a silent scream.

Focusing on the hands and the partial view of the face, we can see that Guayasamín restricts the figure to simple but contorted shapes. Line, created by the creases in the skin of the figure's fingers add detail and dimension. Dark shadows coat the underside of the hands. This is the most extensive use of shadowing in all the images of the *Manos* series and has the effect of giving the hands shape and pushing them further toward the picture plane, as if they are almost reaching out of it. The implied line created by the positioning of the hands in a diagonal invokes a sense of agitated movement in the figure. This and the use of shadow are some of the reasons this painting is the most energetic of the *Manos* series. The lines outlining each finger jut out in different directions, far more extreme than a real hand would appear which bolsters the sense of energy and intensity that course through them. This distortion of the human hands and face through visual abstraction also alludes to disfigurement and therefore torment in the figure. Here perhaps we can see the influence of one of the other artists Guayasamín most admired, Pablo Picasso (Painter Fulling, 37). The limited palette and contortion of the body, as well as the high level of emotional distress, recalls similar elements in Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, which Greet makes note was a painting that combined a modern visual language with a social message that did not bother Marta Traba in the least (Greet, 194). In *La Protesta* the face is cut off at the nose, reducing its importance in comparison to the hands, which are shown larger and in their fullness with the effect of taking up the most space in the image. Even if one imagines this work without the face at all, the resonance of the image is maintained solely in those hands. It is because of

Guayasamín's use of this modernistic abstraction with a stark color palette that the visual language of these hands is able to communicate so effectively; if they were painted in a more realistic manner, which was the common choice in early works of mainstream *Indigenista* content, they would not have quite the strikingly powerful impact that they do.

Guayasamín uses color, line, and shadow reduced to simple and stark elements to capture the essence of emotions and actions which boldly confront the viewer with the same aggressiveness associated with active social protest. Additionally his use of the medium enhances the abstract and emotionally arresting quality of the work. The application of the oil paint functions in this manner as Guayasamín has laid down the paint in thick and rough strokes visible throughout the painting and most obviously in the face and hands, creating a vigorous sense of movement. In his speech for the inauguration of Guayasamín's monumental project, *La Capilla del Hombre*, Guayasamín's dear friend and important Latin American political figure, Fidel Castro, described the manner in which Guayasamín painted as Castro posed for a portrait,

Nunca vi a alguien moverse a tal velocidad, mezclar pinturas que venían en tubos de aluminio como pasta de dientes, revolver, añadir líquidos, mirar persistente con ojos de águila, dar brochazos a diestra y siniestra sobre un lienzo en lo que dura un relámpago, y volver sus ojos sobre el asombrado objeto viviente de su febril actividad, respirando fuerte como un atleta sobre la pista en una carrera de velocidad (Guayasamín & Castro, "La Capilla del Hombre", "Palabras de Fidel Castro en la Ceremonia de



Inauguración de La Capilla del Hombre, Quito, República del Ecuador, 29 de Noviembre del 2002”, para.3).

We can sense the dynamic manner in which Guayasamín painted in the example of *Las Manos de la Protesta*. The roughness of the surface imitates the raw expressiveness pouring out of the figure. Guayasamín's investment of his own personal energy into the formation of the painting adds to the vivacious quality that is so vital to the expression of each of these paintings. In *Las Manos de la Protesta* this activeness is especially powerful considering the content of this canvas.

The style in which Guayasamín paints, because of its abstract and emotional quality, is often associated with Expressionism. Though Guayasamín claimed that, ...All the expressionism that I have in my painting was born in Sechín and it is not from the German expressionists, or the Europeans, it's born in Sechín, of that history, of that battle (Guayasamín as quoted in Miller, 136).

The formal aspects, as well as the emotionality of the paintings of *La Edad de la Ira* certainly share similarities with the modern European art movement. As a form of representation, German Expressionism recognized indigenous and tribal art as a new visual source of expression (Masheck, 93 – 94) in a way that also recalls Guayasamín's insistence on stylistically drawing from the Pre-Colombian, so even in this claim Guayasamín unintentionally aligns himself with one of the sources of inspiration for this modern European artistic style. The difference being that he, as a Latin American and specifically Andean artist, was claiming influence from an indigenous group that he culturally identified with and which might connect him to this oppressed group in a way

that lent his artwork the credibility of lived experience to fuel the emotional quality. Another source of inspiration for the German Expressionists was Gothic art and woodcuts in particular (Masheck, 97). Joseph Masheck describes the visual elements of woodcut prints that most appealed to the Expressionists and whose influence can be found in their work as, “aggressively gouged, angular forms and...flat patches of blaring color” (108). These terms can also be applied to a description of *Las Manos* series in the flatness of the space and figures, the thickness and darkness of the lines, and the harsh contrasts in color. Inspired by older woodcut forms these visual elements common to Expressionism, as well as the emotional qualities so associated with Expressionism, can also be found in the paintings of *La Edad de la Ira*, demonstrating Guayasamín’s engagement with this modernist vocabulary, which he utilized to confront the viewer with the inescapable atmosphere of an anguished century.

The social aspect of his art is one of the reasons that the Latin American art critic Marta Traba deprecated Guayasamín's work. This has direct connections to the way she denounced the Mexican mural movement for its plastic approach in foregrounding a social message, believing that neither did so effectively. Some twenty years later Florencia Bazzano-Nelson writes of Traba,

Her articles were a forceful attack against those who believed art should 'express' a local and regional identity or a political stance. She was particularly critical of Mexican muralism, which had served as a conceptual paradigm for the first generation of Colombian modernists (Bazzano-Nelson, 2005, 87).

Traba saw the Ecuadorian Guayasamín, like the Colombian modernists Bazzano-Nelson mentions, as working within this same vein, imitating the ideas stemming from the Mexican Muralism Movement. In her last book, *Art of Latin America 1900 – 1980*, Traba only briefly acknowledges Guayasamín's work in two paragraphs within the chapter titled “Mexican Muralism”. His work is often allied to this movement in terms of the visual approach it takes in being a conduit for a social message that was intended for a wide audience. Stephen Polcari's description of Rivera's artistic approach could also describe Guayasamín's social artistic emphasis, “He rejected the more abstract Parisian modernism as selfish individualism, evidence of the intellectual emptiness of the bourgeoisie, and sought instead to express through his art the struggle of the masses for transformation” (Polcari, 38 – 39). Guayasamín himself asserted that the artist must engage with the social, tying it into the very function of being an artist,

El artista no tiene modo alguno de evadirse de su época, ya que es su única oportunidad. Ningún creador es espectador; si no es parte del drama, no es creador (Guayasamín 1988, between Fig. 126 & 127).

In this section of her book Traba also frames Guayasamín's work as *Indigenista*, as she did in the previously discussed work, however, she fails to say what type of *Indigenismo* she means. Lenín Oña, in an essay about 20<sup>th</sup> century Ecuadorian art, writes that it is only Guayasamín's earliest works which truly fit into the categories of Indigenist and Social Realist movements (183), making Traba's critique of him as an Indigenist painter irrelevant by the time he began the *Huacayñán* series. Following this, Traba acknowledges that after 1948 Guayasamín was the “...leading figure in Ecuadorian art” (Traba 1994, 40) and that his series *La Edad de la Ira* was his high point in social

painting. She does not discuss any of his work in detail and is quick to assert that the next generation of Ecuadorian artists rejected the *indigenista* artistic tradition he was associated with (Traba 1994, 40 – 41), thus downplaying the evolution of his work and his contributions to Latin American Modernism.

Despite her criticism, Guayasamín was Ecuador's preeminent and most internationally successful artist. According to the critic Rafael Squirru, while certainly comparisons with other artists working within the styles of Expressionism and Neo-Expressionism can be made, such as Willem de Kooning and Francis Bacon, Guayasamín's work operates uniquely (Squirru, 16). Squirru writes of this, “We could say that Guaysamin is more classic, less subjective – or even, less capricious...His drawing penetrates the depths of the grotesque without becoming a caricature, in whose intention there is room for laughter” (Squirru, 16). Indeed there is no room for laughter in the paintings by Guayasamín, and it is the persistently social element of his Expressionistic style that distinguishes his work and recalls his roots in *Indigenismo*.

Along with *Indigenismo's* social influence, Guayasamín also drew from the Pre-Colombian in terms of form. While Guayasamín was educated at the leading art institution of Ecuador, the *Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes de Quito*, where he doubtlessly would have been exposed to European painting, it was the Pre-Columbian that surrounded him. The strong indigenous presence of the Andean countries heavily influenced the modern art of the Andean region making it distinct from that of the countries of the Southern Cone (Chase, 96-97); this difference resulted in art from the Southern Cone adopting the styles of international modernism, and also mirrors the difference between Guayasamín's aims and Traba's. Sechín, the city which Guayasamín

assigns his inspiration to, is a “pre-Columbian architectural complex in Peru and the site of important preconquest battles” that he visited when he was twenty-three (Miller, 136). The main attraction for Guayasamín in Sechín was the approximately 300 images carved into stone, which depict “...axe-wielding warriors, disarticulated body parts, decapitated and mutilated victims, figures ranging from the fearsome to the grotesque” (Moore, 48). Even without being able to see these images, one can imagine from this description how this might have influenced the expressionism we find in Guayasamín's work, as well as the concentration on the human figure as a conduit for visceral expression. Some of this description, such as the “disarticulated body parts” and the “grotesque”, which Squirru himself used in describing Guayasamín's work, can be applied to Guayasamín's paintings as well. The flatness of the images and the strong use of line are also elements in common between the works of Sechin and that of Guayasamín. Dating his trip to Sechín to approximately 1942, we may assume Guayasamín saw this site before he traveled to America later in the year, which is when he saw many influential European artworks in person for the first time, so we must certainly acknowledge the influence of both on the Ecuadorian's particular style.

As already mentioned, another important source for Guayasamín's Expressionism has to be the great Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco (Preckler, 388). We will recall from Chapter One that Guayasamín spent three months in Mexico working with Orozco and learning the art of fresco (ed. Lassaigne, 83). Ana María Preckler asserts that it is from the Mexican muralists (particularly Orozco) that Guayasamín learned “expresionismo grandioso y desmesurado, su monumentalidad, su riqueza expresiva, su preocupación social” (Preckler, 388). Comparing Guayasamín's images to those of

Orozco we can see that their figural images are both powerfully charged with emotionality. Strong expressive lines and non-naturalistic figures are also similarities between Orozco and Guayasamín, as well as Orozco's adaptation of forms and iconography from Christian art for the depiction of secular themes. Polcari describes Orozco's adaptation as "...the characteristic form and imagery of the modern allegory, which used Christian or mystic iconography and themes to express modern needs and historical process" (41). As observed in several paintings examined in Chapter One, these words could also describe such examples of Guayasamín's paintings as well. A difference between the two is that, while using similar visual elements as Orozco, Guayasamín often further abstracts the human figure than Orozco does. Guayasamín often accomplishes this by using forms derived from Cubism, allowing Guayasamín's fracturing of the human body into skeletal and distorted shapes to convey the experience of lives torn apart by poverty and violence in the very stylistic form of the work itself.

Gilbert Chase calls Guayasamín's style a mixture of modernism, nativism and social realism, and announces that Traba considered it a poor imitation of the simplest elements drawn from Picasso's repertory (Chase, 114). According to Bazzano-Nelson, Traba was critical of this socially oriented modernism because her mission was to promote International Modernism, which linked her to Europeanized and cosmopolitan styles of universal art that were favored by the bourgeoisie, thus connecting her agenda to the industrial elite (Bazzano-Nelson, 2000, 3 & 24). Clearly, with Guayasamín's connections to *Indigenismo* and Social Realism, his aim was originally to give a voice to the oppressed of his nation which developed further to include a variety of types of global oppression. In this sense his work did not fit into Traba's agenda. While denigrating

Guayasamín's work and glorifying artworks in the style of NeoGeometry along with other highly abstract non-figurative modernist vocabularies, such as Ecuadorian artist Enrique Tábara's *Over-Substantial Red* of 1971, Marta Traba disregards the intentions of Guayasamín's work. Both her and Enrique Tábara associated Guayasamín only with *Indigenismo* (Barnitz, 1977, 7-8), which we have already established was only an early phase within a long artistic career that evolved to include more abstract visual language. By limiting Guayasamín's work to only the mainstream, government-endorsed Indigenist style, Traba viewed it as too patronizing. She praised the new work of artists like Tábara, giving it the name *PreColombianismo*, which she felt properly used Precolumbian sources in its plastic form (Barnitz, 1977, 6). Jacqueline Barnitz specifically writes of Traba's appreciation for the new informalist modernists of Ecuador, "Marta Traba has praised them for seeking their themes in their own heritage. But more important is the fact that they accomplished this synthesis without concessions to the limitations of regionalism" (1977, 20). By *La Edad de la Ira* series, Traba certainly could not have criticized Guayasamín as a regionalist for within the form of the work there is no reference to specific localities or cultures and it engages with international modernist vocabularies in its plastic form.

Traba, who believed that only art critics were able to judge the quality of art, would reduce the accessibility of art to a closed intellectual circle. Confronting this issue, Bazzano-Nelson writes that depending on how art is defined, either "...as a democratic activity accessible in principal to all people or as an elitist practice requiring a certain level of specialization," (Bazzano-Nelson, 2000, 89) this either opens or closes the doors on who can make judgments about art. Guayasamín was not interested in addressing

only the intellectual elite of the art world, rather he wished to address most of humanity with this message. His visual language conveys this because it is focused on corporeally relatable human figures which display visceral forms of suffering. This clarity is accomplished through the physiognomy of the figures, which is further intensified through abstraction; a formal technique that Guayasamín drew in part from the Precolumbian through the visual lessons he gained at Sechín, not in the overt subject matter of Indigenism. So as Marta Traba sought out an American art that “...did not mean to paint American scenes, but rather to invent a style that was unique to the region” (Greet, 195), perhaps Guayasamín developed one example of this. In his blending of modern Expressionistic and Cubist forms with social content the work differed significantly from the naturalism of the socially oriented *Indigenismo*, which was firmly rooted in Latin American content, and it was also distinct from the modernist styles which focused solely on form, with no regard for content at all. This is summed up in Guayasamín’s own words,

America is a synthesis. What is important for us is not creating a new school but rather bringing dispersed elements together from both the ancient and contemporary schools to express our dilemma through them.

There is a reason that we are a mixture of races and cultures (Guayasamín as quoted in Greet, 194).

One should not focus solely on the content of Guayasamín's paintings when seeking how they are effective, but also on the formal aspects, for this is what strengthens his message even further. José Carlos Mariátegui, the great proponent of a version of the *Indigenismo* movement also echoed the sentiment that “...form can have an even greater subversive



power than content” (D'Allemand, 84). In *Las Manos de la Protesta* the figure is reduced to its essential elements, thus through the howling mouth and the wrenching fingers Guayasamín was able to create a sense of emotion that reaches viewers on a primal level as something like universal human experience. The medium and style then become as Leonard Folgarait notes, “...agents of meaning, opaque rather than transparent, active rather than inert” (Folgarait, 58). The non-figurative works, such as those of the NeoGeometrists, which Traba favors, function not on an emotional level but on an intellectual and often personal level, making their meanings more abstract as well as more cerebral. From this we can see that Marta Traba's and Guayasamín's aims were at odds, his work did not fit within her restrictive project, hence her negativity towards his concept of art, as well as his paintings, although the plastic qualities of many his canvases project his social preoccupations effectively and have a transnational aspect to them. Addressing criticism, such as Traba's, that Guayasamín's work is anachronistic, Leopoldo Zea – a Mexican philosopher of positivism – explains that some critics have said this precisely because Guayasamín's work deals with social concerns as opposed to an art which is focused only on form and aesthetics. Zea claims that an art only interested in form has “freed itself” from this world by creating its own solitude. Guayasamín's work on the other hand strives for freedom based on solidarity with all people and so Zea asserts,

Therefore, if Oswaldo Guayasamín's work has to be judged as anachronistic it will only be because its content refers to a world which is anachronistic. I insist that under-development, misery, repression, violent and anonymous death in a world which has reached the highest peaks in

science and technology is anachronistic...This is the anachronism the Ecuadorian artist continues to denounce. Because this is not a world which can be eluded by abstracting art from a supposed political contamination. All the contrary, this world must be, not simply eluded, but transformed, starting from its critical conscience that one has of its existence. And it is on this conscience that the work of this artist from Quito leans (Zea, 27).

From early in his life Guayasamín was impacted by tragedy when he witnessed the assassination of his childhood friend, Manjarres, in the *Revolución de Los Cuatro Días*. Then later, working as a cultural attaché visiting foreign countries as Ecuador's representative, he saw many things from the extreme poverty and abuses that the indigenous peoples of Latin America were suffering to the atrocities still visible in post-World War II Europe, and these drove him to create an art that would speak on behalf of the oppressed by confronting viewers with what was happening to other people. Guayasamín's visual approach is inextricably linked to the themes that his paintings vividly convey. In *Las Manos de la Protesta*, the white color of the figure and the simplified presentation of the bony shape of his fingers and face enhanced with touches of blood, appears like someone whose skin has been stripped back and whose insides we are seeing instead. It is almost as if we are looking not at the exterior reality of the emotion, but at the way the figure feels deep inside. Such visceral exposure has a raw power that commands the viewer because Guayasamín is not just referring to these emotions, but is actually embodying them in the plastic language of his paintings, in

which they are meant to affect change. Such appeals to the emotion, from anger to compassion, are often what drive people to act.

### ***CHAPTER THREE: Guayasamín's Pictorial Rejoinders to the Wretchedness of the World***

The Argentine art critic Marta Traba, one of Guayasamín's most unrelenting critics, in her book *Art of Latin America 1900 – 1980*, states that Guayasamín based his series *The Age of Wrath (La Edad de la Ira)* “...on themes taken from Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth*” (Traba 1994, 40). The title of one of Frantz Fanon's most well-known publications *Les Damnés de la Terre*, is translated in English as *The Wretched of the Earth* and is indeed a searing indictment of the modern era. This legendary work was written as a response to the Algerian Liberation Movement and describes Fanon's views on French colonialism in Algeria during the movement for national liberation from colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s. As I show, this book and its critique of oppression do find a visual correlation in several paintings by the artist Oswaldo Guayasamín. Yet how plausible is the above claim by Traba? Based on my research, it seems unlikely, as I have yet to find any other supporting information for the attribution of a series of hundreds of paintings to one book by Fanon. Patrick Frank, in an introduction to a collection of essays in the book *Readings in Latin American Modern Art*, has limited the amount of paintings he connects to Fanon. He says that it is a “...series of sixty paintings by Oswaldo Guayasamín on the theme of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*” (Frank, x). Yet again, difficulties arise in trying to ascertain which sixty Frank is referring to from such a large series. Many of Guayasamín's works from *La Edad de la Ira* series were inspired by or relate to tragic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but rarely is the specific inspiration identifiable by the polyvalent imagery alone, and, while sometimes the title of a Guayasamín painting is more specific, it still cannot

direct us to the exact passage in the prior text. The images, though rooted in actual events, then become emblematic of human suffering more generally and they connect to each other, thus relaying the trans-national experiences of oppression rather than relegating it to just one experience or a singular place.

At present only nine paintings from *La Edad de la Ira* series stand out as undeniably related to Fanon's book, based on their titles and subject matter, and this was also confirmed through personal correspondence with the *Fundación Guayasamín*<sup>11</sup>. This is the small series of *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, which in French would translate to *Les Damnés de la Terre* and in English to *The Wretched of the Earth*. Though contemporary with Guayasamín, Frantz Fanon (1925 – 1961) worked in Algeria during the period of French colonization and the anti-colonial struggle for national autonomy, while Guayasamín came from Ecuador, a former Spanish colony, which during his time was dealing with the effects of neo-colonialism. This difference between the colonial and neo-colonial contexts accounts for the distinct experiences, as well as instructive differences in the work of the author and artist. Yet because of Guayasamín's engagement with the transnational experience of oppression and the historical connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism, there *are* other points of intersection to be developed between the work of Fanon and Guayasamín. Examining Guaysamin's *Los Condenados de la Tierra* as it relates to Fanon's *The Wretched of the*

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<sup>11</sup> In personal correspondence with the Fundación Guayasamín, the following information was provided on Los Condenados de la Tierra series, "Serie :LOS CONDENADOS DE LA TIERRA, 1967-1968 (HOMENAJE A FRANTZ FANON)  
 Colección: LA EDAD DE LA IRA  
 ÓLEO SOBRE TELA (La Edad de la Ira)  
 Serie inspirada en el libro de Frantz Fanon, con la que Guayasamín rinde justo homenaje a la raza negra, que durante la colonia fue vilmente arrancada de África y traída a América en calidad de esclavos. Gente que aun después en tiempos republicanos hasta la actualidad es víctima de la más injusta segregación" (Minda, Fundación Guayasamín, 2 March, 2011).

*Earth* we find several themes connect the two: issues of marginalized people, expropriated land, and the challenge of re-writing history, as well as remaking it. Tackling these subjects, the author and the artist struggled on behalf of those whom colonialism had oppressed and they denounced those who imposed this system of oppression. This chapter will focus on Guayasamín's *Los Condenados de la Tierra* through the lens of Fanon's book in order to examine further how Guayasamín visually portrays the oppressed. As noted earlier, injustice was one of Guayasamín's greatest preoccupations and his paintings of the oppressed constitute the largest part of *La Edad de la Ira* series, making them essential to an understanding of this series as a revisionist history. Comparing the paintings of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* with the book on which they were based will reveal their similarities as well as their differences, demonstrating both Guayasamín's continued engagement with the colonial afterlife and his re-situation of *Les Damnés de la Terre*, a work focused on emerging forms of nationalism, in response to neo-colonialism as a key to his own trans-national 20<sup>th</sup> century narrative.

*Los Condenados de la Tierra* is a small series, consisting of nine large scale paintings, within Guayasamín's major series *La Edad de la Ira* (Fig. 13). The latter series is sometimes more oblique thematically and other times is more explicitly dedicated to specific tragic events from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *Los Condenados de la Tierra* #1 - #9 no further information is given in the title except that we are looking at nine images inspired by *The Wretched of the Earth*. The title of the work must be examined a bit more carefully in order to understand its relationship to the content of the book as well as to the other paintings. The French *Les Damnés de la Terre* and the Spanish *Los Condenados de*

*la Tierra* share a very similar meaning, which in English would actually be more like 'the damned' or 'the condemned of the earth'. The title for the book was chosen by Fanon himself (Cherki, 164). In the “Note on the Text” from the book *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, the authors acknowledge the different meanings evoked by the title in English and in French. They write,

...it is unlikely that Fanon intended his title to refer *only* to class interests on the one hand and, for readers only familiar with the English title, pity and lowliness on the other. Fanon's intentions, marked not only by the Catholic context of France and the role of the Communist Party there, but also the literary influence of Dante's *Inferno*, were most probably to articulate what it means to live in hell on earth without recourse to a benevolent god – in a word, to be damned (Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting, & White, xx – xxi).

This sense of being condemned comes through in the work of Eduardo Galeano as well, in his book *Open Veins of Latin America*. Added to later editions of Galeano's history of Latin America is a section titled “In Defense of the Word”, written in 1978, and in which Galeano actually uses the phrase 'the wretched of the earth' (in the English translation) saying: “One writes, in reality, for the people whose luck or misfortune one identifies with – the hungry, the sleepless, the rebels, and the wretched of this earth – and the majority of them are illiterate” (Galeano, “In Defense of the Word”, after “Foreword”, before “Acknowledgements”, para. 1). His sense of condemnation is thus similar to Fanon's. For both authors the source of this condemnation is oppression imposed from outside forces and involving issues of class struggle. As we have seen,

Galeano does specifically discuss Latin America's colonial past and brings it into the 20<sup>th</sup> century neo-colonial versions of oppression that are enacted largely through the manipulation of resources and capital, a practice he sees as stemming from the original colonial oppression. For Latin America, Guayasamín's context, the oppression of the colonial past is the key to understanding the oppression of the neo-colonial present, which shall be discussed in more detail later as we analyze how we can relate Fanon and Guayasamín. Fanon, in writing exclusively about the 20<sup>th</sup> century, deals with the previous colonialism of the French occupation of Algeria, which ceased being a French colony on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1962. These distinct focuses thus share great similarities in terms of their discussions of how oppression has been enforced and the manner in which they are decidedly writing on behalf of the oppressed, but there are also differences because of their unique contexts and circumstances.

One of the greatest differences is that Galeano does relate specific historical events in Latin America in order to enlighten the reader to the reality of this history of oppression. Fanon, on the other hand, is less interested in recounting particular events that occurred in French colonial Algeria before 1962, but rather he writes in a more abstract, symbolic, and emotionally challenging manner in which he describes the mental and physical conditions of oppression and what struggle must be done to overcome them, as well as what future actions are required for the success of the emerging nation. In a way it is more a manifesto than a history. Akin to both is Guayasamín's series *La Edad de la Ira*. For it does relate to specific events in 20<sup>th</sup> century history but the evocative images themselves, centered on enlarged and abstracted depictions of human figures, do not convey historical specificity and rather read more symbolically. Like both Galeano



and Fanon's work, the images of Guayasamín have often been described as giving "...a "voice" to the voiceless, a "face" to the faceless" (Mella, 10). This potent combination is evident in Guayasamín's *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, and a more in depth look at the series will allow us to begin to understand it both historically and symbolically in connection with Fanon's book, and therefore colonialism, neo-colonialism, and various types of nationalism, as well as how each functions to further Guayasamín's own distinct goals with *La Edad la Ira* series, which overall has a much broader, transnational scope.

The shape of the canvases of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* alternate between square and rectangular; five of the former and four of the latter shape (Fig. 13). The square canvases measure 123 x 123 centimeters. The rectangular canvases measure at 246 x 123 centimeters. Each painting depicts a single human figure. In the square canvases it is the lone face of the figure that we are presented with, while it is the entire body of the figure that covers the surface of the rectangular canvases. The paintings currently reside in Guayasamín's monumental and final project *La Capilla del Hombre*. This is of significance and will be examined more thoroughly later. The works are presented as a cohesive unit, positioned side by side. *Los Condenados* are framed so that all the individual canvases share one or two sides with another canvas in a thin steel colored frame, marked off but creating a visual continuity simultaneously. This entire unit is then surrounded by a gray mat and set into another thicker steel colored frame.

Projecting the paintings of this series as an aggregate gives it the presence of a long mural (Fig. 13). Spanning a length of approximately 52.5 feet, we could certainly view the combination of the individual canvases as a portable mural. This also demonstrates Guayasamín's intermingling of the "high art" of painting on canvas with

the popular format and accessibility of murals. This is not unusual for Guayasamín, who often worked in a scale large enough to be called mural-like, with many examples in *La Edad de la Ira* series. Creating the aesthetic of a mural with single canvases lined side by side, inclines the viewer to read the work as a narrative, and so we are again reminded of Guayasamín's history-telling, which is such an important aspect of *La Edad de la Ira* series. All of the paintings are situated at eye-level, thus engulfing the viewer in the scene before them. This is of significance because the figures are positioned neither above us nor below us, which makes them neither more nor less important than we are. So, while the figures certainly appear to be suffering they do not project the sense of lowness that Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting, & White identified in the meaning of the English translation of the French word '*damnés*' into 'wretched'. In a formal analysis of another of Guayasamín's series in *La Edad de la Ira*, *Los Torturados I – III*, Leonard Folgarait describes the compression of the figures into the space of the picture plane as a “...torturous compression” that we the viewer, who are much smaller than the painted figures, have escaped. This makes our relationship with the figures complicated for he says, “...they are Us, and they are Other” (Folgarait, 58). We can apply this to the figures of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* as well, for they too are much larger than we are and their bodies are either uncomfortably bent into the space or their faces are cut off by edges of the canvas. The picture plane then becomes a sort of prison for these figures, which portrays them as condemned to the situation they are in, and so these figures embody the sense of condemnation that the French '*damnés*' and the Spanish '*condenados*' also signify.

Starting at *Los Condenados de la Tierra #1*, the viewer is then led towards the right, in the Western manner of reading from left to right, again implying that a story is being told (Fig. 15). Here we are confronted with a square canvas of an immense human face. The face is not shown in its entirety; rather it is cut off just above the eyes and in the middle of the mouth. The face is shown at a three quarter view and is created through blocks of color and thin creeping lines. In each of the nine canvases the limited palette consists merely of black, white, and shades of gray. The features of the face are simplified and abstracted, as they are in all the canvases of this series. An example of this abstraction is visible in the circular and ring-like nostrils that flare out in perceived aggravation, their abstract quality serving to exaggerate this mood. The left half of the face is painted black, the other white, creating something of a negative image of each other. This also has the effect of changing the perspective of the image, in which it simultaneously develops a sense of form and then flattens it out, revealing Guayasamín's modernist approach to his socially oriented subjects. Another way to read this element is that one side is cast in shadow, the other blindingly illuminated and robbed of any color, thus creating a sense of this figure's harsh environment. This starkly contrasting binary is also a visual correlation to the binary we find throughout *La Edad de la Ira* and in Fanon's book as well; this is the binary of the oppressors versus the oppressed. And in both of these cases the artist and author create a very decisive line that divides these two groups into an antagonistic relationship. Returning to *#1*, the figure's eyes are white; the left has a dark iris, while the iris of the right is a shady white with the pinpoint of a black pupil, again appearing like one who has just had an overwhelming light shined in their face. This creates the sense that the figure is being watched, his every move followed as

if a spotlight is on him, a metaphor for the colonial experience in which the colonized is treated by the invader as though he does not belong in his own land. The wide eyes look out and upwards, past us the viewer. Combining this with the gaping mouth, we are given the sense of powerful emotion; part despair, part shock, it is as if this figure has encountered some tragedy of which he is powerless to change. Jagged blocks of white create the top teeth of the figure which stand out from the black abyss of the open mouth. Thin, scratchy, black lines trace out the shape of the white lips, giving a withered appearance that contrasts greatly with the flat expanses of black and white that create the rest of the face. It is also interesting to note the grayish rough shadows ringing under each eye, implying an overworked and exhausted body. On the white side it stands out, but on the black it could almost be lost and takes on the shape of a river-like stream of tears. It is a simple image and quite striking in the emotional power it possesses, in which there is no doubt that we, as viewers, are witnesses to someone's terrible distress.

*Los Condenados de la Tierra #2* is the first full-length figural image of the series, in which we are presented with a reclining figure (Fig. 15). But just because the figure is reclining does not lead us to view it as in a sense of repose. Rather the figure, lying on its side, seems huddled on the ground, in what one may describe as the fetal position, with the arms and legs drawn in towards the trunk of the body. This position gives the impression that the figure is seeking some kind of protection, is hiding, or is helpless. The figure is painted in a deep black, which is echoed in the sky behind it. The ground, starting just below the middle of the canvas is mostly white but slashed with rough strokes of black, employing some gray tones. This mixture of the white is then echoed again in the cloth adorning the body of the figure, in the nails of the fingers, the kneecaps,

and some of the features of the face, making them legible to the viewer. Such a limited palette creates strong contrasts, which heighten the intensity of the image and message. There is nowhere for the viewer's eye to rest, as it is forced to dart back and forth against these opposing colors. Except for a thin white line outlining the figure's body and adding certain details which articulate bones, muscles, and sinew, the figure itself could almost dissolve into the black background. Again the same illusion appears in reverse colors for the white robes it wears, which except for the black outline and thicker black strokes that create a sense of texture in the hanging cloth, would be quite indistinguishable from the ground. The line denoting the ground is smooth and straight but is interrupted by the monumental form of the body, lunging upwards in large heaps. Jagged, not soft, this is the body of someone who has been worked mercilessly and not compensated adequately, the problem of poverty is undeniably represented in the physicality of this figure. If we recall the figures of the oppressors from Chapter One, such as those of *Los Culpables*, we are struck immediately by the great difference in their portrayal. *Los Culpables'* engorged bodies heaping with excessive flesh stand in great contrast to these emaciated, skeleton-like figures in which it is the bones and the joints which are the most pronounced feature of the body. The message is clear: in *Los Culpables* we see those who have, consume, and continue to desire more, while in *Los Condenados de la Tierra* we are witnessing those without; they are deprived, overworked, poor, and they barely cling to life. But their lack of body does not mean these bodies are unimportant; quite the contrary, for Guayasamín the bodies of the oppressed are essential in order to communicate their real-life conditions socially, physically, and emotionally. And the form these bodies take on will also be important in understanding just who these

characters are in relation to Fanon's book. In *Los Condenados #2* the body is so large in scale that it overtakes the canvas, making the ground and the sky seem minimal in comparison. With the stark difference between the colors of the sky and ground, the image reads as quite flat, and the figure seems barely to cling to that surface before spilling out into our world. Guayasamín has dissolved any realistic sense of perspective in order to push the figure right up to the picture plane and overwhelm the viewer with its agonized presence.

Before continuing with Guayasamín's series, we must become familiarized with Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in order to get a better sense of the different contexts and related aims of the author and artist in a way that will enable us to see how in *Los Condenados de la Tierra* Guayasamín responded directly to Fanon's book but simultaneously aligned it with his own particular goals. Frantz Fanon, like Guayasamín, was deeply concerned with social conditions in the Third World. This term, the 'Third World', of course has its own complicated history and can consist of a variety of social and political situations, as Jean-Paul Sartre makes clear in the Preface he wrote to Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre*, in which he asserts about the Third World,

We know it is not a uniform world, and it still contains subjected peoples, some of who have acquired a false independence, others who are fighting to conquer their sovereignty, and yet others who have won their freedom, but who live under the threat of imperialist aggression. These differences are born out of colonial history, in other words, oppression (Sartre, xlvi).

Here Sartre also points out the connection between the colonial and conditions of the neo-colonial dealt with by Third World nations who have emerged from the actual military

and governmental occupation of their country. As it was for Galeano, these are issues that Third World intellectuals continually grappled with in addressing their countries' histories and future. This shall be elaborated on later, but this idea from Sartre introduces us to the manner in which Guayasamín, from a neo-colonial country, may have absorbed the lessons of Fanon, from a colonial country, into his canvases and the aim of his *La Edad de la Ira* series. Returning to the specifics of Fanon's particular history, even though his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* was written with reference to the Algerian Liberation Movement, he was actually born in 1925 in Martinique, also a country then under French colonial rule – and still today a colony (Burke III, 127). The theme of violence would become an important one in the book, one which shall also come up again in this chapter, and Fanon experienced war firsthand while fighting as a young man. After this, though, Fanon went to France as a student, eventually choosing to focus on psychiatry (Stanton, 246 – 247).

His chosen focus, which would lead to his practice of psychiatry in Algeria during the liberation movement, contributes greatly to the tone and approach of *The Wretched of the Earth*. During this time Fanon wrote the first of his major works, *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in 1952. It has been described as a portrait of the “...lived experience of the black man...” (Stanton, 247). This book was a personal exploration of being black in a country colonized by whites. By 1953 he completed his medical degree and was sent to work in a mental hospital in Blida, Algeria. This was to have a monumental effect on the young Fanon, for it was here that he witnessed the devastating mental and physical effects of colonialism on society and individuals and through mental analysis of many of his patients victimized by colonial rule, his contempt for colonialism grew. Soon after, in

1954, Algeria was gripped by the revolution, which sought to evict the French colonizers and establish an independent Algeria. Fanon became involved with the rebels, known as the Front Libération National (FLN), so much so that by 1956 he had resigned his position at the hospital and joined them (Burke III, 128). According to Gareth Stanton, at this point Fanon was expelled from Algeria but continued to work for the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid* from exile in Tunis (249). By 1957 the revolution reached a peak (Stanton, 250). Fanon's life had as well, for shortly after he was diagnosed with leukemia and after this, in 1961, he began to furiously work on *The Wretched of the Earth* over a period of ten weeks and died later that year, shortly before Algeria won its independence from France on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1962 (Burke III, 129).

*The Wretched of the Earth* became a major piece of literature that dealt with colonialism, revolution, and the eventual creation of a new post-colonial nation deeply embedded with social concerns, specifically in the Algerian context, but applicable to much of the Third World, as is evidenced by the great number of intellectuals, including Galeano, for whom this work was important. Edmund Burke III notes that Fanon created four levels of analysis throughout the book, which include the psychological, the societal, the political, and the cultural (131). He engages each of these concepts with a riveting and emotionally wrought form of language, making his argument especially moving and persuasive to the open-minded reader. The psychological aspect of *The Wretched of the Earth*, stemming from Fanon's practice of psychiatry explores the mental effects of colonialism on the colonized and the colonizers in a manner that makes his discussion of colonization and decolonization more accessible and even more urgent than a purely political analysis might.



Homi K. Bhabha, in the Foreword written for the 2004 edition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, further develops how this element of the book functions as,

A psycho-affective relation or response [that] has the semblance of universality and timelessness because it involves the emotions, the imagination, or the psychic life, but it is only ever mobilized into social meaning and historical effect through an embodied and embedded action, an engagement with (or resistance to) a given reality, a performance of agency in the present tense (Bhabha, xix).

This description also calls to mind Guayasamín's images of the oppressed, which also engage the viewer in what could be described as a psycho-affective manner. This is one of the great similarities between the work of the author and artist, and in essence it is this revelation of the psychological and emotional reactions to oppression that are the driving forces that connect the viewer or reader to the message they are being presented. Burke illuminates us to some of the correspondence between Fanon and his editor, while writing the earlier book *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which Fanon says, ““...I try, when I write such things, to touch the nerves of my reader...That's to say irrationally, almost sensually”” (130). Though he was writing with reference to the earlier book, this description of the voice Fanon uses in his writing can be applied equally well to *The Wretched of the Earth*. Again it also recalls the manner in which Guayasamín paints his socially engaged images. There is a call to the pathos of a situation that cannot be overlooked in either author or artist, as we are forced to acknowledge the suffering of the oppressed through psychologically and emotionally embedding us in their world. Returning to Bhabha's assertion that the psycho-affective is only ever actually effective

when it engages with reality is important while inspecting the work of Fanon and Guayasamín as well. Focusing on Guayasamín's work, we must ask how these images of suffering, such as *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, actually prompt some kind of social change.

In Guayasamín's paintings this is accomplished by rooting the works of the *La Edad de la Ira* series in historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically in *Los Condenados*, this functions in the same way as it does through Fanon's book, by engaging with the historical reality of the Algerian fight for independence from French colonialism. Fanon does not simply regale the reader with all the details of this specific example of decolonization but rather uses it as a springboard from which to discuss more broadly the effects of colonization on the colonized as well as its evolution into the struggle for decolonization. Guayasamín's images alone do not relate to the Algerian situation in particular, or even colonialism for that matter, but they do relate to some of its key features: economic, physical, and psychological oppression. The point is that because the image is connected to the reality of oppression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the suffering it portrays is imbued with meaning and significance that goes beyond mere symbolism and instead acts more as an effective embodiment of such experiences within the two-dimensional space of the canvas. As the viewers, we are then forced into the position of witnesses, making it much harder to leave these images without being impacted, as was observed compellingly by Pablo Neruda about Guayasamín's paintings: "Let us think before entering his art, because it will not be easy for us to go back" (Neruda, 5).

Though many connections can be established between the work of Fanon and Guayasamín, particularly when it comes to *Los Condenados de la Tierra* series, the context out of which each emerges is quite distinct, which must be taken into consideration when trying to compare their works. Fanon's book focuses on the emerging nations of colonial/post-colonial Africa and specifically deals with the struggle of independence in Algeria and projects what he thinks needs to happen in the future of the country in order to achieve a socially just and economically successful nation. Guayasamín's context is the small South American country of Ecuador. As we recall, this country was under Spanish Colonial power for many years, but this period was prior to the European colonization of Africa experienced and addressed by Fanon. Ecuador gained independence from Spanish Colonialism in 1822 with the defeat of the Spanish at the Battle of Pinchincha and subsequently became a part of the territory of Gran Colombia, which also included Venezuela and Colombia. This was one of the early manifestations of the idea of a Pan-Latin American unity. Though it did not have great longevity, this idea would continue to be of importance for many Latin American thinkers and leaders, including Guayasamín.

Seven years later, in 1830, Ecuador separated from Gran Colombia and declared itself an independent nation, in our modern sense (Handelsman, xix – xx). As we can see Ecuador's independence was gained over a century before the movement for Independence in Algeria succeeded in 1962, giving our artist and our author distinct colonial experiences. To make this distinction even clearer: Fanon was from and dealt with countries affected by the literal occupation of one region by another country; while Guayasamín was from a post-colonial country, an independent nation that nonetheless

was still enveloped by imperialistic neo-colonialism. As was discussed in Chapter One, neo-colonialism no longer involves the physical presence and unceasing military forces of the colonizers (though military intervention may continue to terrorize these countries) yet it is subtler and equally harmful as a form of oppression. In *Open Veins of Latin America*, Galeano identifies neo-colonialism's source of power in the economic oppression of the underdeveloped nations of Latin America by the developed nations of Europe and the United States. In fact, throughout the trajectory of his book, which is a history of "Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent" (Galeano, title), he demonstrates how the original colonialism of Latin America set the stage for the future of neo-colonialism, debilitating the nations of Latin America into their state of underdevelopment and therefore making them more susceptible to further exploitation by the more economically powerful. This difference in the contexts of Guayasamín and Fanon results in some important distinctions that will be discovered as we look closer into the themes they have in common.

As Galeano makes clear, the relationship between colonialism and neo-colonialism is greatly apparent here, so we can observe that both Fanon and Guayasamín deal with related themes in both of their work that relates to these experiences. Burke makes note of the impact that *The Wretched of the Earth* had far past the borders with which Fanon was dealing. He says that the text became of great importance to the politically inclined of Third World countries from all over the globe and to many other oppressed peoples and groups, even becoming a kind of 'bible' for the Black Panthers of the United States. Specifically he describes its reception as, "Third World groups found in it a sympathy for their sufferings, justification for their struggles, and encouragement

to persist in overcoming all obstacles” (Burke III, 129). This observation reveals the profound impact of Fanon's book beyond the literal context of colonialism, as its message could be linked to many related types of oppression. Guayasamín himself is an example of a Third World cultural figure who was impacted by reading this book, as was noted by both Marta Traba and Patrick Frank, who declare that some or all of the paintings of his pivotal series *La Edad de la Ira* dealt with the themes presented by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. It is important to note that Fanon and Guayasamín were contemporaries, Guayasamín but six years older than Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in 1961. This text was published in many languages internationally and would have been accessible to the painter after he had completed the *Huaycañán* series. Painted between 1946 and 1952, this series focused on issues of race in Latin American and Ecuador specifically. Of course, not being able to know exactly when Guayasamín read the book, it is safe to assume that it was most likely during the painting of his most important series of artworks known as *La Edad de la Ira*, begun in 1961 (the same year Fanon's book was published) and continued until his death. This immense series engages different discourses than that of *Huaycañán*. *La Edad de la Ira* does deal with race, but now Guayasamín has also incorporated into the series themes of class, the connections between these two, and the political injustices that could be attributed to such struggles. This recalls the way Fanon always deals with the interrelationship of race and class as well, and we can look at a series within *La Edad de la Ira*, such as *Los Condenados de la Tierra* of 1967 to 1969 as responding to Fanon's work and dealing with similar themes, including issues of disenfranchised people, expropriated land, and the re-writing of mainstream history. Throughout the process, I shall explore the similarities of these

themes as well as their differences due to Guayasamín's neo-colonial context and Fanon's colonial one, resulting in different goals within their works.

For both Fanon and Guayasamín 'the people' are the most important element of their socially driven works. They are *the* subject matter of the paintings of Oswaldo Guayasamín, who throughout his career produced figural compositions. He did paint landscapes and still lifes as well, but in *La Edad de la Ira* series it is the human figure alone that carries forward the narrative of 20<sup>th</sup> century history. His stylistic approach to figural compositions changed when he evolved as an artist but from the beginning of his career the human figure remained of the utmost importance to him. In his earlier works his figural compositions were more naturalistic in their representation and likened to the official *Indigenismo* movements that were happening throughout Latin America at the time, a version of which was of special significance in the Andean region, of which Ecuador is a part. Though Guayasamín denied ever being an Indigenist painter, it is difficult not to view his early works as being related to a class-based *Indigenismo* like that championed by José Carlos Mariátegui, and at odds with the *Indigenismo* of José Vasconcelos. Mariátegui of Peru defined *Indigenismo* as a social, cultural, and political movement which sought justice for the oppressed indigenous peoples (Greet, 19).

Discussing Indigenism in the context of literature, Mariátegui wrote that,

Los <<indigenistas>> auténticos – que no deben ser confundidos con los que explotan temas indígenas por mero <<exotismo>> - colaboran, conscientemente o no, en una obra política y económica de reivindicación – no de restauración ni resurrección (Mariátegui, 286).

From this quote Mariátegui makes it clear to his reader that Indigenist cultural works should engage with social situations and not merely present the idealized, exoticized or historicized image of “the native”, but actually seek to reveal their current political situation in order to bring it to light and to effect a positive social change. Mariátegui was not alone in forming *Indigenismo* related ideas; there were other more rightwing versions, such as that associated with the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos' conception of *mestizaje*, which Mariátegui very much opposed (Craven, 2001, 4). Mariátegui's definition is the one I shall use in reference to the work of Guayasamín, for his paintings that could be described with this term focus not on the “timeless” traditions or customs of the people, but on depicting their contemporary social situations and class-based oppression, an example being *El paro* of 1938.

Michele Greet, in her book *Beyond National Identity: Pictorial Indigenism as a Modernist Strategy in Andean Art, 1920 – 1960*, refers to Andean *Indigenismo* as an *avant garde* postcolonial strategy. She argues that, even though *Indigenismo* has often been disregarded, because it was eventually co-opted for use by governments, it was actually an *avant garde* project at its inception precisely because it was so socially engaged (Greet, 17). *Avant garde* at this time in Latin America had to do with social change as much as with formal innovations in the arts, and this she notes was also Mariátegui's understanding of the term (Greet, 70 – 72). Though completely distinct from the situation that Fanon was responding to in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the idea of a postcolonial response is fundamental to both Guayasamín as well as Fanon. Discussing Diego Rivera's *Zapatista Landscape*, David Craven analyzes one of the earliest postcolonial works of art and in so doing gives us a better understanding of what is meant

by this term. He writes specifically that the work, "...hinges on a darting interplay, which is both multi-class-based and multi-ethnic in nature" (2001, 7). This multi-dimensional approach to resisting and overcoming the colonial is apparent in the work of Fanon and Guayasamín, for example in how each addresses colonialism by remembering the layered experiences of oppression, both for oppressed as well as oppressor and how these effects continue to be felt. In *Wretched*, Fanon asserts that after independence is achieved by the natives, the quest for the new nation's identity truly begins. The national bourgeoisie, of whom Fanon is ever critical, will look to the mother country (1963, 134), meaning that they continue to emulate Europe uncritically instead of seeking out the future of the new nation from within their own culture and form new cultures. Responding to this we can then posit that the Indigenists reacted in a way opposite to this, as they sought out a national identity in the native people of the Americas, while engaging in an international artistic dialog. Greet describes this as a postcolonial response that sought the "essence" of Latin American identity over the influence of Europe, while not denying that the new identity would also be heterogeneous and multi-cultural (7 – 13).

Fanon even explicitly mentions this "return to roots" as an approach taken by native intellectuals as a form of decolonization, saying

But it has been remarked several times that this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by the native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped. Because they realise they are in danger of losing their lives and thus becoming lost to their people, these men, hot-headed and with anger in their hearts,



relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people (1963, 169 – 170)

But there is still something to be critical of here and Fanon uses this specific example: that he is doubtful of how much looking to a past Aztec civilization affects the diet of today's Mexicans (1963, 169). This reveals Fanon's critical approach to the influences of both the local cultural heritage and that of Europe introduced in the colonial period, as he sought out a new attitude and future for Algeria that concentrated on its current cultural and political realities. The glorification of an indigenous past is also a criticism aimed at some of the early stages of official *Indigenismo* that merely presented the splendors of an Incan past without acknowledging or engaging with the problems of the modern day. That is why it was imperative for Mariátegui that *Indigenismo* deal critically with current political situations of the native people for it to be of any real significance.

This is something Guayasamín did well, which we can observe in his 1941 painting *La Cantera* (Fig. 14). The title translates in English to *The Quarry*, but the painting is often known in English as *The Accident*. In this painting four human figures are the main subject, three men and one woman. Two of the men, each standing at one end of the canvas heaves up the body of a third man, who limply stretches out across the length of the canvas. The woman standing behind them is wrapped up in garments with only her eyes and furrowed brow visible revealing her anguish over the situation. She also seems, underneath the cloth, to be gesturing with her left arm in the direction the men are heading. The men too don worried expressions as they carry the burden of their fellow worker. These men are clearly quarry workers, and from the background which is overtaken by steep and jagged looking stone mountains which extend past the picture

plane, we can ascertain that they work in the stone quarries. Their bodies appear strong, they take up the vertical length of the canvas, they are monumental. Muscles bulge with years of physical labor and their veins noticeably protrude. Their hands and feet are oversized, implying the manual nature of their work. Dangerous and hard work this is, as we can observe in their fallen comrade. Dressed in dark pants, white tank tops, and barefoot these men have little protection from the elements, which emphasizes their poverty and therefore addresses issues of class within the work. Presumably one has gotten injured on the job, has possibly even been killed. His skin belies this, for the others are dark, likely indigenous figures, whose representation also acknowledges the intertwined issues of race and class in Latin America. Though he looks like the others this one man is much paler, with a shade of blue-green falling over his skin, as if the life is draining out of him. The thick dark lines that mark the creases in all of their faces appear like the crags in the stones behind them, tying them into the landscape. This is even further emphasized by the female figure, whose garments create a point above her head, echoing the pointed boulders behind them. The colors too, browns, grays, blues and some red, are all of the same muted almost muddied tone, making the figures quite harmonious with the land. One cannot help when looking at this painting but to see its relationship to a Christian image of Christ's descent from the cross. The carrying of the dead body, the distraught woman, and the rugged landscape are certainly similarities. And as we recall from Chapter One, this adaptation of religious art forms would be utilized much more by Guayasamín in *La Edad de la Ira*, his painting *Playa Girón* being a clear example. Burke also notes a connection with religion in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he writes, "Even though Fanon was not a Christian, the work is permeated

with salvationism, albeit of a secular kind” (131). This idea of the adoption of religious themes in the work of Fanon and Guayasamín will continue to be of importance as we explore in more detail *Los Condenados* series through the theme of 'the people'. In *La Cantera*, Guayasamín too has manipulated the language of his country's dominant religion, the religion of the conquerors, and has applied it to a secular image of the people; in this particular case, 'the people' being indigenous laborers.

The effect is to portray the rural laborer as a figure of great importance. Fanon is quite emphatic about using the language of the people in order to educate them politically, assuring his readers that “But if you speak the language of every day; if you are not obsessed by the perverse desire to spread confusion and to rid yourself of the people, then you will realise that the masses are quick to seize every shade of meaning and to learn all the tricks of the trade” (1963, 151). Guayasamín accomplishes this by using a weighty visual language that the people would be familiar with in order to elevate the subject and focus attention on social issues. This painting, because it depicts indigenous figures and experiences, uses an *indigenismo* approach and also deals directly with labor. Greet addresses these ideas in her discussion of the later work of two other Ecuadorian painters, Camilo Egas and Eduardo Kingman. She informs us that the representation of Indigenous peoples as exploited workers associated them with the proletariat. This approach fit within Mariátegui's definition of *Indigenismo* (Greet, 99). From this we can see that Guayasamín's work is engaged with both race and class and thus decidedly social, making him a painter who Mariátegui most likely would have supported. Yet, as *Indigenismo* was co-opted by the government, thus losing its critical potential (Greet, 130), we can also see why Guayasamín, for whom the social and

political was always the most important part of his art, denied being an indigenist painter and created a new aesthetic from which to approach social subject matter on a transnational scale. And it is this transnational aspect in *Los Condenados de la Tierra* series that will make the aims of the work distinct from that of Fanon, while also drawing inspiration from his book.

*La Cantero*, while separated many years and much in style from *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, gives us an interesting base from which to jump into and find similarities and differences in Guayasamín's approach to another depiction of the people as oppressed. Returning first to Fanon, I shall explore in more depth his conception of 'the people' and the role they were to play in decolonization. To begin with, Fanon immediately makes a strong distinction between the different people that make up the colonial world. This is the division of the colonial world into the colonized and the colonizers, also referring to the colonized as the 'natives' and to the colonizers as 'settlers'. The antagonistic binary he sets up recalls a similar binary created by Guayasamín throughout *La Edad de la Ira* series of the oppressed versus the oppressors. These words could just as easily stand in for Fanon's colonized and colonizers, and Fanon certainly uses this description as well. Fanon sets up this binary because he maintains that this compartmentalization is a key feature of the colonial world, even saying it so specifically as, "The colonized world is a world divided in two" (2004, 3). And what is it that keeps this world divided? The answer is clear: the violence perpetrated by the oppressors. He even writes, simultaneously literally and metaphorically, that the line that divides the colonized from the colonizers, "...is represented by the barracks and the police stations" (2004, 3). Violence is a major theme of *The Wretched of the Earth*, which has led to

various interpretations as to why Fanon emphasized the role of violence in decolonization so much. In the book we learn that after being oppressed both physically and mentally by the settlers, the natives desire their independence more than anything and Fanon sees that the solution, at first, lies in a violent response. It is essential to acknowledge why Fanon sees violence as necessary for decolonization to occur, especially because this theme is important to understanding his conception of 'the people' and their colonial experience, which shall be explored more a bit later. First we must ask who Fanon expects to take up this armed struggle, and therefore, who are 'the people' at the heart of decolonization?

For Fanon, it is not the nationalist parties, the bourgeoisie, the native intellectual, nor the urban worker, rather it is the rural peasantry. He writes, "...it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain" (1963, 48). Edmund Burke III makes note that this is an important and distinct element of *The Wretched of the Earth*. He writes that when it first came out the French Communists condemned this particular idea of Fanon's, for they could not accept the idea that it would not be the urban working class that would carry out the Revolution, but that it would be the peasantry (133). Why does Fanon promote the rural peasants over even the urban workers? To answer this question, we must uncover Fanon's ideas surrounding the nationalist parties, the local political organizations and groups. He finds great fault with the nationalist parties' role in decolonization, believing that they do not truly desire an overthrow of the colonial powers. Fanon writes,

...they are strong on principles but abstain from marching orders. During the colonial period the activities of these nationalist political parties are purely for electioneering purposes and amount to no more than a series of

philosophic-political discourses on the subject of the rights of peoples to self-determination, the human rights of dignity and freedom from hunger, and the countless declarations of the principle “one man, one vote” (2004, 21 – 22).

But, as Sartre makes clear in his Preface when addressing his fellow Europeans, this discourse is no different than the one espoused by the French colonizers themselves, who purported to be so humanistic and yet they repressed the colonized at every opportunity (lvii – lviii). Talk is therefore not enough, as Fanon continues to make clear throughout the book. Already dissatisfied with the attitude of the Nationalist Parties, Fanon then declares that these parties find their support in the urban voters. These include, “...workers, elementary school teachers, small tradesmen, and shopkeepers who have begun to profit from the colonial situation – in a pitiful sort of way of course – [and] have their own interests in mind” (2004, 22). One group has been left out of the Nationalist parties discourse though, and this group consists of the rural peasantry (2004, 23). This is significant for Fanon, for not only have the rural peasants endured the extremely negative effects of colonialism by the foreign oppressors, but they are also disregarded by their own ineffective nationalist parties as well. As Fanon describes them with “...nothing to lose and everything to gain”, this most maltreated group, the rural peasantry, are the only ones confronting sufficiently terrible circumstances to drive them to take up the violence that is their only hope for decolonization and liberation (2004, 23).

We can read the figures in Guayasamín's *Los Condenados de la Tierra* as these peasants. It is unclear whether the figures are meant to be based specifically on the actual rural people of the Algerian struggle or more symbolically as inspired by the book, for

they seem to be readable either way. We may read them as peasants because of the manner in which Guayasamín has painted them; they are deathly thin, they have nothing but the cloth swaddling their bony bodies which emphasizes their immense poverty, and their faces convey a great amount of emotional trauma. These figures are almost the sole focus of the series. Especially in the square canvases, which focus only on the up-close view of a face, Guayasamín has monumentalized their bodies to express their great importance, even as we are presented with slender images of their suffering. This element of humanism is also recognizable in the words of Fanon; for both the people, specifically the oppressed peoples, are the focus of their works. In these faces painted by Guayasamín we can read much of the torment of colonization imposed on the natives by the settlers that Fanon describes. Eyes, glaringly wide, look out with urgency, giving a sense of the extreme feelings of pain and desire for escape. In *Los Condenados de la Tierra #5* Guayasamín again creates one eye in black with a white iris and the other eye white with a black iris, resulting in a strong contrast that appears uneasy (Fig. 15). As our eyes try to make sense of this discrepancy, this visual element enhances the sense that something is wrong or out of place. The discomfort of the figure is therefore emphasized. This contrast of the black and white in the eyes can also stand in symbolically for the larger contrast of oppressor and oppressed within the colonial situation, also a relationship of uneasy tension. In *#5* out of the second eye pours a stream of tears. Created with dripping gray lines that lightly stand out against the black patch of color that creates part of the face, they appear like an extension of the deeply furrowed brow and layered wrinkles under the eye. A mixture of emotions crisscrosses this face. The tears conveying the figure's sadness and suffering, the creases of the

forehead and between the eyes displaying the rising anger and frustration, and the stillness of the lower half of the face the enduring spirit which has survived the colonial situation this far.

This combination relates well to the different descriptions of the colonized given by Fanon, as he moves from the period of colonization in which the people endure colonial abuses, to their growing anger and desire to take power from the colonizers, which eventually explodes into their violent struggle for freedom. Looking now at *Los Condenados de la Tierra #7* in which the head leans so far back that we see the face at an angle which puts the partially visible eyes toward the very top of the canvas (Fig. 15). The pitch-black mouth is open wide with thin curving white lines denoting the shape of the roof of the mouth leading back to the throat. This gives the sense that we could be engulfed in the dark abyss out of which vibrates a horrifying scream. Sadness, terror, an interminable wait...all of these emotions are presented through the faces of these figures. Again, the experience of being a colonized subject is manifested in the slashes of black and white, the thin lines with the appearance of cuts, and the sharp angles, which are all used by Guayasamín to create these faces in a manner that allows no other reading but one of emotional violence, which can then be translated into that of physical violence. These faces act as a source for human to human connection thus drawing the viewer into this sympathetic experience.

Violence is an important part of self-determination in *The Wretched of the Earth*, though perhaps this has been over-emphasized in subsequent interpretations of it. Over-emphasized or not, it is featured prominently enough in the book that an entire chapter, titled "On Violence", is dedicated to exploring the role of violence in the colonial world



and in decolonization. In this first chapter of the book, we discover that Fanon felt that because colonialism was a violent institution, the only way to rid the people of it was through violent means, through an armed revolution (1963, 48). And this is key: that Fanon advocates violence precisely as a response to the physical violence of the colonial system. Adele Jinadu would also impress upon readers of *The Wretched of the Earth* that Fanon was writing with specific reference to the conditions in Algeria, and not necessarily prescribing violence as the method for every country seeking independence (Jinadu, 269). Fanon identifies this use of physical violence as means of oppression in the colonial world at the very beginning of the book when he writes of the colonizer and colonized, “Their first confrontation was colored by violence and their cohabitation – or rather the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer – continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire” (2004, 2). The idea is that violence begets violence. Since the natives of the colonial country have known no other life than the constant violent treatment of colonialism there is no other manner in which they can respond that will be effective. Sartre too recognizes this sentiment in the words of Fanon by saying that a non-violent solution is only plausible in a non-violent world, which the colonial world certainly is not (Sartre, lviii). And as we recall, for Fanon, it was the peasants that would be the most willing to use violence to achieve their aims, “...the mass of the country people have never ceased to think of the problem of their liberation except in terms of violence, in terms of taking back the land from the foreigners, in terms of national struggle, and of armed insurrection” (1963, 101). It is important to remember that Fanon only advocates this violence in order to dispose the colonial powers from the native's country, and not beyond that.

Nonetheless, his overall approach to the subject of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* is quite different than Guayasamín's in *La Edad de la Ira*. Guayasamín saw his series as a necessary rejection of violence, a rebuttal of the horrors that cause it and that it causes. Here we recall that Guayasamín claimed, "I will end the cycle only when violence is ended. But it is not all that easy to accomplish. For that reason, as long as I live I shall go on painting canvases for the "Time of Wrath"" (Guayasamín as quoted in Manthorne, 58). This difference between Fanon and Guayasamín can perhaps be attributed to the colonial context of the author and the neo-colonial context of the artist. For Fanon actually experienced, and saw in his patients as well, the violence perpetrated by colonialism through wars, forced labor, and torture. Guayasamín, though fiercely anti-colonial, never actually experienced the colonial period of his country. But addressing the colonial history of Latin America remained important to the artist as we can see from an interview with Fred Murphy when Guayasamín described Spanish Colonialism as "...an event that was, at its own historic moment, so terrible and damaging for all our great pre-Columbian cultures..." (Murphy & Guayasamín, 61).

In many of Guayasamín's images that deal with colonial subject matter, the manner in which he paints them acknowledges the literal violence of the colonial world to the viewer. A painting such as *El Toro y El Cóndor* of 1957, which predates his *La Edad de la Ira* series, is a poignant example (Fig. 16). With the bull as the symbol of Spain and the condor as the symbol of the Andes, we are presented with an image rooted in local traditions as well as in one that deals with colonialism, in fact speaks out against it. Guayasamín has appropriated this image from an Andean ritual in which a starved condor is sewn to the back of a bull in a spectacle of terrible violence (Barnitz, 2001, 92).

In his painting the condor, gray wings fluttering wildly with dark strokes, tears at the bull's neck to free itself and sinks its claws into its body. The bull, head down, neck twisting, seems already defeated by the bird who takes up as much space in the picture plane as the bull does, though the condor rises above the bull, giving it precedence in the image. Focusing in further, the eyes of each creature tell the viewer a lot about who is winning and who is losing this epic battle. The bull has one black eye and one red eye, both seem vacant. Here we are reminded of the technique which Guayasamín would continue to use of painting the eyes in opposing colors, a signal that the figure has endured staggering pain. The red mimics a red outline that coats the bull's body, evoking an atmosphere of bloodiness. The condor's eyes, on the other hand are greatly animated as they glare fiercely at their victim. The message is clear: the Andean, the indigenous, the Latin Americans, will overcome Spanish colonialism and this may involve violence, an idea that resonates with the message of Fanon as well. This is not the only *El Toro y El Cóndor* Guayasamín would paint. Another, much later and larger version rests in his last project *Capilla del Hombre*, which is also the home of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* (Fig. 21). Perhaps there can be found a dialog between them, since this structure and the paintings in it are intended to tell a story.

Of course, *El Toro y El Cóndor* is a very symbolic image dealing with colonialism and neo-colonialism, but there are some similarities in the style of the painting that remind us of *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, an image that more literally interprets colonialism. The stark colors, which rely heavily on dark blacks, grays, and white are immediately noticeable. It is truly the roughness of the application of the paint that is visible in both works. Only the blacks seem solid. The rest of the colors in *Los*

*Condenados*, the whites and grays seem slashed onto the canvas, tearing at the figures' skin and clothes, and imposing distress as the eye is yanked back and forth by the harsh and choppy lines created by the paint. This adds to the agony visible in the figures' faces and gesticulations. This examination of the forceful style in which Guayasamín paints as contributing to the fierceness of his images, is verified in a quote by the artist in which he claimed, "Mi pintura es para herir, para arañar y golpear en el corazón de la gente. Para mostrar lo que el Hombre hace en contra del Hombre" (Guayasamín, 1988, after Fig. 68). The depiction of the figures calls to mind the manner in which Fanon describes the colonized before decolonization. They are victims of the violence of colonization, as Fanon says, "...the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm" (2004, 4). In *Los Condenados* the visible suffering in the faces of the figures and the way that parts of their faces seem spotlighted as if under constant view represents well this experience. The human form that is so full of this suffering that Guayasamín has embedded it in the experience also makes it more corporeally relatable to the viewer and thus the message is rendered all the more potent. We have now acknowledged similarities between Fanon's approach to the idea of 'the people' and Guayasamín's, but what we must return to now is their differences.

The greatest difference stems from the author and the artist's different approaches to the idea of violence. Recalling Guayasamín's above quote, the artist was vehemently against violence. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, James F. Smith says that "...Guayasamín calls himself a humanist, incapable of violence" (Smith, Los Angeles Times website, pages 2 of 5, para.8). It seems presumable then that Guayasamín would not have necessarily endorsed the type of violence that Fanon found so necessary for

decolonization. Focusing in the paintings of *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, we in fact find no visual reference to physical violence being acted out. The effects of violence are recognizable in the horror on the faces of the oppressed, as well as on the broken appearance of their bodies, but nowhere do we find an image of the perpetrators of the violence nor the means by which they might have committed it. Neither are these figures actively involved in perpetrating any violent revolutionary activity themselves. Because of this Guayasamín has made his images less specific to a particular context and therefore more universal as well. This is quite distinct from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which is entirely clear about the circumstances it is addressing, French Colonialism in Africa, and Algeria in particular. In turn this also relates to his more nationalistic approach to the entire work as well. The nationalistic emphasis is clear throughout and it is established right in the very first sentence of the book when Fanon claims, “National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or Commonwealth, whatever the name used, whatever the latest expression, decolonization is always a violent event” (2004, 1). Dissimilarly Guayasamín's intention with *La Edad de la Ira* series is to address transnational themes. This is accomplished through the multiple sub-series that constitute the large series and which are inspired by or based on historical atrocities from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The events that inspired Guayasamín are from all over the globe, and are not at all limited to Latin American countries or even Third World countries for that matter. Again, the figures of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* do not, on their own, necessarily communicate the specific circumstances of oppression in colonial Algeria. What they do convey clearly are human beings in some kind of agony.

In this manner Guayasamín has transformed a very particular experience, that of colonial Algeria, and has morphed it into the more universal experience of pain. Bulging eyes, open mouths, crumpled bodies all relate this experience, which as Guayasamín makes clear in *La Edad de la Ira* series, is something which was happening all across the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While Fanon's analysis of decolonization emphasizes the importance of unifying the colonial peoples "...on the grounds of nation and sometimes race" (2004, 10), Guayasamín seems to desire a unification of all people, by doing away with borders, and on the basis of our common experiences. We must keep in mind Fanon's actual colonial experience when we recognize the differences between his work and Guayasamín's though. Remembering that for Guayasamín the colonial experience had been replaced by the less physically violent but also greatly oppressive experience of neo-colonialism and thus distancing him from the violent atmosphere that Fanon believed could only be gotten rid of with more violence. Though as Eduardo Galeano notes in *Open Veins of Latin America*, the violence of colonialism and the manner in which it economically debilitated the countries of Latin America, would enable the continued economic oppression of these countries by the developed capitalist countries thus resulting in the neo-colonialism Guayasamín experienced. This evolution of oppression connects the different experiences and the work of Fanon and Guayasamín, illuminating for us why the artist was so inspired by the *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Focusing more intently upon the full-length human figures of *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, we are presented with a new theme within the works of Guayasamín and Fanon. This is the theme of the land. While the natives are fighting against colonialism for their own personal freedom as human beings they are also fighting for the return of

their land, which has been spatially overtaken and occupied by the foreign settler. Fanon asserts the importance of the land in the struggle for decolonization when he writes, “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (2004, 9). The connections between the rural peasants, Fanon's revolutionary group, and the land is of great importance and we can begin to see how this develops by looking at his description of the physicality of the colonial world. When Fanon discusses the difference between the settlers’ town and the natives’ town in the colonized country he describes this colonization of space as a world divided. The settlers’ town is well-built, well-protected, and well-stocked with everything they could need or want. The natives’ town is the complete opposite, deteriorating, over-crowded, with not enough food or provisions (1963, 32), the contrast between the two is stark. Here again is the binary we find both in the work of Fanon and in that of Guayasamín, as the artist throughout *La Edad de la Ira* series has pitted the oppressed against the oppressors. Already oppressed in terms of physical space, this then leads to the psychological oppression of the colonized as well, and we can see from Fanon's descriptions of the colonial city why, for him, the town because of its crippling division and abhorrent conditions was not the most powerful source for overthrowing the colonial regime. Rather Fanon seeks the true spirit of revolution in the rural peasants. The land is very significant here, because these peasants are connected to it and this is one of the keys to understanding why it is they who are the revolutionary force. This is because both the land and the people of the countryside are the most uncorrupted by the ways of the colonizer. Fanon speaks highly of the rural peasant who has resisted the urge to move to the city to try and make a living, saying that

“The peasant who stays put is a staunch defender of tradition, and in a colonial society represents the element of discipline whose social structure remains community-minded” (2004, 67). For Fanon the rural peasants’ connection to land and therefore tradition sustains the community orientation that is destroyed in the divided city, but that is fundamental to the unification of the people in a violent effort to eliminate the colonizer. This also calls to mind the most progressive forces of the *Indigenismo* movements in the Latin American countries, variations of which sought a sense of identity and national essence in the indigenous peoples before their communal ways of life were destroyed by the European colonizers.

Though these rural peasants are the true bringers of the revolution, Fanon does elaborate upon the role of those involved with the revolutionary political party and the native intellectual in bringing the revolution and the new nation into being as well. The political parties are certainly not able to start the new nation alone, for they are torn into either conservative or liberal elements, resulting in a revolutionary minority. But he never privileges them, rather he affirms the peasants’ primary position when he encourages the revolutionary intellectual to quit the city, where he is hunted by the police, and take refuge with the rural peasants, “They fall back towards the countryside and the mountains, towards the peasant people. From the beginning, the peasantry closes in around them, and protects them from being pursued by the police” (1963, 101). Fanon elaborates on the revolutionary intellectuals' experience, “...they will have good reason to wander through their country and get to know it. The cafés are forgotten; so are the arguments about the next elections or the spitefulness of some policeman or other. Their ears hear the true voice of the country, and their eyes take in the great and infinite



poverty of their people” (1963, 101). In the natural landscape of the country, with the people who are intimately tied to that landscape, he will find asylum, community, and the true essence of his country that will enable them to overthrow colonialism in a manner impossible in the city (1963, 101).

As we observe Guayasamín's *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, we become aware of the theme of the land in some subtle but powerful ways, particularly observable in the rectangular canvases (Fig. 15). Moving straight to the literal depiction of the land in these paintings we are presented with a very simple element. Just below the half-way point of the canvases the image is divided into two. The upper register is pitch black, the lower register is painted white with streaks and smudges of blacks and grays throughout. This is the obvious representation of the landscape on which uncomfortably lay the twisted figures. Though the space created is rather shallow, this separation of colors does create a horizon line that sets these figures into a perceivable space that reads as ground and background or sky. The illusion pushes each figure right up to the surface of the picture plane. Knees, feet, and elbows come dangerously close to pushing out of it, with the effect of making the figures nearly extend into the viewer's space. We are presented with their suffering in an up close and personal manner, not allowing us to avoid it. A starkly contrasting visual binary is manifested by this approach to the landscape, one that echoes in a symbolic way the binary established by Fanon's image of the colonial city divided. The land in its literal representation in this series is actually quite minimal. One might even say unimportant in comparison to the great weight given to it by Fanon, as he should for this is a major element of what the struggle for Independence is all about.

A closer inspection of the rectangular shaped canvases reveals that there is still more to this theme of the land in these paintings than just the literal representation though. The figures themselves are portrayed in a manner that is visually land-like. The black, white, and gray in which they and their clothes are painted echo the colors of the ground and sky, making them blend harmoniously into their surrounding landscape. In writing about Guayasamín's work, Claude Sabsay also notes this in *Los Condenados*, “...the white dress of these characters unites with the ground – white too – thus forming one unit, integrating Man with Earth” (Sabsay, 10). Their bodies protrude out in sweeping and staggering lines that morph into jutting mountain-like forms. The lifted knee of #4 displays this clearly. With the rough cloth draping over it, and the white circle denoting the knee cap, this part of the body makes a crooked triangular shape that looks like a mountain peak. In #8 a more squared-off but still jagged effect is established in the cloaked shoulders of the figure that are thrust upwards by the dark and thin arms and elbows that dig into the earth (Fig. 15). The white cloth is almost indistinguishable from the ground, carrying the eye over the shoulders of the figure into a rocky formation that then swoops down the figure's back in a manner that mimics that of a mountain range. The effect of this in #6 (Fig. 15) recalls visually another painting by Guayasamín, from around the same time, titled *Quito Sangriento* of 1966 (Fig. 17). The undulating but squarish bulges of the mountains surrounding the city of Quito are painted in a dark ominous fashion. The city scratched out of the landscape in grays and blacks is encompassed by streaming red lines that leak down from the tops of the mountains. The title is quite expressive of what we are seeing, a bloodied Quito. A very similar shape appears in the body of *Los Condenados* #6. A line is created starting with both knees up

and swaddled in the cloth, then dipping down to the gaunt stomach, up again to the long bony arm and following the cloth to the distorted shoulder. This shape, whether intentionally or not, echoes that of the shape of the Andean cordillera in which Quito is engulfed as Guayasamín has represented it in this other work. Even the lines, which give shape to the cloth, share a visual similarity to the rivers of blood outlining the mountains and city.

One cannot help but feel a sense of anguish when looking at either image. If there is any doubt whether Guayasamín is alluding to landscapes in these images of figures, we need only to look at another work of his, *El Hombre y La Montaña* of 1975 (Fig. 18). Though done later than the other paintings discussed so far it demonstrates that the combining of human and land was not an unusual technique for Guayasamín. In this painting we are presented with an immense head, somewhere in between profile and three-quarter view, which is facing upwards toward the top of the frame. This face, on a brown background, with its shape shadowed by a black form, is painted white and mixed with blacks, grays, browns, and reds which tear at its surface in hatches and cross-hatches that make it appear to bleed. The eyes are wide circles with tiny pupils, the mouth is open and revealing sharp upper teeth. Everything about this face screams of agony. Its mountain-like shape is obvious, again appearing like *Quito Sangriento*, and this is confirmed by the title. An image of human, land, and torment pervade this image much in the way they are united in *Los Condenados*.

From this it is quite clear that Guayasamín presents the full-length figures of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* as connected to the land in an intimate way. This connection may be seen to justify their ownership of it over that of the settlers, for Guayasamín does

not really present us with an image of people and a landscape behind them, which would separate the two. The literal landscape of the images, like most, if not all, of the paintings of *La Edad de la Ira*, gives the viewer hardly any context whatsoever. Instead Guayasamín has morphed the figures into the landscapes in such a manner that the figure is the land, even more so than the literal depiction of the land itself, and the two become indistinguishable. It is this unification of people and place that then creates a greater narrative from which history-making may spring. Fanon sees these ingredients as necessary to the creation of history, something that up to now was done by the oppressor, but which the oppressed must now create. And for Guayasamín too, history is an essential part of his project with *La Edad de la Ira*, which puts the narration of history in the voice of the oppressed.

For both Fanon and Guayasamín the people and the land are situated into a larger theme, and that is the re-writing of history. Early on in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon acknowledges the important role played by history in the colonial country when he informs us that the settler is fully conscious of making history and this is in part the place from which he derives his power (1963, 41). Not only does the colonizer create his own history but he also does whatever he can to denigrate the native's history. Fanon writes,

Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it (1963, 170).

This is one sense in which the conquered people must retake their history. A response to this type of idea is seen in Mariátegui's *Indigenismo* which, as previously discussed, sought to reclaim some aspects of indigenous heritage and synthesize them with some aspects of European artistic movements (Greet, 73). Guayasamín, in his own personal history, reacted similarly. Born to a *mestiza* mother and indigenous father, Guayasamín predominately emphasized his indigenous heritage. One such example of this, given by Greet, is that his full name was originally Oswaldo Guayasamín Calero, the last being his mother's name. In 1948 he dropped the Spanish name Calero in order to be identified only by his indigenous name. Greet asserts that the underscoring of Guayasamín's indigenous heritage lent credence to the type of *Indigenismo* work he was producing at the time (151). Not only this, but it also associated the artist with oppressed peoples, both in Latin America's past as well as in the current day. I would like to take this idea, about the artist authorizing his ability to comment on certain themes and issues, and apply it to Guayasamín's *La Edad de la Ira* series in which we find *Los Condenados de la Tierra*. In a series that forcefully presents us with 20<sup>th</sup> century persecutions, how does the artist enable himself to speak on behalf of the oppressed?

We certainly can see how emphasizing his indigenous heritage allows Guayasamín to give this oppressed group a voice, but I also believe Guayasamín accomplished this by including a self-portrait within *La Edad de la Ira* series. Painted between 1965 and 1968, this *autorretrato* was part of a smaller series titled *Serie Rostro del Hombre* or in English *Face of Man Series* (Fig. 19). In this painting Guayasamín presents an image just of his head, no body whatsoever is included. Right away, aesthetically this fits in with many of the canvases in the series which focus on the human

face. In the now recognizable palette of blacks, grays, murky whites, and also with some bluish-greens his face emerges out of a background of black and gray, the melancholy tone is established. The expressionistic slashes of color create his characteristic features in a similar way to the treatment in *Los Condenados*. Further attention is called to the shapes that create his face through scratchy white lines which outline his nose, mouth, eyes, hair, and emphasize the wrinkles on his forehead and under his eyes. We are presented with a troubled man. The colors and his facial expression, with the eyes surrounded by heavy lids, deep furrows in the brow, and bags underneath, denote his sadness. Setting the work into the larger intentions of the series, we can surmise that his grief is over the state of humanity during his time. Visually likening himself to the other oppressed figures in *La Edad de la Ira* series Guayasamín allies himself with them, thus inserting himself into this history and enabling himself to speak on their behalf. By being included within this community Guayasamín could now re-write history, as Fanon suggests the community-oriented colonized do, and therefore assert power, which is what Guayasamín was attempting to do in his final project *La Capilla del Hombre*, which is where *Los Condenados de la Tierra* is housed. In order to further understand the series then, an exploration of this context is necessary.

“The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called into question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonisation – the history of pillage – and to bring into existence the history of the nation – the history of decolonisation” (Fanon, 1963, 41). Fanon sees the control of history as equal to the control of power, and thus is it imperative that the native begins to command his own history instead of having it imposed on him by an outside force. We can certainly see the

relevance of this to Guayasamín in his monumental project *La Capilla del Hombre*, which consists of an architectural structure filled with paintings and sculpture, all by the artist (Fig. 20). *La Capilla del Hombre*, or *The Chapel of Man*, is dedicated to telling the story of the Latin American people from the Pre-Colombian to the present in the form of a monument. Because it is a monument whose focus is on the regular citizen, or 'the people', instead of the heroes and leaders of the nations of Latin America, it is a revisionist history of Latin America, one that very much deals with and presents an overcoming of colonialism and oppression in general, an example of which we find in the mural version of *El Toro y El Cóndor*, a permanent work in *La Capilla del Hombre* (Fig. 21). The dialog created in this painting makes an explicit statement about Spanish Colonialism and the role of the indigenous in ridding Latin America of European domination. The Pre-Colombian past manifests in many ways in this multi-media artwork. Even the design of the structure of *La Capilla del Hombre* itself echoes elements of Incan stone architecture. It is clear that Guayasamín honors this element of Latin America's past, present, and future, especially in an Andean country, like Ecuador, where the indigenous population is large and important for constructing the nation's new identity.

*La Capilla del Hombre* is then also relevant in terms of a post-colonial discourse because it approaches the subject in a manner that oscillates in time. It is unclear if the figures of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* are meant to be from the colonial period or after, for Guayasamín does not present us with the perpetrators of their suffering so explicitly. When the series was painted between 1967 and 1969, the Algerian Revolution (1954 – 1962) had already occurred and Algeria's independence from France had been gained.

This fact means that Guayasamín's series should not be viewed as a visual endorsement of a struggle that was contemporaneously happening. Rather it is the experiences and lessons of the fight, and Fanon's ideas about it, that become symbolic in Guayasamín's work addressing oppression and the struggle for justice within the framework of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This in turn universalizes this particular experience, making it fit into the message of *La Edad de la Ira* series, which emphasizes that injustices have yet to end. Even in the new nation after colonialism, Fanon acknowledges that often the new nationalist parties treat the rural people the same as the colonizers did (1963, 90 – 95). The ideological values linked to oppression, of course, did not cease once the colonizers were evicted. The history of Latin America makes this quite clear, with indigenous populations, as well as other oppressed groups, up to this day not having the opportunities of other citizens and being forced to live in extreme poverty. This, as has been discussed earlier, was one of Guayasamín's great social concerns.

In *La Capilla del Hombre*, the home of *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, Guayasamín tries to embody all of Latin America in his socially concerned message. This is evidenced both in the message of the work and also in its creation. *La Capilla del Hombre* required a collective effort to come to fruition. As we recall, for Fanon the collective effort of the colonized was essential for ridding themselves of the oppressors and to seize control their own history as well. The unification of the public or 'the people' is then a considerable source of power. And we see that this is true in the diverse cases of the Algerian revolution and the creation of *La Capilla del Hombre*. In both cases the aim is to recapture history and re-form it to the advantage of the oppressed. The means for creating a sense of collective identity are quite distinct for Fanon and for Guayasamín,



yet their respective goals of popular self-determination are related. In *La Capilla del Hombre*, there is the desire to create a monument to a Latin American history different from the ones presented as official in textbooks, one that is instead brought together by artists, musicians, and government agencies to fund this project. Guayasamín and Fanon's examples are so different that it seems almost strange to compare them, but the important connection is this idea of unifying people under a common cause, asking them to engage with their own history and to shape it for themselves. This is the means whereby the oppressed can overcome their oppression. In *La Capilla del Hombre* we can imagine this effort, embodied in the work of art, in terms of a kind of Pan-Latin Americanism. This idea, too, was for Guayasamín fueled by an indigenous precedent, that for him was more important than Simón Bolívar's *patria grande*. This precedent was the Incan empire, which stretched vertically across much of South America and was known as the Tahuantinsuyo (Murphy & Guayasamín, 62). Reclaiming the indigenous element is evidenced throughout *La Capilla del Hombre*. Across from *El Toro y El Cóndor* are several works that are based on indigenous ideas. They create a dialog with the mural that acknowledges the continuing role of the indigenous popular classes in the postcolonial world. While Mariátegui would not agree about Tahuantinsuyo as the example to emulate, he would concur that the indigenous past and present was one of the bases from which to develop the new nation (Löwy, 84). For Mariátegui it was the communism he saw in Inca society plus the civil liberties of modern society that set the example from which to follow in the future. He writes,

Incan civilization was the most advanced primitive communist organization that history has known...We certainly do not wish socialism

in America to be a copy and imitation. It must be a heroic creation. We must give life to an Indo-American socialism reflecting our own reality and in our own language. Here is a mission worthy of a new generation (Mariátegui as quoted in Löwy, 86).

The sentiment evinced in these words reminds me of similar ones claimed by Fanon at the end of his book, when he asserts that the new nation should not seek out guidance for the future from Europe but that they must discover and create anew, “For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man” (1963, 255).

For Fanon, as a result of the revolution and in the creation of the new nation, the distinction between official nationalism and a popular national consciousness was of the utmost importance. He found many pitfalls in official nationalism, which could perpetuate the oppression of the people for the benefit of those in power (1963, 147). In terms of a popular national consciousness, which Fanon did support, this could succeed only if the people were in control of their country. Thus any political parties must accurately represent the majority will of the people. He writes, “The party is not a tool in the hands of the government. Quite on the contrary, the party is a tool in the hands of the people; it is they who decide on the policy that the government carries out” (1963, 148). Fanon's division and definition of these two concepts reminds us of Benedict Anderson's separation of popular nationalism from official nationalism in his book *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, chapters 5 & 6). For Fanon, national consciousness then must develop into political and social consciousness (Fanon, 1963, 161). Even once

Independence is gained the struggle goes on, not in terms of violence as before, but now the struggle is against poverty, illiteracy, and other forms of oppression.

This is the type of fight for human rights that Guayasamín's *La Capilla del Hombre* and the works it house address as well, such as the ongoing battle with neo-colonialism. And it is at this point that Fanon advocates for the political education of the people as the best solution (1963, 145). For Guayasamín too, making the people aware of historical and current states of oppression was essential to preventing it from continuing. In terms of content, this is one of the great strengths of his work, that it aims to awaken consciousness of the exigent issues plaguing humanity. By including paintings from *La Edad de la Ira* in *La Capilla del Hombre*, Guayasamín was able to continue the narration of the history of Latin America by bringing it into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and addressing global problems of injustice. *Los Condenados de la Tierra* fits into Guayasamín's re-working of history in several ways. To begin with, its inclusion in *La Capilla del Hombre* is significant, for the choice to place it here was quite conscious. *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, whether specifically about the Algerian situation or not, is definitely symbolic of the colonial and postcolonial struggle and is not opaque in its sentiment. Placing it within the chronology of the story it can fluctuate between being part of the past and being part of the present. Working visually in a cosmopolitan modernist style, Guayasamín utilized subject matter that was focused on the people and decidedly social in nature, and made it artistically relevant to his time. Thus *Los Condenados* maintains its meaning and relevance regardless of time. Even with *El Toro y El Cóndor*, which we are inclined to view as signifying Latin America's ultimate triumph, Guayasamín forces us to continue to be aware and critical of the issues still present in Latin American and global society.

With *Los Condenados* placed not far from the mural we are constantly reminded that there is still much work to be done. Recalling the history of images as didactic tools in Christian art, Guayasamín can be seen to utilize instead a dialogical method in a secular fashion. This too is appropriate when considering the layered meanings of *La Capilla del Hombre* as a chapel to man, again referring to a religious structure. Guayasamín thus recruits aspects of the dominant language of the religion of the conquerors and uses it to tell the secular story of the oppressed. Fanon also uses a religious tone at times, for example when he says of decolonization, “Its definition can, if we want to describe it accurately, be summed up in the well-known words: “The last shall be first”” (2004, 2). In both cases this adoption of once religious elements may confer greater importance to the forms it is applied to and elevate the stature of the oppressed peoples. Each of the nine canvases of *Los Condenados de la Tierra* develops a story of human suffering in a way that Claude Sabsay notes, with this series as an example, Guayasamín does often by developing unity out of many separate elements in manner not unlike that of cinema (10 – 13). As Mariátegui maintained and as Guayasamín's art encourages, or even enforces, we need to develop our social consciousness.

Fanon would agree as well, “But the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realise that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities” (1963, 181). The people and the land are at the heart of this national reality, which both Fanon and Guayasamín recognize through text and image. Though their backgrounds were distinct, as were those of the countries they knew and dealt with in their work, both author and artist addressed the neo-colonial issues arising from colonial and postcolonial countries in a manner that is both vividly moving and educational.

Concerned with social justice, the words of Fanon and the strokes of Guayasamín's paintbrush completely emerged from the experiences of their time and place. Both emphasized the important role of the people as the main force that could alter society for the better. The land too, connected as it is to the people, formed the identity of the society. And in the creation of a new identity Fanon and Guayasamín sought to reclaim history. To do this meant a reclaiming of popular power as well. In *Los Condenados de la Tierra*, we can see that Guayasamín learned from and shared much in common with the ideas of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, turning them into symbolic images that give a face and a voice to those who most needed to be seen and heard.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a rejection of the multifaceted forms of oppression that plague human societies across the globe, Oswaldo Guayasamín's *La Edad de la Ira* series takes on a monumental task. Frantz Fanon also knew that the fight for social justice would be no small undertaking, but he felt it could be realized through re-humanization. I assert that this is also one of the great strengths of the work of Guayasamín, as he attempts to re-humanize his down-trodden subjects, through his continual interest in representing the human figure, acknowledging the actual situations which oppressed so many, and painting in an emotionally provocative semi-abstract style. This immense narrative of 20<sup>th</sup> century horrors should also be read as a revisionist history, and in this history we encounter both the oppressed and the oppressors, in which while the former are re-humanized the latter are de-humanized in order to express their real-life roles in the undeniable realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This thesis has delved deeply into the binary created by Guayasamín through the exploration of images of the oppressors and the oppressed in several series from *La Edad de la Ira*. Though transnational in scope, Guayasamín's own environment in Latin America, and his home country of Ecuador in particular, highlighted this conflict. Michael Handelsman, in discussing the history and culture of Ecuador, emphasizes that, "Such dualistic reasoning...is an expression of the deep conflicts that are at the very center of Ecuadorian identity" (2). In this thesis I have tried to examine some of these conflicts in Guayasamín's *Los Culpables #1 – 4*, *Reunión en el Pentágono #1 – 5*, and *Los Malditos, Pinochet*, which were explored in the context of the expansive and illuminating Latin American history written by Eduardo Galeano in *Open Veins of Latin*

*America* in which both the artist's and the author's work draws attention to local and global oppressors, and the larger socio-economic systems at work in the interconnectedness of the two. It was essential for Guayasamín's 20<sup>th</sup> century narrative to include these oppressors, as it acknowledges the larger sources of exploitation, such as the economic superstructures functioning within colonial and neo-colonialisms, that historically have and currently do envelope class, race, and gender relationships in Latin America and which are imposed on it from within and even more so by foreign global dominators, such as Europe and especially the United States.

It is not through an explicit narrative that Guayasamín accomplishes this, but rather through his emphatic emphasis on the human body. In both representations of the oppressed and those of the oppressors, the human figure is *the most* significant pictorial element of the painting, and it is Guayasamín's use of stylistic abstraction, rather than naturalism, that actually provides the viewer with more information about the figure they are observing. The bloated and grotesque bodies of the oppressors appear like nightmarish monsters; their physiognomy is intended to communicate their despicable acts to the viewer. Opposite of these figures are Guayasamín's depiction of the bodies of the oppressed, such as we find in *Los Condenados de la Tierra* series. These characters are more visually abstract than the oppressor figures; the sense of space is flattened out, their bodies are simplified and contorted, and their features are less specific. In discussing the human face, Michael Taussig brings up the idea of radical physiognomics in which the soul of a being is freed from being fixed to a particular face and in this manner can undergo identity transformations (263). We might think of Guayasamín's oppressed figures in this manner, in which their less particular appearances, allows them,

even when communicating a concrete historical event, to metamorphose into a symbolic representation of the suffering that almost any viewer can relate to despite their own personal history.

Adapting the modernist visual languages of Expressionism and Cubism to the social preoccupations evident in much Latin American art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Guayasamín actually enhanced the power of his paintings. These modern European styles themselves were intended as reactions against established art norms, and that is what made them *avant garde*. In Latin America the *avant garde* was usually associated with art that also had a social cause (Greet, 53), as the ideas of the Peruvian intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui confirm. Guayasamín thus takes forms known for their subversive qualities and marries them with critical content, stemming from the social consciousness in art emerging from the *Indigenismo* ideology and artistic styles, to create his unique abstract style that intensifies the socially critical message his paintings carry, which we saw in *Las Manos* series. Despite Marta Traba's criticisms of Guayasamín's work, the palpable emotionality of the oppressed figures combined with the transnational historical events being addressed makes the images at once deeply personal and simultaneously universally relatable.

Our ability, as viewers, to relate to these images is fundamental to their success in communicating Guayasamín's social concerns. O. Hugo Benavides writes, "To look at the other is a powerful act which allows the onlooker to appropriate what is being observed and to incorporate it into his or her own sense of logic" (102). Guayasamín's painted bodies become a conduit for emotions that enable the viewer to connect with this figure of 'the other', making these actual injustices unavoidable for the viewer.



Connecting images like *Los Condenados de la Tierra* to other important socio-economic issues like control of land and history, colonialism and neo-colonialism, Guayasamín gives them agency in the manner described by Homi K. Bhabha in his Foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which for physco-affectivity to truly be socially affective it must embed itself in reality.

Taussig emphasizes the significance of seeing over knowing as more effective in the apprehension of truth (199). We all know that poverty, violence, racism, among other intolerable situations, exist, both near and far, but to actually become a witness to it through the images of tortured bodies and the emotional outpouring in Guayasamín's monumental figures forces these realities into our consciousness. The ability of the image to be a conduit to communicate history is especially powerful in a nation, like Ecuador, which has been plagued by high rates of illiteracy. Here monumentality also plays a significant role. Because of the size of the canvases the figures become overwhelmingly large. Adding to this the massive amount of paintings in *La Edad de la Ira* we are presented with a plethora of examples of 20<sup>th</sup> century oppression, that does not even begin to capture all there really were and continue to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The small amount of paintings of the oppressors in comparison to the great number of the oppressed also mimics the real-life scenarios in which a rich few enforce their power of the disenfranchised majority. In effect, we are asked for our solidarity with this majority, the tortured, the poor, the repressed...and like Galeano, Mariátegui, and Fanon, Guayasamín believed that through solidarity and collective effort, popular power may be achieved and the tides of history might be changed. Starting in 1966, parts of *La Edad de la Ira* series crisscrossed the globe back and forth between Europe and Latin America in

exhibitions alone and in retrospectives in countries including Italy, Spain, France, Ecuador, Panama, Russia, Cuba, Hungary, Colombia, Chile, and more thus demonstrating the international significance of its emotionally charged social content. Recently, in 2008 and 2009, after a long absence, a major exhibition of Guayasamín's works, including many from *La Edad de la Ira*, was shown in several museums across the United States<sup>12</sup>. Today many of the works from *La Edad de la Ira*, including the entire *Manos* series, are on display at *Museo Guayasamín* in Quito, Ecuador, which Guayasamín donated to the country's patrimony in 1976, thus truly giving the work to the people he represents.

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<sup>12</sup> This was the *Furia y Rendición: EL Arte de Oswaldo Guayasamín*, or in English, *Of Rage and Redemption: The Art of Oswaldo Guayasamín* exhibition shown in six different museums/galleries.

## FIGURES



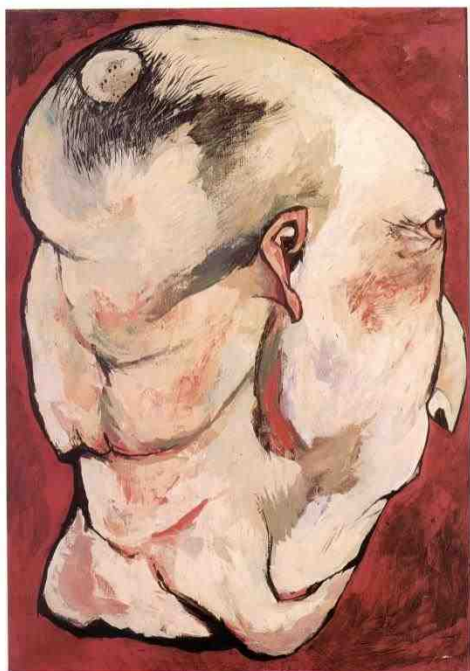
Figure 1: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *El Incario y La Conquista*, Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, Quito, Ecuador, Fresco mural, 1948.



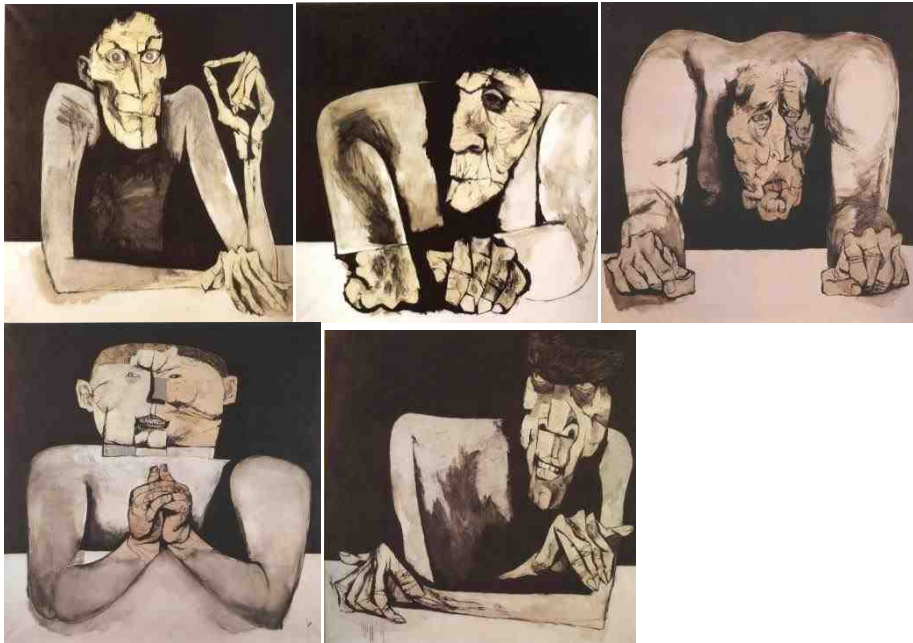
Figure 2: José Clemente Orozco, *The Spanish Conquest of Mexico*, Hospicio Cabañas, Guadalajara, Mexico, Fresco mural, 1938 – 1939.



**Figure 3:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Los Culpables series #1 – 4, #1 El Cura, #2 El Macuto, #3 El Presidente, #4 El Gamonal, La Edad de la Ira series, Acrylic on canvas, 1964 – 67.*



**Figure 4:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *#1 El Cura, Los Culpables series, La Edad de la Ira series, Acrylic on canvas, 1964 – 67.*



**Figure 5: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Reunión en el Pentagóno #1 – 5, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1966 – 70.**



**Figure 6: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Playa Girón, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1963.**



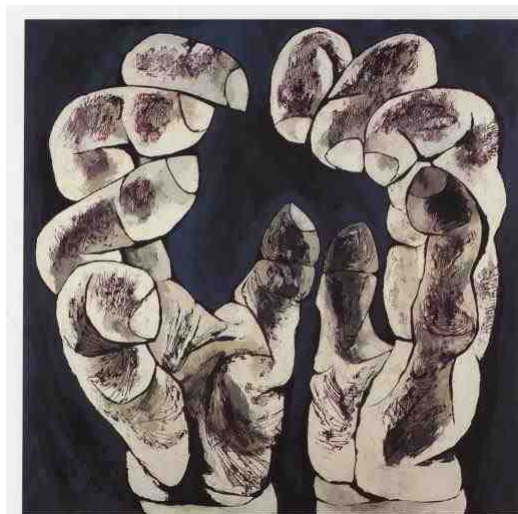
**Figure 7:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Abrazo*, *La Edad de la Ternura series*, Oil on canvas, 1986 – 87.



**Figure 8:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Los Malditos, Pinochet*, *La Edad de la Ira series*, Acrylic on wood, 1978.



**Figure 9:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Las Manos series #1 – 13, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1963 – 68.



**Figure 10:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Manos Insaciables #1, Las Manos series, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1963 – 65.



**Figure 11: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Manos de la Esperanza* #12, *Las Manos* series, *La Edad de la Ira* series, Oil on canvas, 1963 – 65.**



**Figure 12: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Manos de la Protesta* #13, *Las Manos* series, *La Edad de la Ira* series, Oil on canvas, 1968.**





Figure 13: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Los Condenados de la Tierra #1 – 9, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1967 – 69.



Figure 14: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *La Cantera*, Oil on canvas, 1941.



#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



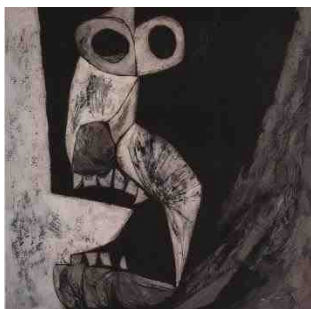
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**Figure 15:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Los Condenados de la Tierra #1 – 9, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1967 – 69.



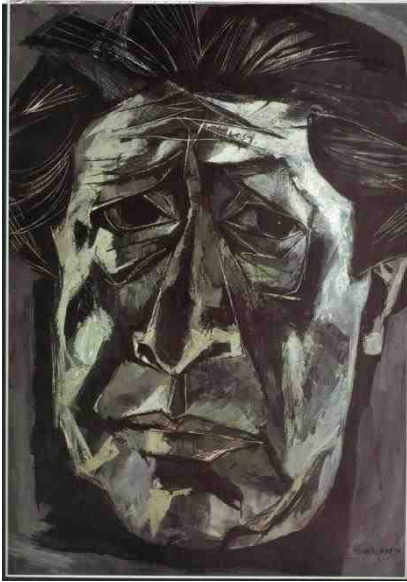
**Figure 16:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *El Toro y El Cóndor*, Oil on canvas, 1957.



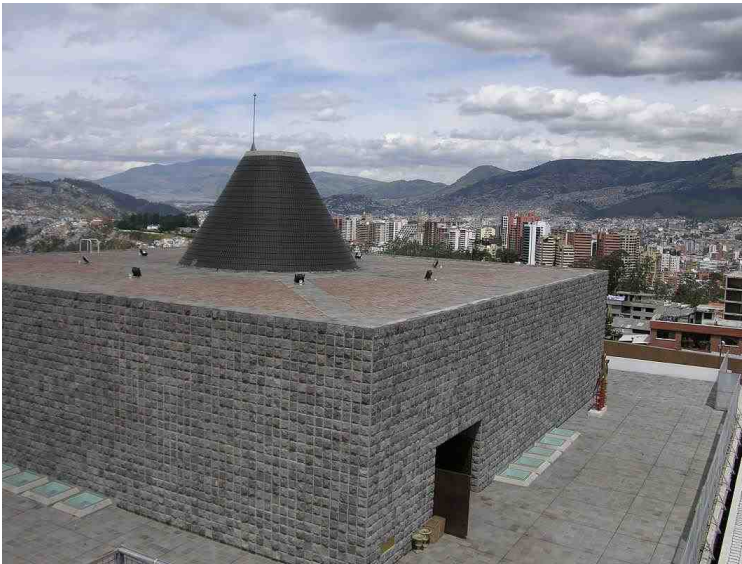
Figure 17: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Quito Sangriento*, Oil on canvas, 1965.



Figure 18: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *El Hombre y La Montaña*, Oil on canvas, 1975.



**Figure 19:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *Autorretrato, Serie Rostro del Hombre, La Edad de la Ira series*, Oil on canvas, 1965 – 68.



**Figure 20:** Oswaldo Guayasamín, *La Capilla del Hombre*, Quito, Ecuador, 1989 – 2002.



**Figure 21: Oswaldo Guayasamín, *El Toro y El Cóndor*, Acrylic Mural in *La Capilla del Hombre*, Quito, Ecuador, 1998.**

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