



the London School of **Economics**
and **Political Science**

**A Post-Structuralist Approach to National Identity After the Cold War:
the Case of Mexico**



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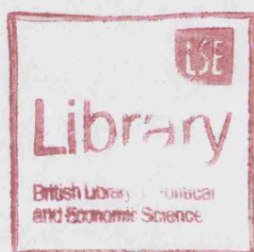


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Abstract

Despite recognition of the centrality of nationalism for International Relations, there has been comparatively little research from the perspective of this discipline on the way national identities are transformed through time, and on the effect these changes can have in relations among states. Thus the focus of this work on the transformation of Mexican identity in the context of the relation between Mexico and the United States after the end of the Cold War and within the framework of economic integration through NAFTA.

The main argument throughout this work is that the meaning of national identity is made through an interaction with the Other, interpreted by means of two sets of discourses: on the one hand, there are those discourses on ethnicity, religion and language that seek to construct a unity out of the people inhabiting a given territory, mainly by pointing out how they are different from those outside territorial boundaries. And on the other, there are the discourses on world politics, which reify the national state as the legitimate political unit of allegiance and construct 'classificatory frameworks' and narratives which shape their interactions.

Given the historical link between cinema and national identity, contending representations of the national identity put forward in recent films, both from Hollywood and from Mexico, are analysed to trace the way this process has been forged discursively in the Mexican case, and to assess the degree to which alternative narratives have become successful or failed to hegemonise a new meaning for the national identity.

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Introduction

National Identity and International Relations

The importance of the idea of the nation, and of the actual national states in which the world is currently divided—that is, national states seen mainly as power containers—has long been acknowledged as central to International Relations, for their very interactions are ostensibly the discipline's object of study. (Giddens, 1985: 120) The main impact of nationalism in international relations occurred with the transfer of sovereignty from the rulers to the ruled, which brought with it an “unprecedented attempt to freeze the political map.” (Mayall, 1990: 35) Moreover, and despite the ‘supra’ and the ‘sub’-national recent challenges, the effects of this transition continue to shape the communities of allegiance we presently inhabit, since “there is no immediate prospect of transcending the national idea, either as the principle of legitimisation or as the basis of political organisation for the modern state.” (Mayall, 1990: 145)

Thus the centrality of nationalism for International Relations is acknowledged. But despite the abundant research both on the relationship between nationalism and the international system and on particular nationalisms, specially at times when conflict can be directly attributed to them, there has been comparatively little research from the perspective of this discipline on the way that national identities are transformed through time, and on the effect these changes can have in the relations among states rather than within states.¹ (Carr, 1945; Cobban, 1969; Tilly, 1975; Tivey, 1980; Howard, 1991 Lijphart, 1977; Ignatieff, 1993) This might have been due to the view that such a concern would be more in the realm of sociology than of IR, but given the complexity of the objects of study of the social sciences, only an interdisciplinary approach can be of help at present, and the range of areas of research deemed within the scope of IR has accordingly broadened. Thus the focus of this work on the transformation of the Mexican national identity, primarily in the context of the relation between

¹ Moreover, while there is abundant literature on European identities, and substantial research on Asian and African identities, there has been comparatively little research on Latin American identities, especially recently.

Mexico and the United States after the end of the Cold War, an end that transformed the international realm and therefore called for new theoretical perspectives.²

So just how are national identities transformed? The answer to this question will of course depend on how the national identity and indeed the nation are defined, and on which factors are identified as constituting the conditions for their continued existence. Traditionally the debate on the origins and transformation of nations is presented, in a rather over-simplified fashion, but nonetheless a useful one for heuristic purposes, as a continuum. At one end there would be the ‘perennialists’, for whom nations have a platonic essence and thus they can undergo minor superficial transformations but the ‘national character’ would not change. This belief, probably grounded on Kant’s ideas of freedom as self-determination and on Fichte and the German Romantics was also shared by Woodrow Wilson in his view of a just world order and underpinned the League of Nations, but it is now espoused only by the nationalists themselves. (Smith, 2003: 11)

A less extreme view would regard the nation as “a deposit of the ages, a stratified or layered structure of social, political and cultural experiences and traditions laid down by successive generations of an identifiable community.” (Smith, 1999: 171) Thus nations and the identities of their peoples would change, according to this perspective, by the experience of the successive generations amounting to depositing ‘new layers’ that can only be built on previous ones, that would therefore in turn determine the shape and the content of the recently added layers. The experience of the generations is not only constrained as regards its interpretation —by the experience of earlier generations— but also by the pattern of cultural elements that make up a sense of continuity, shared memories and notions of collective destiny. Understood in this way, only major developments such as war and conquest, exile and enslavement, the influx of immigrants and

² In fact, O’Hagan and Fry’s characterisation of this period as, after Gaddis, “a tectonic shift” in the “geology” of International Relations accurately captures the redrawing of boundaries that the end of the Cold War implied, which in turn I claim bore profoundly on the re-definition of national identities. (O’Hagan and Fry, 2000: 1)

religious conversion would qualify as factors that can account for the transformation of national identities. (Smith, 1991: 25)

At the other end of the debate however, we would find two opposite but equivalent positions. For the most extreme one, not only are national, and indeed all other collective identities not 'natural', either as eternal essences or superimposed layers of successive experience, but they are never even fully achieved. Living is not a case of being but of becoming. (Deleuze, 1990) Always unfinished, always in the making, identities can never really fully be. (Hall, 1995) Accurate as this may be, this position, if taken too far, would make all theorising of the transformation of national identities untenable. Thus before it can be useful for theorising it needs to be nuanced, complementing it with a less extreme position, namely the view that in the specific case of national identities, the 'nation' on which they depend is a historical, modern construction. From this perspective, the conditions for its emergence were economic as well as social and political, expressed as "reaching a minimum threshold" or as the development of capitalism, the passage from agrarian to industrial societies coupled with the formation of vernacular languages and more generally of a high culture spreading downwards. (Hobsbawm, 1991; Gellner, 1983) The role of the nascent media, especially newspapers and novels, in providing the means —such as "empty time"— whereby it would become possible for people to think of themselves as having a culture in common with others they had never met and would never meet—in other words, of developing a national identity— and the role of the elites and intelligentsias engaging in nation and state-building, often for personal gain, are also taken into consideration.³ (Anderson, 1991) According to this perspective, national identities would undergo transformations when the economic, social and political conditions for the existence of nations outlined above in turn either ceased to be or became so intense as to change in nature.

³ Benedict Anderson used Walter Benjamin's notion of "homogeneous, empty time" to describe the way the 19th century novel managed to convey the idea of simultaneity, crucial to imagining others as partaking in the national community with the reader: readers follow the movement of the hero "through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside." (Anderson, 1991: 24, 30) In cinema, the medium analysed in this thesis, the same effect is achieved through parallel editing, a technique often employed by early visual narrators of the nation such as Sergei Eisenstein and David Wark Griffith. (Howells, 2003: 183, 264)

It is abundantly clear that the conditions identified by 'modernists' are now changing. Some have even declared the end of modernity itself, defining current 'post-modernity' as "disbelief towards meta-narratives," and pointing to the ways that reality has been replaced by "simulacra." (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv; Baudrillard, 1994) Others espouse a more nuanced position, speaking instead of "late," "high" or "accentuated" modernity, whose main features would be the end of tradition, understood as the end of the cyclical reproduction of customs, habits and cherished assumptions across generations, all of these crucial to nationalism; the separation of time and space; the disembedding of social institutions; intrinsic reflexivity; and pervasive risk-calculation. (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992) It is further argued the world economy now has for the first time "the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale," and that new electronic media foster communities where "the unit is the network." (Castells, 1996: 92-93) But whether 'post', 'late' or 'high' modernity, it is acknowledged that the present is in any case a context in which both supra-national entities, such as the European Union, and sub-national entities such as regions or ethnic and other minorities, pose a challenge to the national states that came to embody the idea of the nation, the states that constitute the present state system. In International Relations, these new conditions have been described as the globalisation of world politics.

The challenge has been succinctly summarised by Anthony H. Richmond, whose model of the capitalist society or *Gesellschaft* is embodied in a secular state, legitimated by institutions and the rule of law, where public schools and newspapers are the main media of communication and that has nationalism at its heart. In other words, nationalism is the legitimating ideology of the modern state. (Richmond, 1994: 291) Post-industrial or *Verbindungsnetzschafft* society however, relying as it does in the service sector and specially in the exchange of information, where the main media of communication include satellite television, international agencies and computerised technologies, introduces fragmentation. The homogenising, or to use an image from physics, "centripetal" social dynamics of nationalism are disrupted, as the "centrifugal" dynamics that replace them put nationalism as the legitimating principle of the state under severe strain, often

expressed through attempts at secession or integration of supranational units. (Ohmae, 2000: 217)

The advantage of such a focus is that it allows for the theorisation of transformations in national identities, a transformation that is perceived empirically, even if the national state does not undergo conquest, religious conversion or the other deep social disruptions regarded as the only transformative disruptions by Smith. Therefore, based on the 'modernist' framework somewhat supplemented by its more radical versions, I have used Mexican identity as a case study, mainly for two reasons: first, nationalism had a very important role in the shaping of Mexican society throughout the twentieth century and even earlier.⁴ And second, the country has recently been subjected to the social and economic transformations identified as relevant by the modernists, namely the abandonment of the aspirations to autarky inherent in every nationalism, the emergence of new elites and epistemic communities and their embrace of 'globalisation' and free trade, and the further development of the media of communication and transport, among others. (Mayall, 1990: 71; Smith, 1991: 16)

Methodological Framework

This thesis subscribes to the poststructuralist tradition, within what has been termed, following the philosophy of Wittgenstein, the 'linguistic turn,' i.e. discourse analysis. In order to account for the methodological framework I have sought to apply to the empirical corpus of evidence compiled, in the paragraphs that follow I shall make explicit the underlying assumptions of the thesis.

Given that the formation of national identities is mostly about the emergence of a 'we' of a specific kind,⁵ that can only exist as long as there are some 'they' who remain outside, or in other words, given that 'we' are never in a vacuum but always in relation to the Other, in order to trace the impact of the

⁴ Incidentally, one of the examples used by Anderson to make his point on the role of the 19th century novel in the formation of national identity is precisely a Mexican one: *El Periquillo Sarniento*, written by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi in 1816, during the War for Independence. (Anderson, 1991: 29-30)

⁵ A 'we' whose members are bound with each other in a community of history and destiny.

processes mentioned above in the Mexican national identity I have used a methodological framework that conceives of identities not as pre-existing but as emerging at the moment of interaction, a view thus particularly useful for International Relations, which “as a discipline in constant interaction with the Other(s)...cannot afford to be without the ability to resolve the critical issues that otherness and difference raise.” (Keyman, 1997: 158) At the core of this framework lies the proposition that any system of signification such as social reality “is structured around an empty place resulting from the impossibility of producing an object which, none the less, is required by the systematicity of the system.” (Laclau, 1996: 40) In other words, meaning is organised around a fundamental lack, socially experienced as deprivation, whose concealment results in the variety of discourses that, temporarily, constitute identities, that is, in hegemony: “for life to go on the lack must be concealed and the concealment hidden. This is accomplished by the production of social reality.” (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999: 6)

Two main consequences follow from such a stance. The first, is that ‘the Other’ is not in my theorisation merely an external outsider, but actually constitutive of the Self: the Self only makes sense inasmuch as it is different from the Other, thus were the Other to cease to exist, the Self would be meaningless. (Derrida, 1984; Laclau, 1996) And because ‘the Other’ with whom Mexicans in general and the Mexican political elites in particular interact on behalf of the Mexican people has at least since the revolution been the United States, I contend the Mexican identity and the transformation I claim has been taking place cannot be understood without taking into account the role of the United States in its relationship with Mexico and in world politics.⁶

The second consequence that follows from the methodological stance discussed above is that the importance of boundary-making procedures—that is, procedures that constitute the political field, by instituting difference—is paramount, for ultimately it is all those who become circumscribed within the boundaries that will thereby obtain their identity. Therefore those social practices

⁶ It is of course possible to make the case that it has been Mexico that has been constructed as ‘the Other’ in relation to the United States, given that discursively it is the marked term, but this thesis deals with discursive constructions from the Mexican perspective.

that shape boundaries, and in so doing constitute their objects of study —i.e. endow, as it were, the basis for subjectivity— are of particular relevance here. (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993; Foucault, 1972) As put by David Campbell with regards to the state, which is also true of the nation:

“If we assume that the state has no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that bring it into being, then the state is an artefact of a continual process of reproduction that performatively constitutes its identity. The inscription of boundaries, the articulation of coherence...can be located in and driven by the cultural discourses of the community.” (Campbell, 2003: 57)

I here refer to the set of such practices as a discourse, creating subject-positions which interpellate subjects in a specific manner. (Althusser, 1971) These positions will be taken if appealing enough, in which case there will be a hegemonised political field: power giving identity, or in other words bringing into existence, its subjects as whatever the positions, in this case as Mexican people. Because all identities so conceived are ultimately the result of the exercise of power, they must be understood as contingent, nothing binds the subject to its position beyond the articulation of both performed by the meaning-making discursive practices. Power will thus be contested when this contingency, a fundamental dislocation at the heart of all identities as mentioned above, is rendered visible and the identities become implausible: their meaning is unfixed, different meanings can be given to them by weaving them into alternative discourses, which will become hegemonic if and when they succeed in creating their subjects. (Laclau, 1996: 36-46)

In sum, identity results from occupying (subject) positions created through the instituting of difference via the definition of antagonists, which delimit the political field in relations of power. These identities are more or less stable depending on the success with which the hegemonic project in fact fixes their meaning within the discourse, although an absolute fixture is ultimately impossible —otherwise, it would not be possible to account for change. Those elements which cannot be articulated and remain unincorporated, as well as the unforeseeable and changing nature of social reality —i.e. the contingent character

of all discourses— continuously disrupt and unsettle the discourse in question, and may eventually completely undermine it, as happens at times of crisis. The methodology thus has a role for both the individual and the structure as mutually constitutive agents.

Keeping within the spirit of the thesis, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, a novel by Italo Calvino, will be useful to illustrate these points here. The novel is about a group of travellers who meet in a Castle, which is also a tavern, under mysterious circumstances. They have been deprived of speech, and thus resort to the use of a Tarot to communicate with each other. One by one, they all arrange their cards on the table so that they tell a story, the story of their life, which the narrator then retells for us readers, in words printed alongside the cards. By the time all participants have *told* their story, the narrator makes the following remarks:

“The square is now entirely covered with cards and with stories. My story is also contained in it, though I can no longer say which it is, since their simultaneous interweaving has been so close. In fact, the task of deciphering the stories one by one has made me neglect until now the most salient peculiarity of our way of narrating, which is that each story runs into another story, and as one guest is advancing his strip, another, from the other end, advances in the opposite direction, because the stories told from left to right or from bottom to top can also be read from right to left or from top to bottom, and vice versa, bearing in mind that the same cards, presented in a different order, often change their meaning, and the same tarot is used at the same time by narrators who set forth from the four cardinal points.”
(Calvino, 1977: 41)

Leaving aside the implications of the set of cards being a Tarot, and the fact that through this subterfuge the author manages to recount such different stories as the tragedies of Oedipus and Hamlet, the myths of Parsifal and Faustus among others, the situation described, I would argue, can work as a metaphor for politics: objective reality, the ‘cards,’ are there, some naturally and others socially-constructed. But what they all mean will depend on in which narrative

they are articulated.⁷ Nothing binds the ‘cards’ either together or to a specific narrative, they can always be re-grafted into alternative discursive chains. When the ‘players’ find the narratives convincing, i.e. when they know who they are, they will bear the identity in question, with its purported meaning.⁸ The more subjects are brought into the discourse, the broader and more-encompassing the political project becomes. Power depends on, while attempting to conceal the lack, being able to impose the meanings that work to one’s, or rather, to the hegemonic group’s, advantage.⁹ That, in fact, would be what the very exercise of hegemony is all about. (Gramsci, 1971)

The assertion that there is no ultimate guarantor of truth beyond the collective belief in a particular hegemonic narrative is often raised against post-structuralism, which is accused of relativism. However, “although there is no absolute truth, no truth apart from representation and dissemination, there are still contingent, qualified, perspectival truths in which communities are invested.” (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 179) Moreover, I concur with Richard Dyer in his assessment of post-structuralism as ethical since

“though often thought of as anti-humanist in its rejection of moralising about human destiny, [it] is in fact profoundly humanist in

⁷ Being would, of course, place some constraints on how it can be articulated. Umberto Eco puts it as follows: “That being places limits on the discourse through which we establish ourselves in its horizon is not the negation of hermeneutic activity: instead it is the condition for it. If we were to assume that everything can be said about being, the adventure of continuously questioning it would no longer have any sense. It would suffice to talk about it randomly. Continuous questioning appears reasonable and human precisely because it is assumed that there is a limit.” (Eco, 2000: 50)

⁸ This point can be further illustrated with an example from the realm of film: in *The Man Without a Past*, conflict revolves around a loss of memory. Although perfectly healthy, skilled and a native speaker of the language, a character is unable to function socially because he cannot remember who he is. The state —metonymically, through the police— launches an appeal through the media for clues on his identity. In a few days the state is able to tell the man exactly who he is, which brings about the dénouement. (Kaurismäki, 2002)

⁹ Studies on national identity from the perspective of International Relations have in the past benefited from interdisciplinarian approaches somewhat similar to the one I have undertaken in this work. In 1990 for instance, William Bloom fruitfully drew on psychology to account for individual identification with a group, in this case ‘the nation,’ on the basis of the advantages this belonging poses for the individual’s personality. (Bloom, 1990) Other psychology-based (Lacanian) research on national identity, while not from the IR perspective, is to be found in Slavoj Žižek’s “The Nation-thing,” where he defines the nation as a way in which we organise our collective enjoyment. (Žižek, 1992: 165)

its stress on the human fact of the cultural construction of our lives. It is a political and intellectual stance that should stand us in good stead against any revival of 'scientific' politics with their well documented inhuman consequences." (Dyer, 2002: 9)

While this does not settle the issue, I believe it does make a good case for Post-structuralist-based research.

Empirical Corpus

Given that one of the key tenets of the methodology outlined above is that there is bound to be a gap between reality as it is and our attempts to know it and account for it, "rather than to ignore or narrow this gap, as mimetic approaches do, aesthetic insight recognises that the inevitable difference between the represented and representation *is the very location of politics*." (Bleiker, 2001: 510, my emphasis) Thus special attention is given in this thesis to processes both of production and of attempts of appropriation, by the various political projects now contending for power, of representations of the national identity, for as Martin Bauer and George Gaskell state:

"The world as we know and experience it, that is, the represented world and not the world in itself, is constituted in communication processes...social research therefore rests on social data —data about the social world— which are the outcome of, and realised in, communication processes." (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: 5)

And text, image and sound are the media in which these communication processes are in turn realised. While instances of the three media have been used to compile the empirical corpus for analysis in this thesis, with speeches, newspaper articles and academic papers featuring in all chapters, and photographs and painting featuring in the first and fourth chapters, it is mostly films that I have drawn on. There are several reasons for this choice, which range from the suitability of films for social research more generally and for national identity in particular, to the role of films in the bilateral relation between Mexico and the US. Let us take a look at each one of these.

Because they are the outcome of a collective effort and because they aim to please a mass audience, cinematic representations are indicative of what is hegemonic or struggling to become hegemonic in a discourse. (Kracauer, 1947: 6; Chowdhry, 2000: 3) Films dramatise abstract ideas and mundane events, and thus participate in the setting of agendas. They mediate experience and act as catalysts for further debate and enquiry, including debate and enquiry on national belonging. (Gregg, 1988: 1-25) Cinema gives “worldviews, in the literal sense of the term.” (Woolen, 1998: 113) And beyond the role films have in shaping the structure and contents of contending discourses, the cinema-going experience is also a particularly effective way to interpellate an audience:

“The cinematic experience...fashions a plural, ‘mutant’ self, occupying a range of subject positions. One is ‘doubled’ by the cinematic apparatus, at once in the movie theatre and with the...action on screen. And one is further dispersed through the multiplicity of perspectives provided by...montage...Spectatorship can become a liminal space of dreams and self-fashioning. Through its psychic chameleonism, ordinary social positions, as in carnival, are temporarily bracketed.” (Shohat and Stam, 1996: 165)

While spectators can produce dominant, negotiated or oppositional readings depending on their individual, specific circumstances, the film is bound to provide for them a subject-position to engage with. Film is, in this sense, a site for the negotiation and contestation of ideology.

With regard to national identity, a case can be made that there is a ‘fit’ between national identity as an object of study and cinema as the main medium in which it has been represented.¹⁰ Just as, according to Benedict Anderson, the

¹⁰ In fact, films in many ways inherited the narrative features of the 19th century novel that according to Anderson allowed the nation to be widely imagined. One such feature is what Mikhail Bakhtin called the *chronotope*: “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in [film]...the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materialising time in space, emerges as a centre for concretising representation.” (Quoted in Konstantarakos, 2000: 3, 7) In other words, representations on film can render a particular time and a particular space inseparable and simultaneous.

development of capitalism to the stage where printed media could reach majorities in territorially demarcated communities partly established the conditions for the origins of the national idea, once this idea was established cinema became one of the media most actively used to engage in nation building—in fact, most national states developed a ‘national cinema.’ (Williams, 2002: 4) The public that could read the printed materials to which Anderson alludes was restricted to the educated, therefore if the origins of the nations in Latin America can be traced back to the Bolívars and the Martí’s, it is in fact with the invention of cinema, which did not require a literate public, and with the gradual urbanisation of those national territories that allowed access to cinema, that the national idea could really take root. Georg Simmel, Thorstein Veblen, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer among others have remarked on the coincidence of “the birth of consumer culture and the invention of motion pictures,” and there is a recent approach to the study of national identity that focuses on culture and on the performative dimension of the national subject as the consumer of a specific type of culture. (Gaines, 2000: 102) And even if cinema spectatorship entailed “a very different public sphere from the one Hegel extrapolated from the reading of newspapers, it was just as effective in instituting a mode of self creation through membership of a media-defined community.”¹¹ (Donald and Hemelryk, 2000: 119) Although earlier conceptions of national cinema as the social equivalent to Lacan’s mirror phase in the formation of (national) identity are currently untenable, since as a social product film itself is far from being a mere direct and unproblematic reflecting surface, it is still possible and indeed productive to conceive of cinema as another representational system that constructs the sense of reality it simultaneously claims to represent. (Lacan, 1977: 1-7; Jameson, quoted by Nichols, 2000: 37; Turner, 1988: 129)

Moreover, the relation between national identity and cinema is not limited to the latter’s key role in nation-building throughout the twentieth century, but it continues to be a close one in the dislocation of national identities under

¹¹ Even at present, a close relationship between cinema and the nation can be observed in film festivals, which continue to contribute to the reification of a world ‘naturally’ made up of national states by classifying films according to the country-of-production criteria. The same goes for film histories. (Jarvie, 2000: 76)

globalisation. The importance that theories of the globalisation of culture ascribe to cinema is arguably greater than the importance attributed to other media. Research on reception for instance has shown that in the case of television, it is indigenous programmes that are usually quoted as the ones preferred by audiences worldwide. (Sinclair et al., 1996; Grantham, 2000: 2) Music is said to be more directed towards the young, thus the consequences of the globalisation of the music industry are shown mainly in a specific age group within a national population. (Levinson, 1995: 45-99) In the case of cinema however, the globalisation of the film industry has had an impact at the level of national cultures.¹² Theorists of 'hybridisation' hail this impact, since they regard it as a mere mixing of the American culture as spread by Hollywood and the local cultures that appropriate it and adapt it, as part of an ongoing process of cultural hybridisation that has taken place ever since cultures were first in contact with each other. (Hannerz, 1992; Watson, 1997 etc.) On the other hand, theorists of 'cultural imperialism' deplore this impact, since they stress the unequal relation between the dominant and the local cultures, and on this basis they do not regard the result of the encounter a mere 'hybridisation,' but rather an instance of imposition, thus cultural imperialism. (Mac Bride and Roach, 1989; Schiller, 1992; Ramonet, 1998 etc.) Whether regarded as benign or as a threat, the influence on local cultures exerted by Hollywood films is not denied. In the 'reflexive' times of globalisation, reliant as they are on the telling and retelling of narratives to help make sense of uprooted selves, cinema continues to be "a superb story-telling machine that imparts a kind of presence and immediacy to the world." (Elsaesser, 2001: 1) While the story told tended to construct a national community, it now challenges it as well.

In addition, cinema is a particularly pertinent source of data on the national identity in the case of Mexico. Ever since the arrival of cinema to the country in 1896, the first films shot there "celebrated the nation by documenting its landscapes, its indigenous cultures, and the pomp and circumstance of

¹² In Mexico some empirical evidence corroborates this claim: research on cultural preferences of adolescents in a variety of secondary schools in border cities found that although students consistently preferred and consumed Mexican television channels and programmes, and national radio stations and music, this was not the case for films. (Lozano, 1996: 169-176)

President Porfirio Díaz's extended regime." (García, 1999: 1) During the PRI's own 'extended regime,' the film industry became central in the forging of the national identity, for instance by developing an indigenous star system that provided sources for identification, and creating a shared cultural space that allowed "citizens to see the national forest from the individual trees." (Nichols, 2000: 39) Moreover its industry has recently been described as a site of reverse cultural flows from the periphery to the centre. (Hannerz, 1992: 221-223) With regards to the relation with the United States, cinema is also a very pertinent source of data not only because representations of Mexicans in some Hollywood films are found to have changed both during the Cold War and later in line with the re-grafting of Mexico in alternative discursive chains as is my argument, but also because of the latest trends in Mexico itself, whose films during the 1990s tended to re-graft Mexico in those same discursive chains, and at present show evidence of a dislocation taking place as demonstrated in chapter five.

Finally, there is the issue of the suitability of film given the role it has played in international relations in general, and in the international relations between Mexico and the United States in particular. Hollywood films have often been described as "a crucial weapon" for the dissemination of American narratives and the implementation of foreign policy. Head of the Motion Pictures Export Association of America (MPEAA) Jack Valenti is even said to call Hollywood "the little State Department" given its close links with the State Department and the CIA. (López, 2000: 422; May, 2000: 176, 203) Jack Warner of Warner Brothers reportedly declined Roosevelt's invitation to join the diplomatic service stating that he thought he could "do more for American diplomacy with a good film about the United States every now and then." (Vanderwood, 1996: 59-82) More recently, key figures in American politics did have a Hollywood background, such as former President Reagan, or close connections, as in the case of Bill Clinton. (Scott, 2000: 155-157) Politics has always played "a game of spectacle and idealisation...[which] Hollywood came to enhance." (Scott, 2000: 6)

Films also figure in the diplomatic history of US-Mexico relations in many ways, which range from early disputes over representations of Mexicans to the

widespread distribution of Mexican films in the US through the Consulates, a policy which contributed to fostering the cultural identification of the Chicano community. (De Los Reyes, 1996: 26-35; Fein, 1996: 43-58) More recently, during the Zedillo administration, it was a former ambassador, Jorge Alberto Lozoya, who was Head of the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE), and cultural attachés in Mexican embassies around the world have made it part of their policy to make Mexican films accessible for the general public.

Last but not least, the support of film studies, very rarely used in IR other than for teaching purposes, is also in line with the interdisciplinary approach that informs this thesis.¹³

Organisation of the Chapters

In this work, I claim that the heterogeneous group who came to power in Mexico as a result of the revolution and who subsequently became the ruling elite hegemonised the political field through the construction of a discourse that revolved around the revolution itself, a convenient empty signifier whose fields of meaning or 'moments' proved rather stable for over seventy years partly due to the fact that it was circumscribed within the broader political discourse of the East/West and later the Cold War divide, but which have since been grossly dislocated. The extent to which this project was successful is evidenced in the status of the discourse about the revolution, which in recent research has been described as a mystique:

“Mystical discourse can be understood as an ordering of representations of the origins, the sense and transcendence of collective identities in history...the Mexican revolutionary discourse was constituted as a mystical system of representations providing a

¹³ Important exceptions to this are the work of James Der Derian on Hollywood films and their relation to security studies, and also the work of Michael Shapiro, who not only has made use of films to engage in a critique of International Relations that he describes as “Kantian” in spirit, but who regards cinema, under a Deleuzan approach, to be such a promising avenue of research as to attempt to extend its features to political thought itself: “Through its cuts, juxtapositions, and the temporal trajectories of its images, cinematic writing-as-critical-thought assembles an alternative perspective to those narrations that support the coherences of bounded individual and other collective identities.” (Der Derian, 1992; Shapiro, 1999: 1, 7)

strong sense of belonging, unity and commitment.” (Buenfil, 2000: 88)

The revolution is identified as an empty signifier insofar as it stood for a lack, insofar as it meant nothing in itself but summarised that which was perceived as missing, a surface of inscriptions for the aspired social cures to what Connolly describes as “the fundamental unfairness of life.” (Connolly, 1991: 1) In other words, “although the fullness and universality of society is unachievable, its need does not disappear: it will always show itself through the presence of its absence.” (Laclau, 1996: 53) Upon its triumph, the revolution provided new images of identification for the population, whose representations in literature, painting, music, films, the creation of ‘traditions’ and political agendas for various groups all became practices that actively shaped the discourse of what it meant to be Mexican. Parallel to these internal developments, the discourse on world politics that prevailed during the Cold War also constructed a place for ‘Mexico’ which bore directly on the construction of the national identity. This process is sketched in the first part of the thesis, whose main aim is to set the background of what the national identity in question meant, an identity which I argue has been challenged. Chapter one provides a historical background, while chapter two deals with the way the discourse on world politics during those years also shaped national identity. This part concludes with a section on films, which provide evidence for all claims made.

In the second part of the thesis, on chapter three entitled “Challenges from ‘Outside,’” I argue that, when the sets of oppositions that delimited the political field of world politics during the Cold War, namely the opposition between the West and the East —the former meaning freedom, democracy and prosperity, while the latter meant planning, totalitarianism and poverty— collapsed, the boundaries whereby the Mexican identity had been constructed in exclusion as a member of the Third World also collapsed. The main reason, as I contend in chapter two, is that the group in power, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), had throughout the Cold War successfully deployed an undecidable identity, one which in some discourses constructed Mexico, alluding to its cultural heritage, its post-war period of growth characterised as the ‘Mexican miracle’ and

its civilian government which held elections and changed of Head every six years, as part of the West, while in other discourses this identity was expressed as Eastern: Mexico was a country which had had a revolution, it was heavily in debt and plagued by gross inequality and despite its punctually held elections it was effectively a one Party system. This undecidability, I argue, enabled the regime to supply an answer to the question 'who are we' under most circumstances that arose in international politics.

This changed, however, when the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving it seemed only the Western option available, indeed not only for Mexico but all over the world. The neoliberal team who came to power in those days, although still under the auspices of the PRI, had to 'decide' the Mexican identity. The most important change involved a re-definition of what Mexico meant in relation to the United States, always central to discourses on world politics but for historical and geographical reasons very acutely so in the case of Mexico. I contend that from the end of the Cold War onwards, there was an attempt to re-graft the meaning of Mexicanity in such a way that it would become the supplement, rather than the antagonist, to the United States, a process which was only interrupted after September 11th 2001. This attempt was made by framing key issues of the bilateral relation, specifically drug trafficking control, illegal migration and economic integration, into discourses that constructed them not as problems but as opportunities for co-operation and evidence of complementarity. The key signifier became "North-America," an economic and possibly political unit to be forged together with Canada, to which the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement was crucial. My claim is not that, with the help of American business and political elites, Mexican elites were seeking to make 'North-Americans' out of Mexicans, in a manner similar to those nationalists who famously engaged into making 'nationals' out of 'peasants'.¹⁴ Mexicans would still be Mexican, but

¹⁴ While various authors have theorised the emergence of regional identities of different sorts as co-existing with and even undermining traditional national identities —see for instance Kenichi Ohmae's ideas of region-states based on the existence of 'single economic units,' such as "Mexamerica" or Samuel L. Huntington's 'civilisations' which behave as 'civilisational states'— I concur with John W. Meyer et al. that "world-cultural principles license the nation-state not only as a managing central authority, but also as an identity-supplying [entity]." (Ohmae, 1995; Huntington, 1993; Meyer et al., 2004: 89)

encompassed within a newly emerging North-American region, what being Mexican *meant* from the end of the Cold War on, was open not only to debate, but to actual construction. Evidence for this is provided in chapter five, “The Challenge on Film.”

In chapter four “Challenges from ‘Inside,’” I deal, on the one hand, with the ethnic, linguistic and religious identities, since it is usually the interplay of these that, when in conjunction with a specific territorial space —and also in conjunction, I would argue, with specific discourses on world politics— mark the national identity. (Smith, 1991) And on the other hand, I deal with the political system that continuously interpellated people as Mexican. Ethnicity, on which the image of the nation as an extended family so heavily relies, is discussed first. Here I argue that the mestizo as the ethnic basis of the nation has been challenged by the dislocation in the discourse, and that as a result of this the Zapatista National Liberation Army EZLN, which later became a political movement, emerged and up to a point succeeded. Drawing on the work of Laclau on populism as a mode of articulation I further contend that the importance of Zapatismo resides overall in the possibilities it offers for the re-articulation of a nationalist discourse while excluding the former elite from power. (Laclau, forthcoming) But the challenge to the discursively-constructed ethnic identity is not only obvious in the sudden re-emergence of indigenous identities that had been formerly concealed under class identities. It is now evident in the equally sudden re-appraisal of Chicanos, those Mexican-Americans that remained ‘under erasure’ —and thus all the more present— in the earlier discourse, but who have now come to embody the new ethnic ideal for a mythical national identity. While a reappraisal of the Chicano population in the US is evident in most films discussed in chapter five, contemporary Chicano art is discussed in this chapter, as it deals with the reappraisal of Chicanos by Chicanos themselves and by Mexicans.

Apart from the nation as an ‘extended family’ and its foregrounding of ethnicity, nationalism as an ideology has also been described as a ‘secular religion’ in which the nation has replaced God, thus the totalitarian potential in every nationalism. (Kedouri, 1960) Indeed, links between religion and

nationalism may be traced back to the “god of the land” and the “god of the lineage,” early markers that demarcated territory. (Grosby, 2001: 103) Like religion, nationalism “plays on the atavistic sentiments of the masses and shares with chiliastic religions similar populist and messianic features, as well as similar techniques of mass mobilisation.” (Smith, 2003: 13) And just as the modern state relies on nationalism as the ideology on which it draws legitimacy as mentioned above, the pre-modern, feudal state or *Gemeinschaft* of overlapping territorial authorities drew on religion. (Richmond, 1994: 290) But the decline of religion that came with the Enlightenment made it increasingly difficult for “God” to continue to be the organising principle of society. In other words, a discourse of faith was superseded by a discourse of rationalism that rendered former beliefs unconvincing and made it impossible for ‘God’ to conceal the lack. The nation became instead the way to have dignity restored, through its appeal to a Golden Age, and crucially, it also offered a way to transcend oblivion through posterity, with its linking of generations, surmounting the finality of death. (Smith, 1991: 161) Thus the ‘true Church’ became equated with the nation, which, in some cases such as Bolshevism and Fascism, became equated with the leader of the Party. (Grosby, 2001: 104)

Because Christianity has long recognised the rights of Caesar to rule over this-worldly affairs, it has been relatively easily accommodated into a symbiotic relation with many nationalisms despite its aspirations to universality. In the case of Mexico, Catholicism became key for the national identity through the syncretic practices of which the Virgin of Guadalupe is the most obvious and relevant example. However, the nationalist project espoused by the revolutionaries, following Marxist and Weberian ideas about the relationship between religion and the economy, sought at first to promote Protestantism rather than Catholicism, and only settled in an uneasy but mutually beneficial relation with the Vatican after the Cristera War. Catholicism remained crucial for the national identity, and any attempt to re-cast it as North-American would involve either its direct undermining to the benefit of Protestantism or Laicism, or at least the undermining of those Catholic symbols that represent the national identity, specially the Virgin of Guadalupe.

However the newly emerging projects have been attempting to articulate different versions of the Catholic religion into their contending discourses. The Catholic Church is itself in crisis, and although the upper hierarchy has lost much legitimacy, the popularity of liberation theology has continued to grow in some areas. The result of this has been the signifier 'the Church' splitting into at least two different signifieds, each being put forward by the group now in power and 'the opposition' loosely termed respectively. Therefore religion continues to be a source of discontinuity. Overall, the picture that emerges is one of a dislocation and of rival discourses contending to become hegemonic, without any one of them being as yet able to become the equivalent of what the discourse of the revolution was in the twentieth century. This failure is also partly due to the lack of a broader discourse on world politics that is equivalent to the one that prevailed during the Cold War.

Having theorised challenges from 'inside' and 'outside' evidence is again provided through the analysis of representations from the realm of film. In chapter five, in *The View from Hollywood*, the re-interpretation of issues in the bilateral agenda in such a way that they place Mexico in a relation of supplementarity to the US rather than in a relation of antagonism with it is discussed through films by Chicanos and Mexican directors, and also through the mainstream *Traffic*, by Steven Soderbergh (2000) and *Bread and Roses* by British director Ken Loach (2000), on drug trafficking and migration respectively. As for Mexico, the series of comedies that in the 1990s depicted Mexico as naturally belonging in the West and the films that sought to undermine the regime of the PRI by interrogating the national identity on which it based its hegemony are discussed. *Herod's Law* is a devastating critique of post-revolutionary Mexican politics, while *The Crime of Father Amaro* is a somewhat more ambiguous, but equally influential critique of the Mexican Catholic hierarchy and thus of some of the religious—institutional—dimensions of the national identity. (Estrada, 2000; Carrera, 2002) Finally, *Amores Perros* (*Love's a Bitch*), a story described by screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga as one of "Cain against Cain," undermines the myth of the extended family as the ethnic basis of the nation, although the writer stated as his intention that of making a plea for fraternal restoration. (González: 2001; Mateos: 2000)

Finally, the conclusion recapitulates the main arguments made and offers some concluding remarks on the application of this methodology to the study of national identities from the perspective of International Relations.

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The Mexican Identity between the Revolution and the Cold War

The Discourse of the Revolution

The Porfiriato

Mexico began its twentieth century in 1910, with a revolution that overthrew the thirty-year old dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz (1876-80 and 1884-1911). It had been an independent nation for only a hundred years, and during this time it had managed to survive the politically unstable period of its birth, roughly characterised by the struggle between liberal and conservative forces that pushed for a republican and a monarchical project respectively, as well as two foreign interventions, albeit keeping just about half the original territory.

The Díaz regime, known as the *Porfiriato*, had been a period of great stability and economic growth, based mainly on the land, whose possession was concentrated in a few families that became wealthy through agriculture and mining. In 1910, when the total population of Mexico was ten million, 830 estate owners possessed 880,000 kms², almost half the total land. Conversely there were about 3,096,827 workers in these haciendas, about 64 per cent of the workforce. (INEGI, 1986: 10) Foreign investment, mostly European, allowed major developments in communications, specially the railroads, and the attempt to develop a national industry through exploitation of natural resources: according to the National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Informatics INEGI, twenty five successful industries were active at the time, and this early industrialisation produced an upper class of about 78,000 people (0.6 per cent of the population), a middle class of 1,126,000 (8.3 per cent) and an overwhelming poor majority of about 13 million. (Ibid) The Díaz administration is credited with having fostered foreign trade from a balance with imports worth \$18,793,493 and exports \$27,318,788 USD in 1875, to \$205,874,273 and \$293,753,639 respectively by the time he was ousted. (García-Naranjo, 1970: 256-257) Despite the nascent industrialisation, the hacienda and its feudal structure remained the most important economic unit throughout this time, and the regime alienated the vast

majority of the population shortly after coming into power. When the revolution finally triumphed in 1915, a project that would eventually hegemonise most of the political field for the rest of the century was set in motion. Until the times of Díaz, the Mexican national identity had been defined basically in terms of opposition to Spain, France and crucially the United States.

The process whereby the Creole elite constructed Spain, with whom they shared every single aspect of their culture but the place of birth, as 'the Other' has been documented in detail in the literature about Latin American/Mexican independence and provided plenty of evidence for Anderson to argue that the first architects of nations were indeed European settlers in the 'new world.' (Anderson, 1991: 67-82) Having been born in the land we now call the Americas made creoles equivalent to mestizos and 'Indians' and, moreover, they were also united in their suffering injustice that came from Spain, from those (Others) who victimised them.

Being Mexican in opposition to being American was somewhat more ambivalent. In fact, before the Porfiriato, what the American Others *meant* for Mexico had been at the heart of the debate between the Conservatives, who had assumed this Other to be a threat to be avoided and from whom protection ought to be sought, and the Liberals, for whom this Other had been a sort of model to be admired and imitated. While the Conservatives had stressed the differences, — being Mexican was the opposite of being American in terms of religion, in terms of language, in terms of ethnicity—, Liberals had focused in the similarities: both nations had been born out of a conscious struggle against European colonial powers.

During the Porfiriato, however, the liberal faction that finally dominated and of which Díaz was a representative favoured the construction of the Mexican nation as a federal republic, not only because the rejection of Spain implied the rejection of its institutions, particularly the monarchy, as unjust and oppressive, but also because, in being able to claim a popular mandate, the ruling elite acquired legitimacy and was able to consolidate the nation: it was the government of *the people*, the government of those who were included, of *those who belonged*. Clearly the Americans had had a tremendous influence, through their

construction of the United States, in the construction of the Mexican nation as a (just) republic by (free) European settlers. The opposition, however, came from their neighbouring position combined with all those cultural features that were disregarded in the case of Spain. The first of the two foreign interventions had been fought precisely against the Americans, in 1847, and the massive loss of land that ensued became a key component in the *othering* of Americans, furthered considerably after they became 'developed' and 'a world power,' indeed, after they became 'America' itself.¹⁵

France, on the other hand, had a role as an opposite in the definition of the Mexican political field only briefly. The second war of intervention, in which Díaz had been a hero, had been fought and won against the Mexican conservative faction allied to the French, who were assigned a very similar role to that of Spain only forty years earlier. After their contribution to the formation of the Mexican national identity as the powerful —but defeated— European enemy in search of land and people to oppress, France was recast by Díaz not as the antagonist that affirmed the value of the Mexican nation and glorified him, but as the unthreatening alternative to Mexico's two Others, the United States and Spain. In other words, the role played by France in the construction of the Mexican national identity during the *Porfiriato*, although a role of an 'Other,' was close to Karl Schmitt's enemy/foe distinction, that is, an Other whose existence is not assumed as threatening to the Self.¹⁶ (Schmitt, 1996)

In fact, the time of the *Porfiriato* was characterised by a profound desire to bring about a Mexican-European identity, but while Spain, where the Western heritage of Mexico came from, would have implied a threat to the Self, France did not.¹⁷ Thus, for instance, Reforma, the main avenue of Mexico City, was designed

¹⁵ Significantly, it is only in English that 'America' actually means the United States. In Spanish 'America,' refers to the continent, although 'American' might refer to a US citizen. In Mexico, however, a citizen of the United States is not usually called 'American' but 'Estadounidense,' a word meaning citizen of the United States, not available in English. Indeed, when quoting references to citizens of the United States as 'Americano,' the leftwing press always adds "sic." Some of the rightwing press uses italics. See *La Jornada* and *El Universal* respectively.

¹⁶ In fact, it can be argued the relation between Mexico and France as cast by Díaz during the *Porfiriato* was more along the lines described by Connolly. (Connolly, 1991)

¹⁷ "Paris [was at the time] the city Mexicans consider the centre of the world...it is also Paris that they turn to find out what is good or bad, to ask about science, art, poetry, novel ideas or the futility of fashion, the nonsense of false spirits, the perversity of vice." (Tenorio, 1996: 12)

a copy of the Champs Elysées and the whole of the architecture in urban residential areas was based on Parisian town houses. (Johns, 1997: 17) French rather than English was taught as a second language in secondary schools. His oligarchic regime provided the elites with a constellation of 'Mexican' identities modelled after Europe to appropriate, but in its looking for modernity into the future, in its refusal of looking back into a mythical Golden Age that the Mexican nation would once again seek to realise, in its refusal to search for that former, authentic self that being Mexican would eventually embody, in its refusal, in short, to turn the Mexican people into the secular equivalent of the elected people via the nation, the Díaz regime undermined the Mexican national project and the identity thereof as a whole.

A number of narratives that attempt to account for the eruption and eventual success of the Mexican revolution focus in economic and political factors as the direct causes of the upheaval. (Gilly et al., 1979; Katz, 1981; Meyer et al., 1999 etc.) Without questioning the accuracy of those accounts, I wish to put forward the hypothesis that when rebellions erupted in the north, central and southern regions of Mexico, the exploited, landless, pauperised masses were trying to recover the national identities they had last fully held at the end of the nineteenth century.

***The Revolutionary Struggle*¹⁸**

Whether historians regard the revolution as a single, unified process, or as a series of separate episodes only connected through their insertion within the revolutionary narrative, there is agreement that the struggles now encompassed within 'the revolution' were fought at three different fronts that were distinguished both geographically and in terms of the demands they posed. This is hardly surprising as economically Mexico reproduced the global feature of a north that is comparatively more prosperous than its south. The relatively wealthier and ethnically less mixed states of the north had been led in the struggle by Francisco Villa, with a broad spectrum of social claims. The south had uprisen in a very concrete claim for 'land and freedom,' which became its revolutionary banner, commanded by peasant leader Emiliano Zapata. In the centre, the original demand had been for democracy, which at this stage simply meant the sacking of Díaz, represented first by Francisco I. Madero and later by Coahuila governor Venustiano Carranza. (Aguilar, 1970; Córdova, 1989; Meyer, 1999: 505)

Upon the overthrow of Díaz, the three revolutionary fronts were unable to coalesce into a single one and briefly struggled amongst themselves, a process that is well documented in the literature and out of which the Carranza faction ultimately emerged victorious. (Katz, 1981: 253-297) The subsequent series of governments, all led by charismatic generals —*caudillos*— on the basis of their

¹⁸ The extent to which the Mexican revolution "really happened" and accounts on its origins and direction differ markedly. Revisionist historians "stress that the revolution's legacy has generally been to consolidate (not to destroy) the inegalitarian, capitalist, politically centralised structure that emerged during the Porfiriato." (quote by Levy and Székely on revisionists, 1987: 46; Gilly, 1981; Córdova, 1979: 15-38) More official narratives maintain that many important changes did take place, such as a fossilised oligarchy being replaced by an elite with broader social recruitment, peasants and labour being brought into the consensus-making mechanisms of the Party, the creation of a social security system, a new political order based on civilian rule developing and the emergence of a strong nationalism. (Silva-Herzog, 1960; Mancisidor, 1959; Levy and Székely, 1987: 33) Notably, the 23 volume *History of the Mexican Revolution* published by the Colegio de México between 1977 and 1995, authored by, among others, Alvaro Matute, Eduardo Blanquel and Berta Ulloa, spans not only the period of the actual struggle but reaches the year 1960, endorsing the view that it was for those governments of the PRI to carry the revolution forward. Since the methodology employed in this thesis is not concerned with what "really happened" but rather with the way contending narratives "made it happen", as it were, I have used throughout the chapter the latter account as this was the narrative sponsored by the 'governments of the revolution' themselves, and the one on history textbooks for elementary and secondary education until the Salinas reforms.

personal power, crystallised with the creation of institutions, specially the Party, and with it, the basis for post-revolutionary Mexico and for the consolidation of the Mexican identity it entailed were laid. (Silva-Herzog, 1960)

Defining the Political Field

As is evident from the century of Mexican history briefly outlined above, the discourse that constructed the national identity, which can be traced back to the war for independence and which was easily added to during the period of international antagonisms such as the interventions, reached the point of a stalemate during the Díaz regime, when the absence of obstacles to be overcome in order to reach our 'true' selves and indeed the effective end of this search eroded its hegemony, causing the proliferation of elements it was unable to articulate, and it was then replaced by the more encompassing discourse of the revolution.

To properly understand how discourse analysis can account for the consolidation and later transformation of national identity, it is necessary to establish, first, what this discourse consisted of and the sort of identities it made available and articulated, then the procedure whereby it became dominant, and finally to put it in its broader, international context.

The discourse of the revolution established its political field through the construction of antagonisms with the Díaz regime. In terms of discourse as social practice, it underwent a first phase of radicalism from the foundation of the ruling Party, then called PNR —National Revolutionary Party— in 1928, until its transformation into the PRM —Mexican Revolutionary Party— by General Lázaro Cárdenas, in 1938 when it settled the basis for the strong presidentialism that characterised it later and when it reached its most radical stage. In 1946 the Party was further transformed into the PRI —Institutional Revolutionary Party— and the country abandoned both military rule and effectively the revolution. In fact Miguel Alemán was the first candidate of the PRI as such, that is, of the political system the PRI would become, as well as the first civilian president. The main antagonisms are outlined below.

Haciendas vs. Ejidos

Where the Díaz regime stood for the quasi-feudal structure of the hacienda and *caciquismo*, even if justified as the basis for macro-economic prosperity, the discourse of the revolution, specially in its early stages, proposed the very opposite: ‘the land reform,’ i.e. distribution of those same estates into *ejidos*, collectively owned by those willing to cultivate them, inalienable land suitable for self-subsistence.

At the symbolic level, the distribution of land was paramount for the nation-building project, given the role that territory plays for national projects in general. Derrida defined as *ontopology*: “an axiomatics linking indissociably the ontological value of present-being [on] to its situation, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the topos of territory, native soil, city, body in general.” (Derrida, 1994: 82) It can be argued that this ontopological relation was established by turning this territory that would be delivered into an essence of the national identity, fostering its imagined dimension. After establishing in article 27 of the Constitution that all land belonged, in the first instance, to the nation, thus turning the nation into the *original* i.e. the *real* and *natural* owner of the land, and that the government, its agent, was entitled to allocating it to people into what then would become private property, turning private property in this way into a manufactured, unnatural form of possession, depending upon the government for its legitimisation, the government was providing the population with the economic means for its subsistence, while at the same time uniting it through the bond it created with the historic land, the land over which the struggle had taken place.

In other words, the land reform created a relationship between the land and the people —i.e. a subject position for the people— that constructed them as Mexican in what Etienne Balibar has called the ‘fictive ethnica’ of nations:

“...the ‘external frontiers’ of the state have to become ‘internal frontiers’ or —which amounts to the same thing— external frontiers have to be imagined constantly as a projection and protection of an internal collective personality, which each of us carries within ourselves and enables us to inhabit the space of the state as a place

where we have always been —and will always be— ‘at home.’”
(Balibar, 1988: 95)

The heroic figure of agrarian leader Emiliano Zapata, once assimilated into the national repertoire of the PRI, became the repository of all these meanings and until the late 1980s representations of him were subsequently invoked whenever connotations of social justice and of the success and continuation of the revolution were sought. Zapata quickly became part first of the revolutionary myth and then of the national imaginary. It is of course the symbol of Zapata that the EZLN have tried to re-appropriate since 1989, replacing in the first instance the search for social justice in agrarian terms with the terms of excluded ethnic minorities, as discussed in chapter four. For all these reasons, at a time when about seventy per cent of the population lived in rural areas, the *ejido* became a paramount signifier for the discourse to attempt to hegemonise. Long after Díaz had been defeated and left for exile, it had been the failure of successive governments to comply with the land reform that kept fuelling the armed struggle.

Ejidos had been used in pre-Hispanic times, which again legitimated them as ‘original’ and ‘natural.’ The term was reintroduced to the discourse of the revolution by Zapata. During the radical early stages of the post-revolutionary governments, when the political field was being defined internally, in opposition to the Díaz regime, land reform meant primarily breaking a structure that required intermediaries between production and consumption. The aim was not to break the estate into small private plots, but to keep large amounts of land —one hundred hectares— under collective ownership: *ejidos*. This posed several economic advantages: economies of scale, mechanisation, crop rotation, efficient allocation and use of labour, of water and inputs as well as bulk purchasing and marketing of products. (Markiewicz, 1980) Their main advantage, however, was political, since the land reform carried out by Cárdenas during the 1930s and early 1940s gave him the support of the masses, thus depriving rivals and would-be ‘caudillos’ from the support required for further uprisings. (Brown, 1979: 102-136)

By the 1950s however, when the major dislocation caused by the end of the Second World War was creating the East/West divide and with it a Western subject position for Mexico to define its identity, the signifier 'land reform' came to signify splitting estates into small individual —but not private— property, the new 'small *ejidos*' of between ten and twenty five hectares, still allowing peasants to improve their material conditions only this time in order to create a domestic private market for capitalism. The principle of communal lands remained, nonetheless, "an almost sacred revolutionary ideal." (Hamnett, 1999: 263)

Although in variable amounts and qualities, and undergoing major changes in meaning, land reform continued until it was officially ended in 1989, when the discourse suffered a major hegemonic crisis.

Foreign vs. Domestic Investment

Where the Díaz regime stood for economic development founded in foreign investment, the revolution proposed the search for autarky embodied in all sorts of national development plans, effectively backed up with populist policies of protectionism and subsidies. Although some administrations emphasised this more than others, this principle accounts for the Keynesian, highly interventionist state until the late 1980s, with state ownership of almost all major industrial sectors of the economy—it is estimated the state in Mexico accounted at that time for 50 percent of the GNP—at one point including even the banking and financial system, and heavily subsidised urban areas, specially Mexico City, where transport and public services such as water, gas and electricity were very heavily subsidised. (De Sebastián, 1987: 52) People in working class neighbourhoods received an ID from the government that entitled them to free supply of basic items for subsistence such as milk and tortillas in those homes with children, and to other extremely cheap basic goods supplied by the National Council for Popular Subsistence CONASUPO in a 'basic basket.'

But without doubt the most relevant instance of domestic investment became the oil expropriation.¹⁹ In a very similar way to the land reform described above, the expropriation of what was viewed as a strategic industry for development by Cárdenas in 1936 became the symbol of this collective ownership of all resources by 'the nation,' specially of a resource that would provide bargaining power, further essentialising not only the territory as land but also those elements underneath the land which comprised it. And because having been defeated, the struggle was not against Díaz nor among the revolutionary leaders themselves for the first time since the war had broken, but actually against 'foreigners,' the nationalisation of oil supplied a new enemy, a new 'Other' presented as the cause of the lacking which despite the revolution still persisted, an Other against whom 'we' could be united and in opposition to whom 'we' could be ourselves. Cárdenas made this very clear in the speech in which he announced the nationalisation:

"While there are no schools or hospitals in the areas where the oil companies operate, there certainly is a private police force to guarantee their interests. They argue there is no money for decent salaries, but they do have money for their police, for those organisations that go as far as murdering for them, for the anti-patriotic press which sustains them...they think their economic power and their arrogance shields them away from the dignity and the sovereignty of a nation who has generously granted them her vast natural resources...it is for these reasons inescapable to...take action in a definite and legal way to put an end to this state of affairs...I hereby request the unreserved moral and material support to carry out this justified, transcendental and indispensable resolution." (Cárdenas: 1936, my translation)

Moreover, the involvement of Cárdenas' wife in the fundraising campaign invoked the powerful representation of the nation as a family. The campaign received major coverage, and photographs of children and peasants carrying hens and piggybanks, presented along with those of middle classes and the rich, whom

¹⁹ Again there are contending versions of the oil expropriation. It is viewed either as a heroic affirmation of independence by Cárdenas, a champion of the national cause, or an assertion of power by the incoming elite, which thereby granted itself access to considerable resources and gained immediate legitimacy and mass-approval. (Philip, 1982: 201-226) But here too I am concerned only with the implications of the oil nationalisation for the ability to interpellate 'the Mexican subject' and thus create a national subject-position in the nationalist discourse.

“even the Catholic hierarchy had urged to co-operate,” handing-in cheques and jewels “to pay for the debt,” stressed the sources of unity and cohesion even across classes. (INEGI, 1986: 150; Philip, 1982: 224) Narratives of the heroic efforts of everyone involved, from the rail workers who had worked “twenty four hours transporting the oil” to the “technicians who had hitherto only received orders and been humiliated” but who were now successfully taking over the work of foreign engineers, complemented the media campaign. Finally, March 18th, the day of the nationalisation of oil, became a public holiday. (Ibid)

It also helped to consolidate the Cárdenas administration, in fact unique in its radicalism, as a myth on which his successors drew legitimacy whenever it was necessary. During the administrations when the word ‘nationalisation’ used in 1936 became associated with so-called communism, and thus politically incorrect, it was replaced by the consensus maker ‘Mexicanisation.’ After the Salinas and the Zedillo administrations had completely implemented neo-liberal economic policies, the meanings conveyed by oil in the (still) hegemonic discourse that held them in power but which they were actively transforming proved remarkably difficult to change.²⁰ Representations of a paternalistic state and its corresponding ‘child-like,’ dependent citizens, evident for example in the logos of the various governmental institutions —the national health service (IMSS) logo for instance depicts the institution as pair of hands, protectively enclosing the icon of a family— appealing to hierarchical family values endowed the state of affairs with a natural and positive connotation which remains unchanged.

Bourgeoisie vs. Peasants and Working Class

Where Díaz had privileged the bourgeoisie over the poor, the discourse of the revolution purported to do the opposite and endeavoured to protect peasants and workers by the creation of a welfare state that provided free education and health care and, at least at the very beginning, by strengthening trade unions and a

²⁰ Even at the time of writing (2004) with the Fox project well under way, the denationalisation of the energy sector, especially oil, but also gas and electricity, continues to be an extremely contentious issue.

national peasant organisation that was later formally incorporated into the Party—and thus largely neutralised. Legislation was introduced granting workers the right to strike, to get a share annually of the profits made by enterprises and to safe working conditions; an 8 hour-maximum working day and a minimum salary were introduced; sacking would be allowed only when justified; saving associations were fostered. (INEGI, 1986) It also promoted the collective ownership by workers of a number of enterprises called ‘co-operatives,’ in an equivalent scheme to what *ejidos* were for peasants, only not as ambitious. In later stages few of these enterprises survived, and only those unions absorbed and controlled by the state were strengthened, while all others were crushed into disappearance. (Agustín, 1999: 171-181)

This area of social policy was closely related to the point mentioned earlier. The state became the major service provider and its influence was felt in all areas of social life: a joint trust with private investors was set up to make cheap or zero-interest loans available for workers to acquire government housing, whose construction was also massively undertaken (FONACOT). (Meyer, 1999: 629) Also access to government infrastructure in areas such as tourism (TURISSSTE), retail shops (ISSSTE), schools for artistic development (INBA), leisure activities and the further education of adults (IMSS), theatres, a national film industry, film library and institute (Cineteca and IMCINE) that stocked and showed national and art films mostly, television and radio channels, concert halls and even sports clubs sponsored and managed by the government were made widely available to everyone in urban areas, with some extra facilities for the various workers of governmental bureaucracies and their families. At a time, the protection offered by the government to the working classes even involved the prohibition of any increase in the payments of tenants as rent to some of the private housing market, a prohibition that implied the substantial deterioration of the buildings involved, and which lasted for at least twenty years. (INEGI, 1986: 99)

But the key areas remained education and healthcare. By offering access to free education and healthcare the government claimed to be offering conditions of equality of opportunity as well as important means of social upward mobility. (Meyer, 1979: xvi and 1999: 628) Moreover, as soon as the government became

civilian, it became one of the vital, unwritten laws of the system that the president would have, as a requisite, to have studied law at the national university, to further symbolise legitimacy. At the discursive level, since the government was more or less attempting a suture, as it were, by decree, the president *had* to be a lawyer, implying that governing was essentially to do with law and order, and with legislation in general, and that from his position such a suture-by-decree was feasible. The figure of the president could be thus understood as corresponding to a people that were citizens, and a country that was primarily a nation.²¹ This rule would only be broken by the latest neo-liberal administrations, whose presidents were economists with a managerial approach —creating a client-position for ‘the people’ and a business-position for the country. They also held postgraduate qualifications from American universities, a fact that would have been seen as a disadvantage by their predecessors.²²

In the arts, especially painting, literature and cinema, but also sculpture, dance and architecture, positive representations of peasants and workers made the class identity part of, and ultimately equivalent to the national identity. From the 1920s and until the 1940s, *muralism*, a movement which featured peasants and workers as central themes and which involved the creation of large paintings on walls of public buildings, so as to make ‘high art’ available for the masses, predominated. (Smith, 2003: 211; Meyer, 1999: 592-597) In this way, muralism endowed the identities of peasants and workers with a double value: as a topic worthy of depiction in ‘high’ art in a way that would have never been possible under Díaz (as objects); and as would-be-consumers of ‘high art’ (as subjects). Muralism was also ‘translated’ into cinema by Eisenstein in his unfinished film *¡Que Viva México!* which proved influential for Mexican directors such as Emilio Fernández and Fernando de Fuentes. (López, 2000: 425; Hershfield, 1999: 86)

²¹ PNR and PRM presidents had been members of the military, thus their rule supplied an ambiguous identity for the people: inasmuch as the rise of the modern state had created a division between the police for insiders or ‘nationals’ and the army for outsiders, military-presidents involved an outsider identity for the people, and a position of chaos for the country. Avila Camacho is said to have preferred Miguel Alemán as his successor because, among other reasons, he was a civilian.

²² Indeed, even at the time that NAFTA was being negotiated, detractors in Mexico “chastised negotiators as people who ‘speak in English and think in English’ meaning their concepts were alien to Mexican culture.” (Bertrab, 1997: 41)

Dependence vs. Independence

Where the Díaz regime had meant dependence, the revolution opposed an independence it attempted to affirm via its foreign policy. (Meyer, 1999: 634-635; Philip, 1991: 119-120) Even when the radical period was over and the 'governments of the revolution' moved towards an unequivocal right, staged as centre by devising a Labour Party and its corresponding Conservative Party, they always aimed at pursuing an image of agency in the international arena, particularly evident in diplomacy and in Mexican activity in international fora such as the United Nations. This topic is further discussed below, in reference to the broader international discourse in which the national discourse was inserted.

Patriarchal Family vs. Emancipation of Women

The pre-modern Díaz regime had underprivileged women just as much as Indians/peasants and the working classes. Therefore, the discourse of the revolution, in its attempt to realise a comprehensive articulation of signifiers, opposed to this the incorporation of women from the very beginning. (Hershfield, 2001: 129) Although as a universal category only, and thus in sharp contrast with the very particular roles played by the male *caudillos*, a role was granted and acknowledged for the participation of women first in the armed struggle, then in positions of relative power in the first post-revolutionary governments—it was Cárdenas who appointed the first women ambassadors— and during the Ruíz Cortínez administration 1952-1958 the right to vote was granted to women. (Meyer, 1999: 591) The constitution also provided explicit rights and protection to pregnant women and mothers whether married or single. (Levy and Székely, 1987: 29) However conservative Mexican society would become under the rule of the PRI and however fixed the subordinated status for women would be thereof, an attempt was made after the revolution to provide a subject-position for women as Mexican, so as to consolidate the nuclear family as the cornerstone of the modernity Mexico was supposed to be entering.

Legitimate vs. Illegitimate Government

The final opposition to the government of Díaz was its illegitimacy: it had been an oligarchic dictatorship, whereas the governments of the revolution were legitimate because they were democratic. When the revolutionary war began, democracy simply meant ousting Díaz. In the early years after the war, the signifier 'democracy' only came to signify fixed terms in power without the possibility of immediate re-election of the same person regardless the Party, and to this end the constitution, which originally stipulated four-year periods for the president as in the United States, was changed to establish six year periods without re-election. (Meyer, 1999: 302; INEGI, 198: 124) In fact the Party slogan remained 'effective suffrage, no re-election' for several years.

After a while the successive re-election of the Party via its various candidates led to a change of meaning in 'democracy,' which now meant the ruling of the PRI by *antonomasia*, since democracy was the government of the people and the Party had become the repository of the interests of the people while becoming its representative and agent as of the revolution. This was the time when the discourse around the revolution as an empty-signifier was most successful. This meaning of democracy, however, was later challenged as the Party lost hegemony. (Meyer, 1999: 625) There were struggles for this signifier to mean instead the alternating in power by a political elite split into two parties. (González-Casanova, 1970) These struggles became more intense at the time the elite was effectively fracturing, and the second important Party PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) split from the PRI in 1989. (Granados, 2004)

Individual vs. Community

The resulting field is analysed in detail below, but now it is worth mentioning that underlying all these oppositions there is a deeper, implicit one, namely that which opposes a political project based on the individual, portrayed as alien to Mexicans and embodied by the dictatorship —itself a temporary accident, an interruption from the living of 'our common destiny'—, to one based on the community, attributed to the pre-Hispanic peoples of mostly central and southern Mexico, who were now reassessed as 'our roots' and 'who we really come from.'

In political theory, this is the opposition between the liberal, instrumental conceptions of the state, and what Habermas has called the 'holist model,' in which individuals are part of the whole which is more than the sum of its parts: "The holist model emphasises that political autonomy is a purpose in itself, to be realised not by single persons in the private pursuit of their particular interests but rather only by all together in an intersubjectively shared praxis." (Habermas, 1992: 6) The Mexican national identity fostered by the revolution has been described in almost identical terms: "The Mexican which nationalism has invented...is a being who survives thanks to the state. The individual is considered an unfinished and larval creature, whose metamorphosis can only take place within the bosom of the revolutionary state." (Bartra, 1993: 42)

It is not difficult to realise that it is this second holist model which is more powerful in terms of its capacity to interpellate individuals as members of a collective identity, in that the identities it provides supply substantial cohesion to bind the 'us' group. Undoubtedly, this opposition to the Díaz discourse proved a key factor in the stability and general success of the new regime.

Resulting Subject Positions

So what is the nature of the subject positions that became available, and how, for the people whose identities had been blocked by the shattering experience of the revolutionary war, in the new discourse? Because national identities are cultural and collective, meaning ascribed to those cultural markers that set up the boundaries of the nation, namely ethnicity, religion, and language, produced by and through narratives of a common history, common territory and common institutions, specially the educational system, have traditionally been considered relevant in that they "make the people produce itself continually as national community." (Balibar, 1988: 93) These are the cultural markers considered in this section.²³

²³ Although the Mexican national identity was overdetermined, in that a 'pure' meaning for it could not be obtained given the plurality of identities which made it up, the attempt by the elite to encompass the whole of the population within it, or in other words their success in articulating as many floating signifiers as was actually possible within their discourse, resulted in a remarkably stable political field, which is what it analysed in this section.

The National Identity through Ethnicity

Whether conceived as a 'core ethnia,' a 'fictive ethnia' or one of the components of the 'proto-nation' the role of a process of, as it were, 'ethnisation' in the formation of national identity has been acknowledged, and is most evident in representations of the nation as an extended family, where nationalism borrows from the discourse of kinship. (Smith, 1991: 37-42; Balibar, 1988: 86-106; Hobsbawm, 1991: 46-79)

In the rehabilitation of the national identity as one that would appeal to vast social sectors and mobilise them, the first, main stage involved privileging the overwhelming mestizo majority as the 'natural' Mexican identity, although this was done through a thorough reassessment, for the first time, of its partly Indigenous origins. This was important because in this way not only did it incorporate the vast majority of the population while addressing it not negatively, in terms of class, but positively, in terms of ethnicity, but also because it presented to them an identity whose origins they could be proud of, incidentally those origins the indigenous minority represented, thereby incorporating both while gaining a key, distinctive element of 'Mexicanity' —Mexicans could boast a link with remote civilisations, who had been unfairly undervalued until then, wrongly portrayed as primitive and savage by the arrogant Euro-centric discourse, but whose profound wisdom was incontestable and more importantly, who could be traced back in time, in the same, historical land, until 'the beginning.' For this reason, the representation of this indigenous past was reinforced in education, through textbooks; institutionally, through the creation of museums and organisations that appropriated and expropriated the 'native' image and performance of traditions. Thus, the re-writing of history the regime undertook devoted large sections to these ancient civilisations, under the heading 'pre-Columbian Mexico,' implying a more or less eternal Mexico, whose existence did not come into being with the independence of the political and administrative unit from the Spanish empire or even with the conquest but which predated the unequal encounter with Europe.

Basically, the various indigenous tribes were not (re)presented as different peoples subjugated under Aztec rule, but quite the opposite, as the same, unified, homogeneous group of original inhabitants, merely parts of our common present whole: 'the natives' equivalent to one another and crucially to 'us,' who had embodied all good and been wronged by the foreign, Spaniard conquerors.²⁴ One alternative version, namely that the Spaniards were able to subdue the Aztecs only with the help of the subjugated Indian peoples, specially the Tlaxcaltecas, would have avoided the image of Mexico as a nation conquered by foreigners, an issue much discussed in the research on "Mexicanity" during the 1950s and 1960s, but only at the expense of breaking the unity of its origins. This version was thus never officially adopted. In official accounts the 'natives' had been brave, defeated only because they had been outnumbered, their unity broken by alien action, and because of the technological advantage of Spanish weapons; they had been rich, although their ('our') country's natural resources had been systematically drained by the conquerors; the metaphor of the nation as a living organism under a viral attack, so common in nationalistic ideologies, was also drawn upon to construct 'our Indian' selves as healthy, since terrible illnesses such as syphilis and typhoid had been brought by the Spaniards, likened to viruses themselves. All in all, the indigenous past came to represent a mythical Golden Age we should one day return to.

The discourse on 'natives' has been described in the literature, specially in psychological interpretations of national identity, as gendered female, not only because mestizos were the children of Spanish men and native women and thereby equated to the mother, and symbolically the motherland, but because they had been the conquered ones, the defeated ones, the forced-open ones, passive and had been thus despised and discriminated against. (González-Pineda, 1961) The Spaniards were gendered male in that they were the opposite, and accordingly they were admired. However, given that mestizo Mexicans were at least as much of native as of Spanish origin, and moreover, given that the Mexican identity under construction involved a now Catholic, Spanish-speaking population, this

²⁴ Ironically, most of those ancient civilisations had joined Cortés against the Aztecs in order to avoid precisely belonging to Mexico, the name in Náhuatl of the Aztec empire.

discourse stopped short of actually branding the Spaniards as the source of all evil. The elements of Spanish origin inextricably intertwined with any meaning Mexicanity could be brought to signify forced an almost simultaneous reassessment of the Spanish heritage. The Cárdenas government opened the country to Spanish exiles during the Spanish Civil War, and this provided an opportunity for such a reassessment to take place. Over thirty thousand Spaniards arrived in Mexico between 1937 and 1941. A large number of them belonged to the intelligentsia and their influence was immediately felt in the cultural life of the country, especially in higher education, the Ministry of Education and the founding of major publishing houses.²⁵ (Ferrer, 1999) The Casa de España en México, which in 1940 became El Colegio de México, was founded in 1938 as a high quality research centre for Spanish intellectuals to join, and in fact it was one of the two institutions responsible for the publication of the primary school textbooks in 1971. (Martínez, 2002) The Colegio de México still remains a leading centre for academic research. Thus, the myth would have it that if Spain had first 'sent' to 'Mexico' some of the worst of her population as conquerors, she later 'sent' the best as exiles. In any case, both native and European ancestors could from then on provide roots that adequately restored dignity to the mestizo national ethnicity.²⁶

In discourse analysis, institutions and organisations are understood "as 'sedimented' discourses, which despite their origins as products of hegemonic practices have become relatively permanent and durable." (Howarth, 2000: 120) Moreover, on reflecting on the role of institutions in investing authority on social actors, by setting the circumstances under which the production of language is legitimate or 'felicitous,' —in other words, by creating appropriate subject-positions— Pierre Bourdieu has shown this role to be one of instituting *difference*, that is, of dividing people into those who are or can be encompassed within the

²⁵ Among those who arrived there were several philosophers, poets, architects and artists, such as Jose Gaos, Leon Felipe and Juan Grijalbo, and indeed the first serious researcher to specialise on Mexican cinema, Emilio García Riera, who arrived as a child.

²⁶ Another crucial point, further dealt with in chapter 3, was the replacement of the racist discourse that had produced mestizos as 'half breeds' and thus 'impure' and inferior with a discourse from genetics that argued that the more mixed a genetic pool is, the healthier and 'better,' and thus superior the product of the mixing.

boundaries of the consecrating institution and those who are and will be left out, thereby setting up boundaries that create identities. (Bourdieu, 1991: 117) In Mexico, two institutions were deployed to foster the ethnic component of the national identity: the National Museum of Anthropology and History (MNAH) and the National Indigenous Institute (INI).²⁷

The MNAH was created in 1940, under the Cárdenas administration, and in 1964, “to pay homage to the admirable cultures that flourished in the pre-Columbian era...in whose example Mexico acknowledges features original to her national identity,”²⁸ its location was changed from a rather small building in central Mexico City to its current location at the heart of Reforma Avenue, this time allocating to it about 80,000 square metres. A considerable budget was assigned for it to house a series of collections that have continuously been added to following major archaeological works all over the country, with half the space devoted to collections of the indigenous past, and the other half to the present.

The INI was meant to improve the material conditions of living of the population classified as ‘native,’ with approaches to economic development and the general aim ‘social justice,’ which in practice meant supplying the means for them to be turned into the same identity, namely the Mexican identity, as the mestizos: it selected those features of the native cultures that would be incorporated into the national identity while attempting assimilation by eliminating all the rest, specially language. In particular, practices that could be classified as *traditions*, and that would provide a performative dimension to the national identity were widely promoted, such as music and dancing. Using the same metaphor of society as a living organism, Zygmunt Bauman has described assimilation as one —the ‘anthropophagic’— way of unmaking strangers, since it implies

²⁷ However, the origins of the MNAH can be traced back to the National Museum founded in 1865, where the Creole elites of the newly independent nation had first, although somewhat reluctantly, turned ‘idols’ that according to Catholicism ought to be destroyed into ‘archaeological pieces’ worthy of academic attention and patriotic devotion, in an attempt to give prestige to what had been “an undervalued American past.” (Morales, 1994: 171-192; Smith, 2003: 210)

²⁸ Inaugural speech by then President Adolfo López Mateos on September 17th, 1964.

“annihilating the strangers by devouring them and then metabolically transforming them into a tissue indistinguishable from one’s own...making the different similar...forbidding all traditions and loyalties except those meant to encourage conformity to the new and all-embracing order; promoting and enforcing one, and only one, measure of conformity.” (Bauman, 1997: 49)

Thus the ‘natives’ were unmade as ‘strangers’ and made into ‘us,’ to fit within the Mexican side of the redrawing of boundaries the all-embracing order the national project entailed.

As for the MNAH, a Foucauldian frame of analysis of this use of institutions as conducive to the assimilation of native cultures to the national identity, and also of the account of the conquest supplied in textbooks, provides a different reading to that inherent in the policies of incorporation actively pursued by the government: if museums are institutions where the powerless are objectified subjected to the scrutiny of the powerful, constructed into *others* to be known, then by displaying the representations of these cultures provided in the collections for Mexicans to see, Mexicans are effectively being turned into the audience who knows, they are being placed in the (powerful) position of *knowers*, a position common to them, which does equate them to one another as non-natives: the institution sanctioned the boundary between natives and non-natives. (Foucault, 1980) In this way, Mexicans were given a common —mestizo and Western— identity.

The National Identity through Religion

Together with kinship, the representation of nationalism most commonly found in the literature on the subject is that of a religion. Indeed, nationalism has been characterised as a secular religion, in that, after the death of God, its narrative was able to offer the nation as a replacement:

“Through a community of history and destiny, memories may be kept alive and actions retain their glory. For only in the chain of generations of those who share an historic and quasi-familial bond, can individuals hope to achieve a sense of immortality in eras of purely terrestrial horizons. In this sense, the formation of nations...appears more like the institutionalisation of ‘surrogate

religion' than a political ideology, and therefore far more durable and potent than we care to admit." (Smith, quoted by Castells, 1997: 33)

From the perspective of a discourse-analytical methodological framework however, a religion, surrogate or otherwise, is as much a discourse as a political ideology, in that it can form and hegemonise a political field if it allows individuals to attempt to be, or in other words, if it provides them with an identity.

It would not be unfair to the early governments of the revolution to characterise them as struggles that mainly attempted to bring about this discursive change, namely the secularisation of the Mexican state. (Muro, 1994: 35) The major role played by the Catholic church from the times of the Spanish empire did not diminish with independence, itself in fact to a large extent the making of the Catholic priests, and endured attacks of the liberal Mason elite afterwards and until the *Porfiriato*.

It is true that president Juárez had severely curtailed the power of the Church at the cost of the war of the Reform, when its land was expropriated, civil rights were removed from its ministers and when an attempt was made to remove rites of passage from its control and into the control of the state through the creation of the civil registry and of secular cemeteries. (Meyer, 1999: 366-367) But this had not been enough since the main forces of cohesion, of integration and identification in Mexico so far had precisely come from the Church, whose discourse hegemonised to a considerable extent the Mexican political field. Through several syncretic practices that had been developed through the years, the identities it offered were profoundly embraced by the population at large, and instead of being a mere other component of the national identity, that is, instead of being reduced to an element to be articulated in the emerging discourse of nationalism, it effectively competed with it.

What the revolution entailed was the insertion of Mexico into modernity via the replacement of the hegemonic discourse of religion with what the elite hoped would be the equally powerful discourse of the nation. Thus the state became the new 'father': the carer, the protector, the saviour, the repository of unquestionable authority, the powerful one. Its citizens were positioned as 'children' in need of guidance, protection and care, as those who obey and are

rewarded if their behaviour complies with the norms, or punished accordingly. (Bartra, 1993: 42) Perhaps the main challenge the state faced was the remarkable resilience of religious institutional practices, which eventually led to a whole branch more or less splitting off Papal authority in what came to be known as Liberation Theology, and which made any attempt to articulate a new position for 'the Church' in the new hegemonic discourse particularly difficult. (Muro, 1994: 42-45)

In practice this led the government to uphold the laws of the Reform, which had until then been largely ignored, and to introduce a narrative on this regard; (Bailey, 1974) to, in an instance of historicism characteristic of nationalism, turn the Liberals into heroes not so much for having fought and resisted through foreign interventions, but because of their attack on the Church, and to appropriate them as symbols for the new government, while at the same time taking over the educational system, forbidding the Church to participate in education.²⁹ Finally, this also led to a brief armed struggle, particularly difficult because of the wish of martyrdom displayed by the population, —the "Guerra Cristera" or Cristiada, militarily won by the government. The extent to which the discourse of religion provided the basis for the main collective identity at the time can be appreciated from the following quote, given by a Cristero as an explanation for his participation in the struggle:

"We did not want to abandon the Church in the hands of the military men. What would we do without it, without its festivals, without its images which patiently listened to our lamentations? What were they condemning us to? To pine away among the stones and work the dry ground? To die like street curs, without any complaint, after leading a life of misery? It was better to die fighting! There is no evil that lasts for a hundred years, and he who spits at heaven, his spit falls to the ground again." (Meyer, 1976: 182)

Victory was thus provisional. After the radical period of Lázaro Cárdenas, the Church proved too vast an element to be eradicated. Instead of attempting to

²⁹ Later however, when demand for education surpassed the state's capabilities this point was not enforced. Sometimes religious organisations created civil societies in order to obtain the licence to teach and continued to impart confessional education for the upper classes, but their number has never gone beyond ten percent of the total number of schools in the country. (Torres, 2002)

construct the Mexican 'us' in opposition to the Catholic identity of the Mexican people, the hegemonic nationalist discourse articulated religion into a constituting part of that national identity.³⁰ For most of the PRI administrations, the Constitution was again largely ignored until 1989, when the Salinas government resorted to closer—or rather, more visible—links with the Church, formally re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican. (Alemán, 2002a; Barranco, 2002; Loaeza, 2002a)

Equivalences and Differentiations

In the preceding pages, I have put forward the contention that a discourse emerged from the dislocation caused by the revolutionary war, centred around the revolution as an empty signifier: a locus for the inscription of social demands, hopes and aspirations. External to society, it allowed society to be unified. It marked the boundaries of the Mexican political field by recourse, first, to a number of antagonisms to the previous hegemonic discourse, and later by the complex intertwining of the resulting discourse and nationalism. In this way, the discourse of the revolution was able to devise a broad array of subject positions and later of identities, that successfully articulated what had until then been excluded elements. Indeed, the main feature of this discourse, and one that accounts both for the extent and duration of its hegemony, was its ability for articulation. It developed conditions necessary for a stable hegemonic practice: a plurality of antagonistic forces and unstable frontiers separating them. (Barros and Castagnola, 2000: 31)

For the revolution to become this nodal point, four vital equivalences were made: first between the revolution and the government, on the one hand, and between the revolution and the nation on the other, in such a way that the government and the nation were also equivalent. (Meyer, 1999: 636) This was done by providing a coherent narrative of the revolution, one that homogenised the struggles of the three fronts and presented them as one single, unified struggle with common origins, aims and objectives, the most important being to achieve

³⁰ The traditional symbol has been the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose syncretic origin is said to be Tonatzin, 'our mother,' that is, feminine as the motherland.

‘social justice,’ that is, that fundamental lack, the absent fullness, not only in textbooks but also in academic accounts. The ruling elite thus presented itself as the legitimate heir of the winners in the struggle, and at the time in charge of a historical mission: the realisation of the revolutionary ideals. (Buenfil, 2000: 86) The ultimate equivalence was that of the nation with the supreme good, drawing not only on ideas of the state as prior and superior to the individual, after the Aristotelian polity and the Hegelian state, but also on ideas of the state that revolved around the general will, after Rousseau. This was accompanied by its corresponding series of differentiations, which left little room, if at all, to dissent, and provided the grounds for the repression that at times characterised the regime.³¹ The equivalence between the revolution and the nation was also achieved by the signifier ‘social justice’: undergoing the revolution was part of our community of history —of suffering injustice— and destiny —the salvation that would be granted by succeeding in it.

These points can be illustrated with photographs 1 and 2 found in the Addendum section. The first photograph, selected from a book entitled *Testimony about Mexico*, shows the image of a man in uniform, surrounded by a group of men and women and some journalists, taking a skull out of a wooden box. Some of the men have taken their hats off or appear to be kneeling down. The caption reads “The mortal remains of President Venustiano Carranza were removed from the Dolores cemetery, to be taken to the Monument to the Revolution, on the 5th of February, 1942.” (Tercero-Gallardo, 1978: 154)

We have here a representative of the government appearing together with some humbly dressed people, members of ‘the nation.’ But here there are also some well-dressed people, and women as well as men, all devotedly united in the worshipping of this skull, the symbol of the revolution, which unites the nation cutting across gender and social class. The skull, which at the literal level is

³¹ This is clearly reflected in the names the Party received in the brief period between its creation in 1928 to its final version in 1946 as mentioned earlier: it was transformed from “National Revolutionary” (PNR), to “Mexican Revolutionary” (PRM), when an attempt was made to give a particular content ‘Mexico’ to the universal ‘national,’ and finally to “Institutional Revolutionary” (PRI), which summarised the totalising attempt that was made to completely and utterly arrest the by now rather controlled flow of meanings and appropriate the meaning of the revolution, and in turn to use this to close the field.

Carranza's mortal remains, functions as a guarantee of the ancestry of the government that was in power at the time the photo was taken: it was legitimated because it was the successor of what had been the government of the revolution. At the symbolic level, the skull stands for all those who died during the struggle, dead men and women that the revolutionary discourse turned into 'our community of history,' whose mortal remains became part of the national homeland. The photo has been taken from the viewpoint of one of the standing members of the audience, so us as viewers share the same position as the audience, that is, the position the viewer is invited to take is one of participant. But while everyone is present, it is only 'the government' that is naturally entitled to taking and indeed takes 'the revolution' in 'his' hands, rescuing it from the oblivion of death, while invoking our passive admiration and respect.

Photograph two also illustrates very well the way the government was drawn in a chain of equivalence with the nation. It comes from the cover of *Rotofoto*, a magazine published in 1938 and reported "to have broken all circulation records for the period." (Mraz, 1997: 152) The photograph shows president Cárdenas formally dressed but nonetheless sitting on the floor, sharing a meal —ordinary food and beer— with a humbly dressed peasant. Although the subject is clearly Cárdenas, he does not take a disproportionate amount of the visual space but quite the opposite, he almost shares it on equal terms with the peasant and the food.

Although it has been interpreted as a rare example of irreverent treatment of the presidential figure at the time, including a reminder that even within the conditions of free press enjoyed in the country at present, it is still prohibited, as a lingering taboo, to take photographs of the president while he is eating, I contend that this photo actually goes a long way in strengthening the presidential image, and more than that, the Cárdenas myth, the myth that linked the governments of his successors with the revolution. (Mraz, 1997: 151)³² Here we can see he is 'just one of us,' someone who —of all social activities— eats 'with us': sharing meals

³² Fox initially attempted to imitate this aspect of the Cárdenas presidency, in order to create the image of a strong leader in direct contact with the people that can by-pass congress. However he went even further, "dumbing down" the debate considerably. The strategy failed and was indeed counterproductive. (Loaeza, 2003) This point is further discussed in chapter three, under the heading "The Linguistic Challenge."

tends to foster links of solidarity and union among those involved. (Goody, 1982) And what is shared in this photo is 'our homely, everyday food,' which now becomes 'ours' in a double sense, the one we eat and the one he eats with us, so our 'we' broadens to include him, who symbolises the government, and to take as the result that 'the government' plus 'us' equals 'the nation.' The simple food depicted now linked to our new 'we,' the nurture granted to us by our land, has become 'Mexican food.' On the other hand his formal attire reminds us of his status as 'our leader,' even if by placing him in the context of eating instead of a 'political act' his leadership appears rather ordinary, rather linked to everyday activities in a fatherly way.

Apart from the series of equivalences and differentiations outlined above, the attempt to provide a closure for the field is also to be found in the formal structures of the Party, which was nothing more than an attempt to institutionalise the discourse of the revolution. The PRI formally incorporated a 'worker sector,' a 'peasant sector,' a 'business sector,' and a 'popular sector,' to claim to be representing the interests of all sectors of society simultaneously and with the same policies, reached through the thorough negotiation among the sectors until consensus was achieved. Moreover, for at least fifty years the Party maintained very open and flexible recruitment, resorting mostly to co-option and corruption and to only selective repression, as if to further advance its grip of society at large. (Hamnett, 1999: 265-272) And one last feature of the practices that assured their hegemony worth mentioning at this point, was the unwritten law that, in order to reach the sort of alternation in power of Parties to the left and to the right of the political spectrum found in so-called established democracies, this was to be achieved in Mexico by an in-built balance of the Party: each president would try to distant himself as much as possible from his predecessor, often by adopting the opposite sort of policies that had characterised the preceding regime. (Philip, 1991: 6) This thus rendered some conservative governments and some liberal ones, always without resorting to a Party other than the PRI, which officially admitted to 'mixed capitalism.' (Meyer, 1999: 623)

In this way, through equations and differentiations embodied in representations that set the boundaries of 'our identity,' and through the process of

institutionalisation mentioned above, the revolution, acting as a nodal point in the discourse, was able not only to articulate the national identity, but also to redevelop it so as to allow the government to take advantage of the possibilities it offered for the stability of the regime.

2. THE DISCOURSE ON WORLD POLITICS 56

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The Discourse on World Politics

Having outlined those elements for the construction of the national identity developed from within Mexican boundaries, and precisely because identities are constructed in negative terms, that is, in terms of what one is not, we must now turn our attention to those elements from outside the social and territorial boundary, or in other words, to the subject-position created for Mexico within the broader discourse of international politics.

If the domestic dislocatory experience of the revolution at the beginning of the century enabled an almost all-encompassing discourse to emerge in Mexico, it can be argued that, from a discourse analysis perspective, the very dislocatory experience of the Second World War in turn brought about a new discourse into world politics: a discourse that, on the one hand, reiterated 'the nation' as the legitimate political unit around which, as it were, sets of essences (selves) clustered, enshrined in the right to self-determination. And on the other hand, this discourse also constructed the world as a political field through antagonisms between 'the East' and 'the West,' revolving around floating signifiers that have been very much used in politics for the past century, such as 'freedom,' 'justice,' and crucially 'democracy.' Let us look at the field that resulted out of 'nations' split along an 'East/West' divide and the position this created for Mexico.

Producing 'the West' during the Cold War: Freedom, Democracy, Prosperity

Broadly speaking, the Cold War can be characterised as the confrontation between two competing narratives, each one of which attempted to supply meanings for democracy, prosperity, freedom and crucially justice, around which the respective political elites sought to both account for their hegemony and reassure their populations with regards to their way of life, by means of affirming their commitment to the 'right' or 'true' project. (Gray, 2000: 23) These claims to the truth in turn justified the battles, both physical and ideological, that attempted to bring further states into either of these two political fields. (Booth, 1998: 35)

But more importantly, this confrontation also allowed both the defence of their respective identities, not only because each other's existence was due to the continuous threat, spanning seventy years, that unified 'us' versus 'them,' but also because failure could be justified by placing blame on the other, in what Connolly has called a problem of evil: "the evil that flows from the attempt to establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the other that exposes sore spots in one's identity as evil or irrational." (Connolly, 1991: 8)

It seems to be the end of these cohesion-leading circumstances that NATO's Secretary General mourned when lamenting, perhaps ironically but nonetheless with a grain of truth, the passing of the Cold War in the following terms:

"...When the Cold War was coming to an end...of course, we were mesmerised by the 'velvet revolutions' of 1989, but we were also worried. We had always wanted it to happen, but now, as it was happening, there was also an unease as to where all this would lead. In a sense, we were like the Lady at the bar of the Titanic. When the iceberg struck she turned to the waiter and said: 'Yes, I ordered ice, but this is ridiculous!'"³³

The Western narrative, based on the main tenets of liberalism, constructed its subjects as free, autonomous individuals. Society is not a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Responsibility for prosperity and blame for unfairness therefore lie largely in the individual —or else, in contingency. The pursuit of individual interests best serves social interests. The Eastern narrative's subject for its part is above all a social product, determined by a society whose freedom it constrains. In this view it is the system that is primarily responsible for justice, conceived as social justice, and the interests of the individual are best served by the pursuit of social interests. Both these discourses share the basis of the Enlightenment. (Gray, 2000: 23-24; Kaldor, 1990: 115) They are oversimplifications of longstanding political debates, expressing and synthesising the ultimate lack at the heart of society as well as the desire to overcome it: a lack, and in fact an impossibility, of coincidence, of achieving an overlapping between

³³ Secretary General's Mountbatten Lecture, "NATO in the New Millennium," 15 February 2001, University of Edinburgh.

the interests of the individual and the interests of the community, an overlap only conceivable as a particular embodiment of the universal, as the absolute.³⁴ Therefore, they can be regarded as two different ways of expressing a failure to achieve the whole, as the evidence of limitation, which Connolly's remark alludes to in its characterisation of the definition of evil as that which exposes these limitations — 'sore spots' — inherent in being. As put by Steinback: "Maybe the whole world needs Russians. I suppose that even in Russia they need Russians. Maybe Russia's Russians are called Americans."³⁵ (Quoted in Galeano, 2001)

But during the Cold War, these antagonistic positions provided the basis on which meanings for key floating signifiers such as 'freedom,' 'prosperity' and 'democracy' were constructed, in a complex, self-referential intertwining, always in relation to the Other. In this relationship, it was the Western discourse that was clearly dominant. Thus Western economies were free in the sense that they were not planned, like their Eastern counterparts. All sorts of positive connotations were attached to this lack of planning, presented not as the mere product of randomness nor of fate, but as a Darwinian arrangement that responded to a process of trial and error, which rendered the 'surviving' arrangement the 'fittest,' the natural way.³⁶ In this way, planning was associated with manufacturing or designing, with artificiality and thus fallibility. Moreover, freedom of the market was extended to mean a free society. (Costigliola, 2004: 289) Prosperity in turn was defined as the direct result of this freedom. All this was cast in a variety of representations, ranging from popular culture to high art. (Shaw, 2001: 1) Regarding the former, there is a body of literature on the reception of such cultural products as Hollywood films and TV programmes. (Stam and Habiba, 2000: 381-401; Schiller, 1991; Mattelart, 1984) Regarding the latter, research on

³⁴ As Laclau has noted, both Hegel and Marx proposed utopias that attempted to achieve this impossible overlap: Hegel by posing a state which comprises it all, the absolute, and Marx, through the disappearance of the state. (Laclau, Forthcoming)

³⁵ Indeed I would argue one of the reasons why the binary opposition between Islam and the West seems to be gaining currency in some theories of International Relations is that it allows for the same projection of 'sore spots' into the other to take place. The Western assumption of superiority to Islam is "only the mirror image of the positions held by many, perhaps most Muslims." (Brown, 2002: 294)

³⁶ This is of course the view underpinning the 'end of history' thesis, regarding liberal democracy as the final destination in a human journey that was sometimes led astray, through socialism. (Fukuyama, 1989)

Abstract Expressionism in painting, the movement that, promoted by the CIA via the Museum of Modern Art in New York, emerged and succeeded during the Cold War, has concluded that: "By giving their paintings an individualist emphasis and eliminating recognisable subject-matter, the abstract-expressionists [achieved] a purely political phenomenon: the supposed divorce between art and politics." (Cockcroft, 1974: 41) Moreover

"The movement's emphasis on spontaneity and individual freedom of action was easily made to fit the rhetoric that posited these qualities as quintessentially American, in stark contrast to the conformism and lack of individual freedom represented by Socialist Realism in the Eastern Bloc." (Bohm-Duchen, 2001: 212)

Abstract expressionism in painting had its ideological equivalent in minimalism in other forms of artistic expression, such as sculpture and architecture. However, it was the privileged discourse of science, specifically economics, that through its claims of a knowledge closer to 'the truth,' was most influential in this respect. In the words of Hayek:

"...What is threatened by our present political trends [the rise of social democracy in Europe] is not just our economic prosperity, not just our comfort, or the rate of economic growth...It is very much more. It is...our civilisation...The fact is...that if at any point of the past man had mapped out his future on the basis of the then-existing knowledge and then followed this plan, we would not be where we are. We would not only be much poorer, we would not only be less wise, but we would also be less moral...We owe the fact that not only our knowledge has grown, but also our morals have improved...not to anybody planning for such a development, but to the fact that in an essentially free society certain trends have prevailed because they made for a peaceful, orderly, and progressive society." (Hayek, 1968)

According to this view, producing without planning, following no more rules than allowing the markets' freedom i.e. absence of rules, would result in going beyond the cover of the bare necessities that was the case in the East, creating an excess, a surplus, always varied, presenting ever-more choices to exercise freedom. (Kaldor, 1990: 106, 114; Medhurst, 2000: 13) In cases of successful production and distribution, centralised economies were criticised for presenting a lack of choice to consumers, which was equated to poverty. This was always contrasted with the abundance and options available to consumers, the preferred subjects of the Western discourse. As put by a woman in Poland:

“Once when I was in Warsaw, a friend told me about a spate of red-haired women: suddenly it seemed that half of the women in the city had red hair, a phenomenon that couldn't pass unnoticed...imagine those women confronted by the fact that there is no other colour in the store...they have no choice. [Those were] years of the aesthetics of poverty. Even though I'm not an American, it seemed there was absolutely nothing to buy.” (Drakulik, 1992: 24)

Democracy in the West was the political embodiment of this. Substantial definitions of it —i.e. claims to being ‘the government of the people’— were derided in opposition to procedural definitions, that is democracy as the holding of elections, or in other words the availability of options, in the form of at least two competing Parties. Only the existence of respected alternatives secured the free and fair elections without which democracy in the West simply could not happen. The identities of the United States and the Soviet Union were unequivocally defined along these lines, together with their respective spheres of influence.³⁷ This gave rise to the ‘First’ and ‘Second’ worlds, and countries in the ‘Third’ world, however non-aligned their governments might have proclaimed them, were also integrated into the security system of one or the other. (Kaldor, 1990: 104-115)

³⁷ Although rather nuanced in Western Europe through social democracy.

Despite the fact that the revolution against Díaz in the early twentieth century and the arrangements whereby the armed struggles amongst the revolutionaries themselves were terminated, —i.e. the means of building consensus in Mexico— had involved an affinity with the East, the Mexican state, as mentioned in chapter two, was bound to be constructed as (developing) Western due to its geopolitical position.

However, what was fundamental for the regime's success in producing the meaning of the Mexican identity during this period was precisely its refusal to become in relation to one of these identities only, or in other words, its undecidability, that is, its simultaneous maintenance of both sets of frontiers. As Derrida has shown undecidability is not simply concerned with 'indeterminacy,' but it rather designates "a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities [which are themselves] highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations." (Derrida, 1988: 148)

Undecidable identities are therefore very resilient. Thus by drawing on forms of interpellation that constructed subjects-positions in both prevalent discourses, the regime was able to cope with pressures to disarticulate signifiers from their hegemonic narrative, since in strictly defined situations, different sets of meanings for democracy, prosperity and freedom were deployed to signify the national identity. This undecidability took place both in the international context and in the domestic realm.

The International Context

On the one hand, because many revolutionary upheavals after 1945 described themselves as 'national liberation' movements, because many were linked to Marxism, and because of the force of the universal 'nation' as opposed to any particular, a focus in the nation and nationalism or any related term acquired for a while socialistic connotations. But on the other, the link between democracy and nationalism has been explored and described as 'ineradicable,' since it replaces the link between the Prince and God that allowed the former to embody power. (Lefort, quoted by Torfing, 1999: 192-193)

“The Democratic Revolution involves ‘the dissolution of the markers of certainty’ and undermines the possibility of embodying symbolic power in a particular body. As a result, the locus of power becomes an empty place, [it] cannot be occupied...No government can appropriate power, as its exercise is subject to procedures of periodical redistribution and controlled contest...Nationalism represents the repressed Other of democratic universalisation, which is necessitated by liberal democracy, but which, nevertheless, threatens the very logic of the latter and prevents its ultimate closure.” (Torfing, 1999: 192-193)

In other words, a certain amount of nationalism is required for democracy to work, as democracy purports to be the government of ‘the people.’ But which people? How is the legitimate unit of ‘the people’ constructed? Of course through nationalism, which is precisely “a theory of political legitimacy...which holds that the political and the national unit be congruent.” (Gellner, 1983: 1)

In the period spanning from the revolution and until 1945 when the ‘national’ project was retaken by the Mexican political elite, Russia underwent its Soviet Revolution and appeared to emerge as victorious of the Second World War as the United States did. As has been noted by E. H. Carr, Woodrow Wilson included the Soviet Union in the “democratic world” when he proclaimed democracy as an aim of the allies in the First World War. (Carr, 1945: 1) Later, in his speech on 3 July 1941, Stalin declared the Soviet Union had “merged with the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for independence and democratic liberty.” (Carr, 1945: 2) Therefore, the close links developed between the Mexican elite and the (splitting) Soviet elite at the time could not be then framed in terms of the East/West antagonism that would ensue the end of the Second World War: such subject positions had not yet been shaped by the discourse.

From the end of the Second World War, however, it would be clear that while the United States constructed democracy in antagonism to autocracy or dictatorship, the USSR constructed the meaning for it by relating democracy, in opposition, to aristocracy or oligarchy. In other words, probably drawing on the Aristotelean definition of democracy as “the government where the supreme power of the polity is vested in those who possess no considerable property,” democracy was in the Soviet Union to be that kind of government where ‘the people’ ruled, rendered in this case as ‘the proletariat,’ and not the Tsarist dynasty

or 'the nobility.' (Carr, 1945: 7 quoting Aristotle) By then it can be argued that the discourse of the East and the West divide addressed Mexico in such a way as to place it within the (dominant) Western set of oppositions, not only as a result of having its origin as a nation in Europe, but also as a result of its geo-political position.

This was, of course, never completely achieved. The logic of equivalence that alluded to a pan-American sentiment which would link Mexico and indeed Latin America with the United States and Canada, whom in turn represented the West and antagonised with the East, or the same logic when used to point at the common interests of American and various Latin American, and certainly Mexican elites with the same Western result were also faced with the logic of differentiation involved in the Third World status of Mexico and Latin America in general. Thus, the Mexican identity can only be understood as undecidable, changing its meaning depending on the context in which it was deployed.

In this way, the period from 1946 to 1964 was one of growing American influence and intervention in the hemisphere, when the new political field was being defined in terms of very deep, even polarised antagonisms. The United States had the ability and the willingness to intervene, fostered by their victory in the World Wars. Latin America was closely integrated into the Western security system. The US had the monopoly of arms and military training as well as economic dominance, and there was no external challenger in the region. (Hurrell, 1999: 156) Thus the Mexican identity as Western was thoroughly affirmed. Mexican administrations of this period rejected previous ones, specially the Cárdenas one, as radical and detached themselves from it. Indeed the presidencies of Miguel Alemán (1946 – 1952), Ruíz Cortinez (1952 – 1958) and López Mateos (1958 – 1964) strongly favoured the business sector, re-approached the Church and in many ways un-did some of the most controversial policies of the Cárdenas administration, such as 'socialist education' and the land reform, which they both reduced in scope and progressively slowed down.

On the other hand, the period from 1965 to 1982, when the hegemony of the West was challenged and it was less able to articulate floating signifiers gave way to a shift in the positions occupied by the more developed Latin American

countries. American hegemonic decline became obvious in Vietnam, and Western Europe replaced the US as main arms supplier in the region. The Alliance for Progress failed and produced disenchantment. In Mexico, this meant an opportunity to construct its national identity resorting to antagonism against the West, as belonging to the 'Third World,' re-drawing the boundaries of its 'us' as to include the very same ones it had wished to be differentiated from right after independence: the rest of Latin America.

The 1970s, under president Luis Echeverría (1970 – 1976), were a particularly active period: Mexico publicly opposed all the US Cold War policies, although in the détente stage at that moment, by for instance giving its unreserved support to the Chilean government of Salvador Allende, supplying it with oil and credits, and opening Mexico to Chilean refugees under the Pinochet dictatorship, with whom relations were immediately broken. In the United Nations, Mexico and Peru had a key role with the drawing and approval of the Charter of Rights and Duties for States, demands for a New Economic International Order and a new Law of the Sea as well as with the Non-aligned Movement and the formation of the Group of 77. Mexico voted Zionism to be a form of racial discrimination. The Third World identity was so embraced during the Echeverría period that an institution, the Centre for Studies of the Third World, was formally created in 1976. The late 1970s under José López Portillo (1977 – 1982) also pursued this identity, for instance fostering close links with Cuba and supporting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. (Philip, 1991: 119-120)

From the 1980s onwards, the discourse of the revolution started to lose hegemony over the political field in Mexico, just as the broader international discourse into which it was inserted started to lose hegemony too, specially after 1986, when Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika eroded the antagonistic status of the Eastern identity. (Pellicer, 1994: 222) Mexico downplayed protest against US intervention in Panama and refrained from forming a debtors cartel. (Russell, 1994: 313)

By 1989, the whole East/West divide discourse collapsed, and so did the Mexican political system.³⁸ Although the discourse of the revolution had effectively stopped being hegemonic by the end of the 1980s, institutional inertia more or less carried the PRI forward until the end of the century, when the new, profound dislocation that had hit the international discourse hit Mexico. The ‘governments of the revolution,’ which had survived the death of that revolution for sixty years, were finally formally buried in June 2000. It is my contention that with them, the Mexican identity that had been so relevant for their construction and functioning also changed, and the discourse involved in this change, that is, the challenges to the discourse of the revolution, are thus analysed in chapters three and four.

The Domestic Realm

Undecidability was also constantly evident in the domestic realm. Democracy could be western or eastern: inasmuch as re-election was banned and elections were carried out every six years, there could be no more military or civilian dictators. Moreover, competitive politics did take place, albeit within the Party and not amongst Parties. (Hamnett, 1999: 265) And inasmuch as it was the PRI that remained in power, it would be ‘the government of the people.’

As for prosperity, the years of the ‘Mexican miracle’ combined with the high revenue during the oil boom and the strong support to private enterprise specially during the Miguel Alemán and Ruíz Cortínez administrations, there certainly was diversity, plenty to be bought, if by the privileged few only, but stress was always laid on the availability of goods. (Russell, 1994: 311) This western Mexican identity was —and is— invoked by statistics from macro-economics such as the GDP, amount of direct and indirect (now foreign)

³⁸ In a dramatic breakdown of the institutional order, PRI Candidate to the Presidency Luis Donaldo Colossio was assassinated on 23 May 1994 and Party Secretary General and former governor of the state of Guerrero José Francisco Ruíz Massieu on 28 September of the same year. His brother and General Attorney Mario Ruíz Massieu apparently killed himself on 15 September 1999. Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo was murdered in 1993. Also, a number of key PRI politicians began to leave the Party, many to join the PAN.

investment, literacy percentage and life expectancy, etc.³⁹ On the other hand, the Third World identity, poor-thus-potentially-communist and a threat, mostly alluded to during the Echeverría and Lopez Portillo times, constructed a mirror image of Alemán's Mexico: a heavily indebted, underdeveloped country. In this case it was microeconomics that were invoked: per capita income, inequality coefficient, rate of under/unemployment.⁴⁰ The country had prospered in the sense of covering for the bare necessities, if judged by the welfare state that provided social security, free education and heavily subsidised services. Despite the fact that regardless the degree of 'freedom' economic success or failure can be located in time, these identities were not restricted to specific dates, but adopted alternatively throughout as determined by the discourse.⁴¹

By 1989 however, pressures to decide the Mexican identity as Western could no longer be contained, and the country underwent a series of sweeping reforms which dramatically altered the political and economic landscapes. The reforms involved, in the financial sector, the liberalisation of credits and interest rates, the creation of instruments of large scale savings —notably additional pension funds AFORES—, the privatisation of the banking system and the introduction of foreign competition; in the fiscal sector, taxes were lowered, exceptions reduced and mechanisms for collection strengthened; in the trade sector, non tariff barriers were eliminated; All industries that belonged to the government except for some natural resources —Pemex among them— were privatised: telephones, mining, steel, agribusiness, aviation and food; the number of state-owned companies went from 1,044 in 1985 to 207 in 2003. (Méndez,

³⁹ The latest estimations of these by the World Bank are as follows: GDP: USD\$ 637.2 billion in 2002; life expectancy 73 years; literacy of 94 per cent for adult males and 90 per cent for females; Overall, the World Bank classifies Mexico as 'upper middle income' and 'less indebted.' (*The World Bank Annual Report*, 2002) More recently, membership of the OECD and NAFTA is also taken into account.

⁴⁰ These were as follows: per capita income: USD\$ 5,910; Gini coefficient: 53.1 (Report for Congress, 2002); unemployment: 2.4 (INEGI, 2002: 135); rates for underemployment are not available.

⁴¹ Indeed, this undecidability often led to puzzled observers either pointing out the contradictions, or else attempting to provide coherence by constructing explanations that accounted for the contradictions: politically "a Party that could embrace the leftist policies of Cárdenas and the business-oriented policies of Alemán was ideologically bankrupt," while the type of economy sponsored by the PRI was variously described as "statist," "socialist" and "free enterprise." (Meyer, 1999: 623, 636) In Mexico it often went as "state capitalism."

2004) foreign investment was encouraged in areas previously classified as 'collective,' such as the building of roads, bridges and highways and communications; redistribution of land was officially stopped, and the Church was restored its former privileges. In education, new textbooks were introduced, especially of history, for all primary schools, whether state owned or private. Their versions of key passages of Mexican history upon which the legitimacy of the PRI largely depended, specially the revolution, were radically challenged. (González, 1998: 37-65; Hamnett, 1999: 285-287)

Most historical accounts of the process whereby it became necessary to undertake such profound reforms provide explanations for the changes that took place during the 1990s on the basis of what they see as the terminal crisis of an inward-looking model of economic growth, where the heavy participation of the state attempted to develop the country, meaning to achieve industrialisation, under closely controlled, protected conditions, fully compatible with the aspirations, if not to autarky, at least to economic independence inherent in nationalism, in fact at times described as economic nationalism.⁴² (Smith, 1991: 11) In these accounts, the younger cadres of the political class who reached the top positions during this time are credited with having realised this model was no longer viable, and with having undertaken the set of reforms to liberalise the economy according to a discourse that no longer stressed the need to be economically independent, but to become 'plugged,' into the global economy. (Weintraub, 1990: 17; O'Toole, 2002)

What I want to suggest here, however, is that this process can be better comprehended if these changes are conceptualised as the response to the inability to hold the boundaries that had so far sustained the identity. For it seemed that the situation would no longer arise when the Eastern-Third World identity would make sense. What had been 'the East' was westernising at a prodigious speed, a process which symbolically culminated with the membership to NATO of Russia.

⁴² Cordera and Tello, described this model as 'the nationalist approach' and contrast it with 'the neoliberal approach': "The nationalist approach would make the state the guiding force in development, directly and through its management; foster the production of capital goods in Mexico; strive for food self-sufficiency; deal with inflation by means other than wage containment; and expand large, state-owned projects in energy, petrochemicals, steel and fertilisers." (Cordera and Tello, 1983: 21; also Ojeda, 1983: 315-330)

Therefore, the collapse of the Soviet Union had a devastating effect for the regime in two ways: it considerably weakened the western subject-positions, in that the East/West dichotomy no longer worked as a difference-maker, and it rendered obsolete the other half, as it were, of the signifiers on which the Mexican identity depended.

The Discourse on Film

At this point, the last section of the chapter, it will be useful to sum up what the main aim has been so far: in this chapter I have sought to establish what the discourse that constituted the national identity as 'Mexican' consisted in; how it arose, on the one hand, in opposition to the Díaz dictatorship, and on the other, as part of the discourse on world politics that since the end of the Second World War divided the world into East and West.

Having established the role of both the revolution and the Cold War in the articulation of the Mexican identity, we will now turn our attention to the way it was represented on film. As discussed in the introduction, ever since its invention cinema has had a key role in the making and development of national identities:

"In film we can see how the historicist vision of the nation, and its ethnic fund of myths, memories, symbols and traditions, is unfolded through an increasingly naturalistic mode of expression, and is made to carry an ever-wider range of meanings and emotions...to a greatly enlarged national membership." (Smith, 2000: 45)

There are many instances of nationalism being enacted through films, ranging from Hollywood's epics such as Griffith's controversial *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to Eisenstein's various films on the Soviet Union and of course the fascist films of the 1930s. In all these films, the nation is brought to life as an entity with a past and a sense of direction and purpose.⁴³ But even when films are not openly dealing with questions of history and purported tradition, they always provide spaces where different versions of 'who we are' will be put forward, defended and contested, where earlier versions of the identity will be appropriated by emerging elites, and where alternative, sometimes contradictory or conflicting meanings will also be expressed. Whether directly or indirectly, films aim to "propose and

⁴³ Indeed, after watching *Birth of a Nation* Woodrow Wilson reportedly said "it was like writing history with lighting." (Scott, 2000: 139)

impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present.” (Foucault, 1989: 130)

In the case of Mexico, as is well documented in the literature, the importance of film has been paramount. (Durán et al., 1996; Hershfield and Maciel, 1999; García and Maciel, 2001)⁴⁴ Cinema was first brought to the country shortly after its invention in 1896 and by 1900 there were already twenty-two movie houses in Mexico City and a number of ‘carpas’ (tents) which travelled into the countryside, showing a mixture of imported and indigenous filmed scenes. With prices soon down from one peso to about five to two cents it became hugely popular. (García, 1999: 6) Its main aims were regarded as providing entertainment, education and opportunities for the moral improvement of the population. (Campos et al., 2001: 44) Throughout the revolution and the early 1920s film production began to develop into an incipient industry. Many documentaries of the key battles and decisive episodes of the struggle itself were filmed on the spot. In fact “each faction [of the revolutionary army] and almost every general had a more or less permanent cinematographer.” (García, 1999: 9)

Shortly after Cárdenas first engaged in the development of the revolutionary nationalism project, the film industry was the third largest in the country and one of the largest in the world: when the total population was around 25 million, there were 72 producing companies employing 32,000 workers and 4 major studios which imported their products throughout the Spanish-speaking world and the US southwest. There were 1,500 theatres throughout the country, 200 of them in Mexico City, dedicating 40 per cent of screen time to the exhibition of Mexican films. (Fein, 1999: 128) “Even in the smallest, most remote villages, films were shown and enjoyed by all.” (Hershfield and Maciel, 1999: 33) Native stars such as Dolores del Río and María Félix, Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante proved effective marketing devices that provided stereotypes and sites for identification. And if Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco contributed to the ethnic formation of the nation with their depictions of

⁴⁴ It is also worthwhile to mention the work of Carl J. Mora, who in the early 1980s undertook a thorough study of Mexican cinema with the explicit aim of seeking to further the understanding of Mexican society in the US, as “the two countries share a long border and a troubled history” that was partly the outcome, he thought, of representations of Mexicans circulated by Hollywood. (Mora, 1982: xiii)

the glorious indigenous past and the objectification of Indians in ways discussed earlier, directors Fernando de Fuentes, Emilio Fernández—an ‘Indian’ himself—, Ismael Rodríguez and Alejandro Galindo filmed their rather equivalent contributions on celluloid, despite the fact that there never was an official policy for cinema of the kind that promoted painting. (Campos et al., 2001: 50)

Here we will deal with three issues that bore on the creation of the Mexican identity that prevailed for the best part of the twentieth century. These are the role of the revolution in delimiting the political field by opposition to the Díaz regime, interpellating people as national subjects, so that a whole discourse could be woven around the revolution and become hegemonic; the forging of ‘Mexicanity’ through the specific, consensus-making representations of ‘Mexico’ and ‘Mexicans’ and crucially of ‘Mexicans’ in relation to ‘Americans’ put forward by the national cinema; and finally, evidence will be provided of the undecidability of the identity in the discourse on world politics, where ‘Mexicans’ were represented by Hollywood as belonging to the eastern or the western parts of the divide depending on the discursive context.

Negotiating The National Identity on Film 1910-1989

The Revolution as Discursive Horizon

In 1979 a “basic filmography of the revolution” listed sixty films either narrating the revolution itself, or, more importantly, where the revolution is the setting in which the story takes place, thus turning it into the natural context in which ‘our’ lives or the lives of ‘our ancestors’ took place.⁴⁵ (Mraz, 2001: 81) Most, but not all of these films present the past as a long wait when injustice was suffered at the hands of Díaz —and before Díaz, injustice had been suffered at the hands of ‘the Spaniards,’ ‘the Europeans’ and ‘the Americans,’ thereby equating Díaz with ‘them’— to be redressed in the present, the moment of realising the Self, through the revolution.

Apart from the “Mexicanista” school which in the 1920s accounted for half the total production, films dealing with the revolution were regarded as the

⁴⁵ This number does not take into account the documentaries.

first truly Mexican ones since they were, in the words of an enthusiastic critic who later became a —melodrama— director as well, “flesh of our flesh and breath of our sweet and at the same time tragic land” unlike other earlier national production that dealt with the same topics as Hollywood or even French and Italian films, also popular at that time. (Mraz, 2001: 86 quoting Juan Bustillo Oro) They were also deemed particularly Mexican in that they did not necessarily have a happy ending. In fact, some films on the revolution regarded as among the best were highly critical of it, but this “telling of stories that faithfully reflect our harsh and tragic way of being” in contrast to the “light” and “banal” content of Hollywood was also highlighted as a “Mexican” aesthetics. (Mraz, 2001: 88 quoting director de Fuentes) Technically too the oblique perspective favoured by another key director of the national cinema, Emilio Fernández, as opposed to the lineal perspective of most Hollywood films, is said to have “challenged the artistic traditions of the West and the dominant ideology those traditions implied.” (Ramírez-Berg, 2001: 124) Thus the national identity in cinema is sought by opposition to Hollywood as regards the choice of topics and narrative style, and in opposition to both Hollywood and more generally ‘the West’ as to the technical style of early directors. Films on the revolution or with a revolutionary setting ranked high on the three criteria.

Among the early ones, the trilogy filmed by Fernando de Fuentes, comprising *El Prisionero 13* (1933), *El Compadre Mendoza* (1935) and the first Mexican blockbuster *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1935) has been widely regarded as the most influential: “the day we have a cinema on the same moral standing as...[de Fuentes’ films] our national identity will have been *defined* and we will be *saved*.”⁴⁶ (Bustillo Oro in Mraz, 2001: 86, my emphasis) The three films deal with the losing factions of the revolution, i.e. Huertismo, Zapatismo and Villismo respectively, and in the three of them the portrayal that emerges of the struggle is a particularly pessimistic one, where the loss and pain that the revolution entailed by far eclipse the transformations it sought to bring about. *El Prisionero* paints a particularly negative picture of the army, where the

⁴⁶ Indeed the canon credits *El Compadre Mendoza* as, arguably, the best Mexican film ever made, and it was chosen to be shown on the national film library opening night on 17 January 1974, at the theatre named after de Fuentes.

protagonist, a colonel, is a drunkard who beats his wife and whose corruption leads to the tragic death of his son. *El Compadre* is based on the treason and murder of Zapata, the traitor here being Mendoza, who stands metonymically for the whole of the revolution, and the one betrayed a Zapatista called Nieto, a surname meaning 'grandchild,' who stands for the peasants as a whole. And *¡Vámonos!* poses some sharp criticism of the lack of ideology of Villa and some of his followers who end up killing each other in the same way the revolution was 'killed' by the revolutionaries. (Ibid: 98)

So how can films on the revolution in this rather dark vein have contributed to the making of the Barthian myth? First of all, as mentioned above, films critical of the revolution are a minority of the total production, and they were credited with the creation of a truly national aesthetics. Second, this trilogy in particular contributed to the de-legitimation of two of the losing factions, namely Huertismo and Villismo. In fact, *¡Vámonos!* was filmed on location and in a studio in which the Cárdenas government was a major stake-holder, Latin American Cinematography CLASA. 'The revolution' was thus becoming a particular version of it, namely the one sponsored by the government: cinema helped to 'domesticate' the actual events, by interpreting them, making them fit into the broader narrative of the national identity. Also the Zapata faction, although a loser in the struggle, definitely comes across as heroic, so vital for nationalism, and although the 1917 Constitution mostly reflects the interests of the —winning— middle class, Cárdenas did address some of the peasants' and the working class demands during his administration in order to expand his basis of support. (Levy and Székely, 1989: 30) Moreover, favourable, legitimating comparisons between the censorship that prevailed during the Díaz dictatorship and the openness of the revolutionary governments could be drawn. As put by de Fuentes himself: "We tell *our* people the truth because we think *our* people are now educated and mature enough to deal with the truth." (Mraz, 2001: 88, my emphasis) More important however is the way these films bind signifiers together into a narrative that made them signify 'Mexicanity.' Take for instance *El Compadre*. In the establishing shot we see a furrow, later to realise it has been 'dug' by the rifle of an exhausted Zapatista on the run. In this way a link is

created between the Zapatistas and the land, at the same time that the viewer's position—and sympathy—is placed together with the Zapatistas. (Mraz, Ibid) It is this subtle work of creating subject positions for the viewer that address him or her as Mexican and in endowing land with Zapatista associations that make it a specific, national land that films on the revolution turned nationalist discourse into the practice of an identity.⁴⁷

Class, Ethnic and Gender Diversity Become a Unified 'We'

Kevin Robins and Asu Askoy call “deep nation” the nation as imagined by the elites. “It invents the ordered image of a people and then mobilises this image against [the people's] own disorderly existence.”⁴⁸ (Robins and Askoy, 2000: 208) Between 1930s and 1960s, a progressively modernising deep Mexican nation was put forward by a host of directors on screen. The first stage took place in the 1930s and 1940s. Regional stereotypes were depicted as national types. Films of this period typically take place in the countryside and rural settings where ‘Mexicans’—fishermen, peasants, charros, “innocent *señoritas* with long braided hair and peppery old housekeepers”—inhabit haciendas, ranches and villages. (López, 2000: 427) Most of these films tell the story of the revolution reaching forward into every distant corner of the land, bringing progress and social justice. The highly successful, reactionary genre *comedia ranchera* though, produced a witty critique of the agrarian reforms sponsored by Cárdenas, via plots which revolved around people refusing the ethnic/social identities assigned to them and whose happy ending came about when the charro successfully returned everyone to ‘their place.’ Later, in a variety of melodramas charros were shown to leave their “class affiliations behind for the greater glory of the Mexican nation.” (Ramírez- Berg, 1992: 99) Again the most relevant film of the genre, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936) was filmed by de Fuentes. The film

⁴⁷ Women also figure prominently in de Fuentes' films, and the role their every day, ‘simple’ activities such as cooking, sewing and selling food has in allowing the revolution to happen is fully acknowledged. (Mraz, 2001: 97; Hershfield, 2001: 129) This did not happen in de Fuentes' later films, which tend to glorify Machismo and its alliance with the state's power structures.

⁴⁸ With this regard, hugely prolific and successful director Emilio Fernández is quoted as saying: “there is only one Mexico—the one I made up!” (Ramírez-Berg, 2001: 110)

“unearthed what [international] audiences seemed to have been looking for in the Mexican cinema: the presentation of a ‘Mexican’ vision of Mexico that coincided with their expectations of the nature of national local colour....After *Rancho Grande*, the Mexican cinema enjoyed the prestige of authenticity granted by even the most adulterated folklore...it combined appealing exoticism with a comforting familiarity.” (López, Ibid)

Rancho Grande was awarded the first prize for Mexican cinematography in the Venice festival. It was subtitled and distributed by United Artists throughout the United States and Latin America, since it was deemed “an exemplary Mexican film.” (Fein, 1996: 53) The formula continues to be used by many films addressed to a global audience.

During the 1940s and 1950s the industry continued to expand. The end of the Second World War was for Mexico a time of economic growth and further industrialisation. The city thus became the main territory where ‘Mexicans’ existed. ‘Mexicans’ were now people in the liberal professions, salesmen, students, consumers. ‘Mexico’ became the parks, universities, supermarkets and also the slums of the big city, where cars and motorcycles began to replace bikes. The state created a bank for the funding of films, launched its theatre monopoly and planned the creation of the National Film Library. The preferred genres during this period were comedy and melodrama, that “purveyor of collective conventions [and provider of] a sort of sentimental education for the tribe.” (Hernández, 1999: 102) Although mostly didactic in content, melodrama had nonetheless some subversive potential. Plots revolved around the social problems engendered by modernisation—for instance *Los Olvidados*, (Buñuel: 1950)—the loss of tradition, the growing role of women in the economy and the changing nature of the family. During the administration of Miguel Alemán in particular there was a series of films on prostitutes. Although feminist research has carefully documented the way films constructed a subordinate role for Mexican women during the 1930s, Joanne Hershfield has persuasively argued that representations

during the 1940s and 1950s successfully “threatened the patriarchal ideology that was [by then] so contradictory that it could no longer manage to exert full control,” thus highlighting another opposition between the Díaz regime and the governments ‘of the revolution.’ (Hershfield, 2001: 151)

Crucial to this period were the consensus-making films of Ismael Rodríguez *Nosotros los Pobres* (*We, the Poor*, 1947) and *Ustedes los Ricos* (*You, the Rich*, 1948), featuring pop-idol Pedro Infante, which romanticise and glorify poverty in a thoroughly Catholic background, portraying a nation in which loyalties of members cut across social class. (Ayala: 2001, 289) The same director also resolved race conflicts through intermarriage, as in *Angelitos Negros*, (*Black Angels*, 1948) where the starring Ruíz family is deployed to stand for the ‘ethnically resolved’ Mexican family. (Hershfield, 1999: 96) The whole series of heroic Indians produced from the late 1930s, where ‘Indians’ were usually played by mestizos or white actors —such as *Maria Candelaria* (1943) featuring Dolores del Río and *Maclovio* (1948), featuring Maria Felix— was also important in forging this new unity based on a glorious ethnic past, implicitly stressing, however, that the only possible ethnic present was mestizo.

‘We’ versus ‘They’

When the Centre for the Research on North America, in the context of the North American integration further discussed on chapter three, commissioned from experts a series of articles for the book entitled *México, Estados Unidos: Encuentros y Desencuentros en el Cine* (*Mexico and the United States on Film: Growing Apart and Coming Together*) the idea was to compile a balanced account in which every instance of ‘growing apart’ could be countered by a case of ‘coming together.’ It was however utterly difficult to find any ‘coming together’ on Mexican film. (Durán et al., 1996) While Americans had very rarely had starring roles or been main characters, in the few films where there are American characters they had consistently been the ‘they’ against whom ‘we’ must coalesce and unify. *Campeón sin Corona* (Galindo: 1945), tells the story of a boxing champion, suddenly unable to beat his American rival not because of physical inferiority but because he realises the rival *speaks English*. Only when with the

help of a friend he is able to learn the basics of the language can he retrieve his pugilistic skills and win. In *La Rosa Blanca* (Galvadón: 1961), also produced by CLASA, American businessmen try to force a Mexican ranch owner to sell them his property, where there is oil. When he refuses, because his ties to the land are of a deep, metaphysical nature of love for the homeland and the ancestors, they deceive him and murder him. In *Espaldas Mojadas* (*Wetbacks*, Galindo: 1954) the gringo, a Mr. Sterling, is a heartless abuser of illegal immigrants. In general, if Americans partly built their national identity by ‘othering’ Mexicans as uncivilised and barbaric, Mexicans built their identity by ‘othering’ Americans as a society with weak moral values and lack of communitarian solidarity. Mexicans show respect for traditions, loyalty in friendship and take special care of and pride in the family. In short, Americans are represented on film as “rich with regards to money, but poor with regards to moral, human quality.” (Tuñón, 1996: 110)

Even worse than Americans themselves are precisely Mexicans who go to the United States and their descendents, at the time derided as *Pochos*. *Pochos* have been a concern of the national cinema from the very beginning. While Miguel Contreras’ silent *El Hombre sin Patria* (*The Man without a Fatherland*, 1922) was the first one, the word itself is said to come from a 1945 film in which Germán Valdés Tin Tan, a local comedian, defined himself as a *pochó*, “a Mexican from Los Angeles.” (Maciel, 1996: 181) *Pochos* continued to be depicted on film now and then until the 1980s. Only American women of Mexican ancestry are occasionally ‘forgiven,’ as in *Los Tres García* (Rodríguez, 1946). Given that the change in status and social standing of *Pochos*, now more commonly referred to as ‘Chicanos,’ ‘Mexican-American’ or even what would have before been unthinkable, ‘*Mexicans north of Rio Bravo*’ is one of the crucial features of the challenge to the identity I maintain has taken place, this topic is further discussed in the following chapter.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The relative political power of a state seems often to have been linked to gendered representations on film. Research on European films for instance has found that in the series of co-productions of the 1950s and 1960s, films with German actors were only successful outside of Germany if they were cast in the villainous role, while the male hero was always American, supported by a French, Italian or German leading lady. (Bergfelder, 2000: 147)

The film industry began to decline in the 1960s, following competition from television and from Hollywood.⁵⁰ It improved slightly in the 1970s, when Echeverría attempted to use the medium for the promotion of his nationalistic policies and to co-opt those in the intelligentsia who had been opposing the government. But with the financial support came censorship, mostly regarding religion, the military and the Party, barely disguised as ‘artistic supervision.’ After Echeverría, rampant corruption plagued the institutions comprising the film industry until its near-disappearance in the 1990s. This period is further dealt with in chapter five below.

Mexico Between the East and the West

Together with the discourse of the revolution, I have argued here that it was also the discourse on world politics that created a position for the Mexican state that had a bearing on the transformation of the national identity as of the Cold War, to be challenged only recently. This was evident all along on Hollywood films, the function of which it was, from a discursive point of view, to articulate ‘Mexico’ either in chains of equivalence with ‘the United States’ by drawing borders that included both on the same side, or on the contrary, to articulate ‘Mexico’ as an antagonist by instituting a boundary between it and ‘the West,’ in turn conveyed through at least three key interweaving signifiers, namely ‘democracy,’ ‘prosperity’ and ‘freedom.’ Here we will see how this was done.

Historically, the importance of Hollywood as a ‘manufacturer’ of cinematic representations has been undeniable.⁵¹ Hollywood has enjoyed a privileged position world wide due to a number of factors: from the very beginning, the United States took an industrial approach to film-making, mostly concerned with addressing the masses for profit; there were early merges and

⁵⁰ However, films continue to feature prominently as part of television programming world-wide, in fact recently becoming the main ‘genre’ for prime-time TV schedules, so the relevance of the medium as regards the creation and dissemination of discourses remains high. In Mexico films make up about 33 per cent of AAA programming, and films are now also consumed in the home-video and DVD market. (Sánchez-Ruíz, 1997; Chapman, 2003: 45)

⁵¹ Hollywood has certainly been politically influential nationally and internationally in other ways as well —such as in Chile in 1971 and in South Korea since 1985— but only its cinematic representations are discussed here.

takeovers of producers, distributors and exhibitors, leading to a vertically-integrated industry that for several years operated effectively as a mature oligopoly; the large domestic market allowed to promote films that were highly subsidized when exported; and finally, the two world wars had a devastating effect on European film industries, Hollywood's closest competitors. (Ellis, 1982: 198) At present, amidst debates on what it means to be 'Hollywood' under globalisation,⁵² it is the third largest industry in the United States, generating a yearly income of about USD\$ 9.5 billion domestically and USD\$ 9.6 billion internationally plus income from ancillary products, amounting to about USD\$37.3 billion in total. (Estrada, 2000) Entertainment is the second largest American export category after military hardware. Although it is not the biggest film industry in terms of production, it is "the one national cinema in the world that has a truly global reach" and it is by far the most important in terms of market share, especially as of 1991 with the introduction of multiplexes, further discussed on chapter five. (Chapman, 2003: 152, 9) American films are shown in more than 150 countries, and although their market share varies widely, going from less than 30 per cent in some Asian countries, it reaches almost 100 per cent in many others. The average for the European Union, where some of the major film-producing nations in the world are located, was 75 per cent in 2001.⁵³ (Eurostat, 2001) In Mexico it has increased sharply over the years, going from 34.8 in 1980 to almost 90 per cent in 2002. (Sánchez-Ruíz, 1997; Rosenthal, 2003: 326)⁵⁴

Crucial to this economic success was the development of cinematic genre, a set of rules and expectations governing filmmaking, shared by both makers and

⁵² By 1990, six of "the big eight" Hollywood studios were "in foreign hands." (Monaco, 2000: 255) Columbia Tristar is owned by Sony and Toshiba almost owns Warners. MGM and UA are owned by Australians and Fox by the Murdoch network. Universal belongs to Canadian owners of Seagram, the Bronfman family. However, these studios continue to make films in the very same Hollywood tradition, and most of the production, distribution and exhibition is arranged from headquarters based in the Los Angeles area.

⁵³ It is estimated that 4,000 films are made per year worldwide. (Chapman, 2003: 9) Of this, the United States has for the past 14 years produced between 400 and 510 per year. (Wasko, 2003: 27) The only exception to these figures is India, the biggest film industry in the world. Bollywood produces well over 900 feature films a year and Hollywood has here a market share of less than 14 per cent. (UNESCO, 2001)

⁵⁴ Mexico is also among the 15 countries which account for Hollywood's 75 per cent of all sales, in place 11. In 1995, it imported films for USD\$125 million. (Staiger, 2002: 243; Estrada, 2003)

their audiences, based on a repetition that gives viewers the impression of control and thus generates pleasure. (Schatz, quoted in Abrams et al., 2001: 181) Genres are therefore effective marketing devices, both for standardisation and product differentiation, and were soon adopted by other film industries. Being “patterned narrative responses to a cluster of interconnected social and ideological dilemmas” they help to define what is culturally permissible. (Ramírez-Berg, 1996: 116-117) And Hollywood genres have from the beginning provided a series of alternative responses to, among others, the ‘dilemma’ of national identity, with a ‘we’ emerging from contrasts and juxtapositions with ‘they.’ Mexicans share with Native Americans the earliest representations of ‘Others’ in that all-American genre, the Western, where they typically figured as greasers and evil bandits.⁵⁵ Born at a time when “Mexicans’ were being massively deported, the Western has been described as crucial to the formation of the American national identity. (Noriega, 1992: xv) A key director of the genre, John Ford, believed Westerns incarnated “transcendent values in the historic vocation of America as a nation, [namely] to bring civilisation to a savage land, the garden to wilderness.”⁵⁶ (Wollen, 1998: 54) Westerns rose to prominence during the 1950s and 1960s, accounting in some years for almost half the total production, but they began to decline in the 1970s when they were replaced by science fiction films. Nevertheless, Mexicans continued to feature occasionally in other genres of determinate, contested space, where the ritual function is the celebration of the values of social order, such as gangster films and detective stories. (Abrams et al., 2001: 181)

⁵⁵ This generated a diplomatic dispute that led to a brief boycott, backed in Latin America by Brazil, Argentina and Chile. France and Spain also backed it with some films. The dispute came to an end in 1929, when a treaty was signed whereby the studios committed themselves to stopping the production of such films, and to taking out of circulation the ones already in the market. The Mexican government for its part committed itself to doing all it could to stop piracy. (De los Reyes, 1996: 31) However these depictions did not disappear, but were attributed to other Latin Americans or occurred in unidentified places in Latin America. (López, 2000: 423)

⁵⁶ As Grantham has remarked however, and along the lines I argue in this thesis, cowboys were only able to mean ‘civilisation’ in opposition to ‘the natives.’ If civilisation is, as in the world fairs “symbolised in the form of a woman in classical garb,” Buffalo Bill offered here “a strikingly different image: a virile, violent male,” far less ‘civilised.’ (Grantham, 2000: 12)

However, although in general American films with Mexican characters presented until the 1990s mostly extremely negative, even stereotypical portrayals, this was not always the case since, as was argued above, who the Other is depends on where the boundaries in a discourse are located, and the Mexican identity remained throughout this period an undecidable one. Thus, between the First and the Second World Wars, when for America 'democracy' was the opposite of 'aristocracy' and the East/West divide did not yet exist, Hollywood films dealing with the Mexican revolution often depicted it as a war between the North and the South, that is, in the very same terms as the American Civil War. But during the Cold War, and coinciding with the times when Mexican presidents deployed an 'Eastern' identity as indicated earlier, films dealing with the revolution presented it as a bloody and very violent "fight among tribal savages who committed a series of atrocities and who violated American sovereignty," since they came and went into the US as they pleased. (De Los Reyes, 1996: 23; De Orellana, 1996: 17)

As the political position of the United States grew stronger and thus their ability to shape the discourse of world politics increased, the national identity was defined in opposition to fascism. In *Juarez* (Dieterle: 1939), produced by Warner, the character of Juárez was inspired on Lincoln, with whom comparisons were constantly drawn and similarities pointed out.⁵⁷ In order to condemn Italy and Germany for their 'imperial adventures,' the film thoroughly condemns Europe's imperial past, contrasting it with the democratic and freedom-loving Americas, to conclude that Maximilian of Hapsburg must die in order to expiate Europe's collective guilt. (Vanderwood, 1996: 67) The film was a success in the US and Latin America, both at the box office and with critics. In Mexico, it was shown at the Fine Arts Palace, where American ambassador Josephus Daniels praised it as "perfect" and "historically accurate." (Vanderwood, 1996: 71) Moreover, at the time when the future Head of the Motion Picture Producers' Association, Eric

⁵⁷ At the time other films were constructing similarities between Lincoln and Roosevelt, so by analogy Juárez was in this way also likened to Roosevelt. See for instance *Young Mr. Lincoln* (Ford: 1939), *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (Cromwell: 1940) and documentary *Lincoln in the White House* (McGann: 1939). Moreover, actor Paul Muni, who played the role of Juárez, had in *Bordertown* (Mayo: 1935) played the part of a Mexican-American lawyer who is an admirer of Lincoln. (Vanderwood, 1996: 69)

Johnston, was calling for the utilisation of “all the...tools of mass communications to tell the democracy story,” he insisted on the need to protect America from “European ideologies.”⁵⁸ (May, 2000: 176) Other films that constructed the American identity as ‘free’ and ‘democratic’ out of antagonism with European monarchies and empires rather than what later would become ‘the totalitarian East’ were also made around this time. Here, characters “express their disdain for the Old World where the people are not truly citizens but subjects of the upper classes” and aristocrats are despised as decadent and lazy non-producers.⁵⁹ (May, 2000: 154)

During the Avila Camacho and Alemán administrations, as explained above, Mexico was placed in chains of equivalence with what now was ‘the West’ mostly by means of documentaries and short films that preceded the exhibition of the feature film. These presented an image of Mexico as free, democratic and prosperous, as if it were, in fact, “a developing version of the United States.” (Fein, 1996: 55) Recently built highways leading to Mexico suggested it was “the geographic continuation of the US.” (Ibid, 50) The earlier Cárdenas administration, which before had been decried as “communist, totalitarian, backward, inward-looking and inhibiting progress” was instead portrayed as an alternative version of the New Deal, and although not the president anymore, Cárdenas himself went from being a “dangerous radical” to a “progressive liberal.” Examples of this are *Mexico builds a Democracy* and *Mexican Moods* — directed by Gordon, 1942 and Ermini, 1942 respectively— but there was a whole series financed by the Motion Pictures Division of the Office for the Coordination of Inter-American Affairs OCIAA, headed by Nelson Rockefeller. (Fein, 1996: 43) White Mexicans and westernised mestizos from the middle and upper class appeared in a series of advertisements for the promotion of tourism. In one such

⁵⁸ Although there have been other instances of ‘generous’ portrayals of Mexicans in Hollywood films, for instance the passage from “greasers and bandits” to “Latin lovers” that took place in the late 1940s, depictions of food as exotic delicacies and of pre-hispanic civilisations as bearers of some transcendental, profound wisdom, idealisation remains a strategy of differentiation, with the same discursive function as ‘Indians’ as inferior savages or ‘ethnic food’ as junk or unhealthy. Depictions of the revolution in the terms of the American Civil war and of Juárez as a Lincoln are, on the contrary, strategies of equation.

⁵⁹ Often, however, such scenes were edited when these films were later shown in Europe during the Cold War, especially in the UK, which was a major market that Hollywood was reluctant to alienate. (Vanderwood, 1996: 67)

short film, an American woman chatting with a man at a bar tells him she finds it hard to believe he is Mexican, since “Mexicans are sinister people with hats who engage in revolutions,” and that “anybody would take him for an American” to which he replies that he *is* American, since Mexico has always belonged in North America. (Ibid, 54-58) *Mexico builds a Democracy* pointed out that Mexico had its own film industry and star-system, and the fact that it produced its own mass culture meant to present it as a society of consumers with whom the American people could identify.⁶⁰ The whole exercise presented Mexico as a politically stable, attractive, capitalist country, unambiguously within the West. (Fein, 1996: 58)

Later, fascism gave way to communism as the antagonist for what became in the discourse on world politics ‘the West.’ Now ‘democracy’ would be defined against ‘dictatorship of the proletariat.’ For ‘the West’ a very persuasive identity could be forged out of the Eastern threat, whose very existence could from then on account for the fundamental social lack remaining unfulfilled. During the Cold War, genres such as the war film, the spy film, science fiction and thrillers began to appear, for as put by Peter Wollen, “the epochs of the cinema genres are also the epochs of crisis in America’s consciousness of itself, its national identity and its role in history.” (Wollen, 1998: 119) All of these genres offered the opportunity to, in the same way that had happened on Mexican film of the time, consolidate the American nation with a social unity that cut across gender, ethnicity and class. While depictions of big business as villainous or of the rich as a moral threat were the case in up to 50 per cent the total production of the 1930s and 1940s, during the 1950s, amidst the witch hunts of the House Committee of un-American Activities HUAC, these portrayals decreased to less than 5 per cent. Films focusing on social reform did not disappear, but reform was now “less the agency of citizens operating in the autonomous civic sphere than of experts aligned with established institutions.” (May, 2000: 204) Equally, the incidence of

⁶⁰ This expanding industry was at the time largely the result of the support received from Hollywood, which benefited the Mexican industry over the Argentinian one, then Mexico’s closest competitor in the Spanish-speaking market, since Argentina had been rather sympathetic to Germany and Italy during the war. Credits to purchase equipment, large amounts of then scarce film stock, technical assistance and even heavy investment on studios therefore went to Mexico instead. (Fein, 1996: 51)

‘empowered women,’ which during the 1930s was relatively high, was replaced in the 1950s and 1960s by ‘patriotic domesticity’ and the ‘wife only’ heroine, especially on Walt Disney films, whose contribution to the construction of ‘the West’ was truly vital. As regards to ethnicity, the source of discontent was neither institutionalised racism nor class opposition, but a clash of personalities. Along with the re-discovery of Westerns and the proliferation of war films, an unprecedented number of biblical epics were filmed. *Samson and Delilah* (de Mille: 1949), *The Land of the Pharaohs* (Hawks: 1955), and the *Ten Commandments* (de Mille: 1956) all focused on a sacred people, and identified America with the protection of the eternal and sacred values of western civilisation itself. (Ibid: 205-209) Science fiction films, described as “telling psychoanalytic documents, paranoid fantasies of moving blobs, invading pods, reified ids and metamorphoses” were abundantly produced in this period, not to mention over a hundred spy films. (Monaco, 2000: 307; Shaw, 2001: 4) Conversion narratives, which are especially effective because the main characters—and along with them the viewers— ‘change sides’ as a result of events in the plot, peaked around 1948, when change took place from an alliance with an oppositional group to one with institutions that represent national interest, but remained high during the 1950s and 1960s. As for ‘prosperity,’ it was clearly conveyed by films boasting ever-spiralling production costs, which led from the ‘super-production’ of classical Hollywood to the ‘blockbuster’ of New Hollywood, always working on the propagation of the American dream. “The utopia promised by...Hollywood...is a specifically American utopia of affluence and material well-being.” (Chapman, 2003: 185)

Representations of Mexicans thus decreased in number, and returned to mainstream Hollywood only in the 1970s and 1980s as illegal aliens and drug dealers, when the Eastern identity was deployed by Echeverría, López Portillo and to a lesser extent de la Madrid. Between 1970 and 1988, Mexican characters or characters who are American citizens of Mexican origin appear in a total of 2,644 Hollywood feature films. (García-Riera, 1990: 223) In most of these, unlike the “exotic characters from a by-gone epoch” of the Western, Mexicans are plain and ordinary maids, gardeners and thieves, “alarmingly part of everyday life in North

America...they are not the enemy one can attack frontally as the 'Other' or as someone else, but more of a threat within the Self, a sort of cancer growing at the very heart of society that slowly but inexorably turns the Self into that very feared Other." (Ibid, 125) In the realm of science fiction, a clear example of this was *Quetzalcoatl* (Cohen: 1982), in which threat comes from a horrible monster, a giant feathered serpent living on top of the Chrysler building, where it is breeding its young by killing defenceless Americans. The symbolism could not be any clearer, and although the film was not particularly successful at the box office, it received very enthusiastic critiques.

From the 1980s, just as de la Madrid was opposing American foreign policy in central America, Mexico was portrayed as the site whence the Soviets launched an invasion into the US, in films such as *Red Dawn* (Milius: 1984), *Invasion USA* (Zito: 1985), *Terminal Entry* (Kincade: 1987), *Let's Get Harry* (Rosenberg: 1986) and *Bullet-proof* (Carver: 1988). (Ibid, 79) Moreover, similarities are drawn between Mexico and some Arab nations: Egypt, in the context of the Maya ruins, as regards to its having hosted 'ancient civilisations,' and Palestine, in the film *The Ambassador* (Thompson: 1984), with reference to the loss of land. (Ibid, 88) As put by Cortés:

"...geographically, Hollywood's Mexico consists of the US-Mexican border as a specific region and the rest of Mexico as an undifferentiated mass. Temporally, there is historical Mexico — usually portrayed with escapist equanimity— and contemporary Mexico, treated with ethnocentric alarm...Hollywood...often...uses Mexico as...a backdrop for American activity, a stage on which Americans conduct their own personal morality plays." (Cortés, 1989: 94-95)

The only exceptions to these depictions were the ones put forward by Chicano directors, very much in the minority, and more importantly, regarded in Mexico as American. In the words of prestigious scholar Emilio García Riera, "we must insist that when we refer to Chicano cinema we mean a foreign cinema,

a part of the North American cinema that is in no way an offshoot of Mexican cinema. On the contrary, Chicano cinema is a rival to Mexican cinema, a powerful competitor of which Mexican cinema must beware.” (García-Riera, 1990: 141) This assessment was made despite the fact that the Mexican government provided the funding for some of the Chicano production. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, which put an end to the undecidable, oscillating identity, both these American representations of Mexicans and the status of Chicanos and their cultural production changed significantly, both in Mexico and in the US, a matter that is analysed in the following chapters.

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After the Cold War: the Challenge

In the previous chapter, the argument was advanced that the very strong state and political stability that followed the Mexican revolution, unique in Latin America during this period, can be accounted for, on the one hand, by the success of the political elite in establishing and hegemonising a discourse centred around the nodal point of the revolution whose boundaries were delimited via oppositions to Díaz, a discourse that constructed an intricate weaving of subject-positions that interpellated the people as Mexican while at the same time placing the elite as one and the same with the nation. On the other hand, it can also be accounted for by the position created for the Mexican state by the discourse on world politics, an undecidable position that allowed convincing meanings for the identity to be produced in different contexts. The combination of discourses thus exhibited a remarkable resilience because it supplied a framework of reference through which to construct identity: not only did it give meanings to the people's lives in the several ways discussed above, but more importantly placed them in the way to get to 'their true, authentic selves.' All this was demonstrated through the analysis of a series of representations on film, the cultural industry most closely associated with nationalism during the twentieth century.

From the above it follows that the contingency of these identities became exposed and fissures in the discourse apparent when this set of relations upon which the Mexican national identity and the regime thereof depended were in turn shattered, first, by the dislocation brought about by the fall of the Soviet Union, and second, by the schisms that appeared as a consequence of this in the internal political field. This chapter will now explore what the challenges to the discourses outlined in chapters one and two involved, as well as the opportunities for agency they offered for the elites to take advantage of. These opportunities involved creating a new position in relation to the United States, re-framing it in terms of supplementarity, interpellating the people as Mexican but with a different meaning, within the context of the new discourse on world politics, as yet still unfinished.

Challenges from 'Outside'

The Challenge to the East/West Divide

Producing the West After the Cold War: Development, Industrialisation, Secularism

It would seem quite straightforward that from the 1990s onwards the Mexican identity would simply have to be defined in the terms of the triumphant West. The argument is that because the Cold War ended with the demise of the Soviet Union, the fall of communism put an end to what realism called the bipolar world order, giving way to a 'unipolar' world, under the hegemony of the sole remaining superpower. Even more, with this defeat history itself, conceived as an emancipatory struggle, was said to be over. All other societies would eventually converge in the western ways. (Fukuyama, 1989: 3-18) There was no alternative narrative, so to speak, competing with neoliberalism, which by remaining, had proven the righteousness of its claims.

I contend however that if the Soviet demise is understood as a dislocation to the discourse on world politics, as this thesis argues, it then follows that its consequences impacted on *all* the actors whose identities had been during the Cold War fixed in relation to the framework supplied by the East/West divide, none the less the West itself. For the fundamental premise is that in the process of identity formation, what remains outside is not merely external, but *constitutive* of the inside in the sense that it is required, a *sine qua non* condition to be fulfilled for the inside to be, because the very beings of both as inside/outside depend on the existence of the boundaries that separate them, boundaries which create difference.⁶¹ The implication is not that the West as such also collapsed, but that what 'the West' *meant* could no longer be defined in opposition to the East, and was therefore unfixed, open to mean something else, depending on what would act as boundary-maker, as soon became evident from the fractures that appeared between Europe and the United States.

⁶¹ Erasure of the boundaries would seem to indicate an impossible realisation of absolute, at which point there would of course be no meaning any more.

This is not to deny that 'the West' had and still has other meanings, in other discourses. In some the West is, for instance, the locus of high or late modernity, as mentioned above. In others, the West is "a powerful but declining entity battling to maintain its strength and influence in a world of multiple and conflicting civilisations" whereas in others yet the West "provides a universal model of human progress and development." (O'Hagan on Huntington and Fukuyama respectively, 2002: 1) However whether the West means a post-industrial society, a civilisation or a universal yardstick to assess progress with depends on in opposition to what it stands in the relevant discourse.⁶²

Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union exposed what had once appeared as the mighty enemy reduced to a mere Third World status, economically backward and plagued by corruption, bureaucracy and mafias. But paradoxically, with this the values that the West stood for suddenly seemed less valuable in that they were not to be fought for, but actually inevitable. In a way reminiscent of the Kantian argument that morality can only exist if there is free will, since if our actions are the way they are because they *cannot* be any different they cannot be judged neither good nor bad, capitalism and liberal democracy, when declared the inescapable way, also seemed far less valuable than they had when they had been threatened.

Attempts have for instance been made by political theorists in the United States and Europe to explain both the dramatic decline in turnout that has been taking place in several western established democracies since the end of the Cold War —49 per cent in the US, 59 per cent in the UK and 41 per cent in France in the most recent,⁶³ and in the case of the US, controversial, elections—and the rise of the far right in various European democracies —Austria, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal— in terms of this logic of equivalence that dominated the discourse when the East/West divide collapsed:⁶⁴ (Borger, 2000; Petras, 2000; Mount, 2000: 161) "There are many reasons for the decline in election turnouts over the last decade...but one of them may well be that...if all

⁶² The more hegemonic any of these or other discourses become, the more fixed the meaning of the West will be in that sense.

⁶³ Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Voter Turnout from 1945*.

⁶⁴ Although it is true that voter turnout had already been declining, it remained fairly steady in the period between 1945-1965, when polarisation was at its highest. *Ibid.*

that the parties are offering are alternative management prospectuses, it is...not surprising that public engagement with politics has fallen.” (Jacobs, 2002) And also:

“The problem with the Social-Democrats everywhere in Europe —as with the Democrats in the US— is that they have moved over fifty years so far to the centre, and even the centre-right, that they don't seem to stand for anything that will arouse voters...Jospin's defeat was not the earthquake. The earthquake occurred some time ago, when the left ceased being left, or even recognisably left of centre.” (Wallerstein, 2002)

Equally worrying has been the lack of involvement of the young in established democracies, as well as the dwindling membership of mainstream parties and their continuous reliance in private funding that often compromises their policy decisions. (Bolton, 2000) Recently, scandals relating the bankruptcy of some of these enterprises due to corruption, closely linked to severe falls in the leading stock markets, have greatly damaged the trust that is necessary for the system to work as well as added strains to the link between capitalism and prosperity that was established during the Cold War. (McFeatters, 2002) Some even contend that “protecting the well-off...in Western societies has become the essential business of elections and most aspects of public policy.” (Booth, 1998: 48) Moreover, when construed as unavoidable, the inherent limitations of the ‘winning’ side of the confrontation, now impossible to project upon ‘the Other’ as described above, also seem particularly acute. In the discourses of green politics for instance much of the excess and surplus of the capitalist economies which before was described positively as ‘prosperity’ has been instead constructed negatively as ‘waste’ and the ‘exploitation of the planet.’ (Flores-Olea, 2002; Sutherland, 2000: 186-188)⁶⁵ Even more, an excess of choice is now construed as the source of anxiety and resentment: ever more choice increases the feeling of

⁶⁵ In IR, conventional concepts of security were broadened into ‘comprehensive security’ that would take into account ‘sustainable development’ and ‘human security,’ changing the focus from ‘state’ to ‘humanity.’ (Buzan, 1991; Walker, 1987; Tickner, 1995)

missed opportunities, and this leads to self-blame when choices fail to meet expectations. (Schwartz, 2004) Equally, 'freedom' is becoming more and more bound to 'risk' in discursive chains: "The natural counterpart to a free market economy is a politics of insecurity." (Gray, 2000: 25) This process has been described as the equivalent in politics to what the Enlightenment did to the religious-based worldviews: it brought disenchantment. As put by Jacobs:

"When Max Weber analysed the way in which the post-Enlightenment processes of rational thought gradually permeated European consciousness in the 18th and 19th centuries, he described the world as becoming 'disenchanted.' The religious worldview which the Enlightenment largely destroyed had made the world an enchanted place, filled with the magic and mystery of gods...But cold, hard rationality killed them off...something similar has happened to...politics in European societies. Up to the 1980s, politics...was enchanted...by radical idealism: the belief that the world could be fundamentally different. But cold, hard political realism has now done for radical idealism what rationality did for pre-Enlightenment spirituality. Politics has been disenchanted...What was the political equivalent of Weber's Enlightenment rationality? The answer, in part, is the fall of the Berlin wall." (Jacobs, 2002)

In other words, only through growing around a void, a lack hidden behind a discursive 'mystery,' akin to a veil, i.e. a fundamental separation, an ultimate frontier, can discourse produce and reproduce the iterative practices, the gestures, utter the phrases that will, together, become the meaning-investing rituals. I contend therefore that the process of desacralisation implied in the loss of mystery set in motion a process of loss of identity reaching well beyond the former East, the consequences of which are only now beginning to be articulated, in the emerging discourse.

Nevertheless, because traditional interpretations dominated, such as the above-mentioned liberal triumphalism of Fukuyama or at the other extreme the

clash of civilisations, the unsettling effects on *all* Cold War identities the Soviet collapse had brought about were largely unnoticed at the time. In fact they continue to be unnoticed in many accounts of IR, which take “more or less as axiomatic” the “facts” that the United States won the Cold War and is now reigning unchallenged.⁶⁶ (Laffey, 2003: 596) With the East gone, the West, as shorthand for urban, developed, industrialised, modern and secular societies, seemed to stand in opposition to ‘the Rest.’ The issue then became whether the Mexican national identity could be made to fit this meaning: could the boundaries of the West be redrawn to include Mexico? and, if they could, would the identity still be tenable as Mexican, when the cultural markers on which it depended, namely the Spanish language, the —more or less secularised— Catholic religion and the ‘mestizo’ ethnia were bound in signifying chains that linked them to Latin America and thus to poverty? How could the elite design a project that separated Mexico from the current chain without losing in the process what made it have a meaning?⁶⁷

The concern about the possibility of maintaining the national identity in the context of further development was based on the belief that the particular combination of industrialisation, modernity and secularism mentioned as characteristic of the West actually fosters a different discourse altogether, one that creates for the subject a position of consumer. Just as religion’s loss of hegemony through the Enlightenment gave way to the hegemony of the nation, often characterised as a surrogate religion for secular times, it was feared by some — and hailed by others— that the loss of hegemony of the nation through

⁶⁶ Mearsheimer’s “back to the future,” Krauthammer’s “unipolar moment” and Kaplan’s “coming anarchy” were all images of international relations that held a pessimistic assessment as to the prospects for peace after the Cold War, while Fukuyama’s ‘end of history,’ Russett’s ‘democratic peace’ and various theories of ‘globalisation’ were optimistic instead, but none of these considered a fundamental change in the meaning of ‘the West’ in the light of the absence of the East. (Mearsheimer, 1994; Krauthammer, 1990/91; Kaplan, 2000; Fukuyama, 1989; Russett, 1995)

⁶⁷ In words of Fernando Solana, then Minister of Foreign Affairs: “The crucial question was whether it would be possible to maintain congruence between the projects of growing economic association with the United States...while preserving at the same time Mexico’s Latin American identity in full...President Salinas’ government acknowledged this duality of Mexico’s as a fact, not necessarily negative, derived from the peculiar position that it occupies in the world. To take either option as excluding the other would only affect the country’s privileged situation in the continent.” (Solana, 1994: 562)

development would give way to the hegemony of the market, whose discourse offers a position to subjects as consumers, but which instead of relying in the logics of differentiation typical of nationalism, poses an equivalence among consumers, unconstrained by ethnic, linguistic or territorial concerns. Moreover, with its emphasis on the so-called 'individual needs' of consumers, the discourse of the market, that is, the discourse that puts 'the market' at the centre and attempts to make it conceal the fundamental social lack, is continuously creating a subject position presented as antagonistic to collective identities, such as national identities. Therefore, these positions —as citizens and as consumers— can only be held simultaneously in some tension. (Jeffrey, 1998: 496-498)⁶⁸ To illustrate this point with our chosen medium, cinema, we can see that where before there used to be the CIA, the HUAC and the "Guidelines for Censorship" ensuring that Hollywood output would comply with a 'patriotic' depiction of the US, or Mexican films telling stories of cohesion and unity of and to an audience they addressed as a (national) whole, today there are marketing specialists doing 'product placement' —i.e. featuring branded products on films for profit— and 'merchandising,' and it is these two criteria that largely determine which scripts are approved, as reviews focus more and more on profitability "as opposed to being about directing and acting...[they are] profit-margin reviews." (Wasko, 2003: 204) Thus films now more often address —and in the process, create— only specific fragments of the audience, such as 'the pre-teen' or 'empty-nesters markets,' cutting across national boundaries 'in the developed world.'

In his representation of nations as separate fishbowls where culture acts as a breathing formula that allows life, Ernest Gellner pointed to this fundamental similarity underlying nations in developed countries in the following terms: "The formula for the medium of the fully developed industrial goldfish bowls is fairly similar in type, though it is rich in relatively superficial, but deliberately stressed,

⁶⁸ While these positions had obviously been compatible in Mexico before, the contexts that summoned them had been clearly differentiated: the government never addressed the citizen as consumer, only private enterprises did. Indeed, the government had more often than not been in the place of private enterprises.

brand-differentiating characteristics.”⁶⁹ (Gellner, 1983: 52) The same point had been made by Adorno and Horkheimer among others, when they described the cultures of the developed West as undergoing ‘standardisation’ through the pseudo-individuation and interchangeability of cultural products.⁷⁰ Further evidence, although from a different perspective, has been provided in support of this line of argument by the works of Jean Baudrillard and Andrew Wernick on contemporary western societies as centred on the market through consumption, where the advertising function has spilt over the semiotics of the entire system of communication, crucial to ‘advanced’ societies, displacing all referents and leading to the homogenisation of the signifying mode.⁷¹ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Baudrillard, 1981; Wernick, 1991)

In Mexico, there certainly had been a period of growth since the revolution and by the 1980s a notable degree of development, especially in the north of the country and in all the urban centres where more than 70 per cent of the population now lives, was evident. However, since the beginning of the neoliberal administrations it has been in the realm of discourses on development and poverty reduction, and in the practices and behaviour these discourses have engendered, that the deepest changes have taken place. To offer proof of their success, presidents Salinas and later Zedillo did not deliberately stress the ‘brand differentiating characteristics’ that had been naturally stressed before under different economic circumstances, but quite the opposite, their administrations engaged in a sustained campaign, in the media as well as in the official speeches, textbooks, etc., to emphasise the extent to which the ‘formula’ had become similar in type to that of the West.

⁶⁹ A similar process has been alluded to by Giddens’s theories of late or high modernity, where stress is laid on the disembedding of traditions —invented or otherwise— from the communities where they originated, as well as by theories of a post-modern culture that characterise it as devoid of primary references, nurtured instead by pastiche. (Giddens, 1991; McGuijan, 1999)

⁷⁰ Although the quasi-conspiratorial approach of the Frankfurt School has been seriously challenged by more recent theories on consumption in post-industrial societies, many of their key claims, among them the process of standardisation itself, remain valid.

⁷¹ Wernick’s explanation of the current crisis of western democracies also relies in the logics of equivalence, although in this case it is the ultimate equivalence in the function of all communication: ‘hardened scepticism’ is the reaction in the view of the ‘selling job’ that all communication is ultimately doing, and from this point of view, the “cynical privatism and mass apathy [displayed in elections] can even be construed as a sign of resistance.” (Wernick, 1991, 192)

To avoid the threat to the identity, the specific challenge for the elite was to present 'development' and 'prosperity' not as categories in the order of being, not something countries are or are not, not an identity marker but a behaviour, a set of habits one can engage in if the means are available, an external option to be taken if at hand, and the government's task thus became to provide these options. When MacDonald's was opened in Mexico City for the first time in 1982, far from representing a cheap fast food option catering mostly for children and teenagers, it represented American culture and was thus viewed as a symbol of development reaching Mexico. The outlet was located in El Pedregal, one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Mexico City, where the upper and upper middle classes queued for hours to purchase their rather expensively priced hamburgers. Ten years later, economic success was indicated by stressing the availability in the country's supermarkets of what before had to be purchased —by the well off— in shopping trips north of the border. The supermarkets themselves were soon sold to trade brands Wal Mart and Costco. In the former discourse, the success of a particular policy, treaty or agreement would have been predicated on the benefits for Mexican firms, either belonging to the government or to Mexican businessmen, as opposed to consumers.

Academic, literary and journalistic discourses were key in allowing this shift in value from benefiting local producers to benefiting local consumers to take place. Jorge Castañeda, then an influential academic and advisor first to PRD candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and later an ideologue of the Salinas regime, in a position representative of the recent stance of mainstream literature on bilateral relations between the US and Mexico after the Cold War, argued that the huge influence of American culture in Mexico —specially among the young— was actually not a sign of a weakening of the national identity, which he defines in terms of 'patterns of consumption,' but an index of the material wealth and prosperity achieved in the country.⁷² He equates 'Americanisation' with 'modernisation':

⁷² Jorge Castañeda was also the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the first two years of government of Vicente Fox.

“The United States is where the massification of consumption first took place. Other countries have followed: the key question is whether ensuing trends are signs of Americanisation, or of a similar massification of consumption patterns marked by their American origin. The ‘Americanisation’ of Mexico should perhaps be seen more correctly as the ‘modernisation’ of Mexico.” (Pastor and Castañeda, 1988: 340)

Present consumption patterns are now the object of study as opposed to production patterns, and since they are ‘modern,’ they are also ‘good.’ A later study by Ronald Inglehart concurred with that view, even suggesting that the three countries of North America were undergoing “a complex process of modernisation that is changing their societies in a broadly similar fashion,” and that although the United States was in most respects the closest, modernity remained a model “that none of them has yet attained.” (Inglehart et al., 1996: 81) In the realm of literature rather than academia, the same point has been made by Monsiváis, who also puts the consumer as the subject at the forefront:⁷³

“The actions and speeches of nationalists to try to block Americanisation did no good whatsoever...they made a colossal mistake...they identified technological progress with North American ideology...and their rallying cry to nationalism came close to requiring a rejection of all innovations...who was going to say ‘no’ to comfort?” (Monsiváis, 1997: 113)⁷⁴

Likewise, journalism has since the 1990s also become concerned with the well-being of consumers, again depicted as the direct result of reaching a fit between the local culture and the ‘standard.’ In an article entitled “Trade-brand countries” for instance, commenting on a recent trend by many western and

⁷³ Carlos Monsiváis is a critic, essayist, novelist, political commentator and cultural journalist.

⁷⁴ Monsiváis also noted that the neoliberals were attempting to update the discourse by placing ‘modernity’ —literally— where ‘the Revolution’ used to be, and replacing ‘nationalism’ with ‘productivity’: in their discourse “Modernity is a Noah’s ark with first and tourist class; those who do not arrive on time will be arrested and shot.” (Monsiváis, 1996: 132-133)

westernising countries to market them as if they were products, the writer calls for the government to make of 'Mexico' one such trade-brand, on the grounds that "trade-brand countries promise, just like the market itself, variety, options and quality." (Kuri, 2002) Moreover, since the welfare state was effectively abandoned by the neoliberal administrations and 'the nation' can no longer command the type of loyalty the welfare state fosters, this and other popular press articles now address formerly national subjects as stockholders in the 'Mexico' enterprise, still seeking a position from which they would view themselves as 'stake holders' —rather than partakers in the community of history and destiny of the nationalist discourse. (Montemayor, 2003)

Privileging the consumer over the producer allowed the modernisation of Mexico to proceed during the 1990s without being challenged by nationalism, and both Castañeda and Monsiváis deny that a threat to Mexican culture in which the national identity was rooted was posed at all. To Castañeda: "Mexico possesses an extraordinarily rich, diversified, historically well-anchored cultural personality of its own. It has its language and shapes, its rhythms and colours, its beliefs and fantasies" and "all the MacDonald's in the World could never submerge them," while to Monsiváis "Americanisation... means that we Mexicans instead of thinking in Spanish the way we used to, think in Spanish the way we are now."⁷⁵ (Pastor and Castañeda, 1988: 341; Monsiváis, 1997: 34)

This line of argument however seriously underestimates the degree to which nationalism as an ideology depends on accounting for issues of origin.⁷⁶ For nationalism, the search for the origin implies a desire to really be who we are, to turn to the beginning and indefinitely defer the end, whereas any appeal to modernise implies a renunciation, it implies that we cease to be who we are and actively engage in becoming, bringing the future to violently disrupt the present.

⁷⁵ Thesis on the 'Macdonaldisation' of society however admit that indigenous alternatives to fast food restaurants may be put forward but still consider these 'Macdonaldisation' in that they respond to the same principles of the industrialisation of culture, in this case of food: efficiency, calculability, predictability and the search of control through technology. (Ritzer, 2002: 16-23) Thus were Mexico to be flooded with Taco Bells, from this perspective this would still be regarded as Americanisation by many —and as modernisation by Castañeda et al.

⁷⁶ Some nationalisms which took root in societies with large immigrant populations however, have replaced the search for the origins for the search of a glorious future. This is the case in the United States. (Grantham, 2000: 15)

The very function of the promise of a Golden Age we must one day return to is precisely to keep it in the future, to keep it unattainable. As Foucault noted in his critique to this search for the origin, we instinctively turn to it in search of the authenticity and purity it seems to provide. We tend to think

“...that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth...that this is the moment of their greatest perfection, when they emerged dazzling from the hands of a creator or in the shadowless light of the first morning. The origin always precedes the fall.”
(Foucault, 1991: 79)

It is not surprising that many sorts of ‘fundamentalisms’ have come back during the present time of challenge to nationalism. Moreover, an attempt to supply a narrative of who we may become must acknowledge the randomness and uncertainty involved, in the process appearing quite contingent when opposed to the accounts of origin that, in their stress of purity, tell a story of causes and effects that appears as the result of necessity, constructing a far more appealing identity. It was in fact the search for modernity as opposed to the origins that Porfirio Díaz was posing at the beginning of the century, and it is of course no coincidence that Salinas has often been compared to Díaz, whose reputation also underwent a thorough rehabilitation in the 1990s.⁷⁷ (Hamnett, 1999: 285) It must be remembered though that when posed with this choice, although the upper classes embraced this search for modernity, the vast, dispossessed majority started the revolution. It is as yet unclear to what extent the neoliberal boom succeeded in bringing the deprived majority into the middle class.⁷⁸ In addition, the idea of progress on which the very notion of modernity depends now being less

⁷⁷ Not only did textbooks emphasise the role of Díaz as a hero during the war against the French, but his whole approach to modernising the economy with foreign capital was fully vindicated. The soap opera “the Eagle’s Flight,” on the life of Díaz, as well as his biography by historian Enrique Krauze spread this image among the general public. (Krauze, 1993)

⁷⁸ With a population of about 104 million in 2003, recent statistics published by CEPAL suggest there are still 40 million people living in ‘poverty’ in Mexico, while 12 per cent live in ‘extreme poverty.’ (CEPAL, 2003) At the same time, there were 13 Mexican billionaires quoted in *Newsweek* during the 1990s. “Only the United States, Germany and Japan have more.” (Monsiváis, 1996: 134)

compelling, calls to modernise cannot have the same effect they did in the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, whether a Mexican identity remains at present despite the standardising consumption patterns of modernisation as academics, writers and the press contend, the subject position of the consumer has certainly challenged the position of the citizen, interpellating people far more often and in many more contexts than was the case before, and thus it has doubtlessly been a challenge to the revolutionary discourse.

Challenge to the Position in Relation to the U.S.

The changes in the discourse on world politics described above had for geographical and historical reasons a greater impact in the position of Mexico in relation to the United States. As mentioned in chapter one, since the times of Díaz the Mexican identity had been constructed in opposition to the United States, whose capability and willingness to use force posed a continuous threat that partly explains the strength of nationalism and the government's success in depending on it for hegemony. In order to turn Mexico part of the post Cold War West however, its geographic position, not only in the Northern hemisphere but in contiguity with the United States, was used to claim the identity as natural.⁷⁹ The eventual success in redrawing this boundary would of course involve the re-articulation of the signifiers that constructed Mexico in opposition to the United States to be grafted into chains that constructed that relationship as one of supplementarity instead. As put by Foucault:

“The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing [the] rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this

⁷⁹ While maps of Mexico in the hemisphere had for a long time placed the country within North America, the cultural boundary had hitherto overridden the geographical one. To reverse this was the objective of both the North American Free Trade Agreement NAFTA, an attempt to set up economic structures that would eventually lead to some sort of political integration, in a manner not dissimilar from the European experience.

complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rules through their own rules.” (Foucault, 1991: 86)

I will show here that this is precisely what an influential group of the political elite in both countries attempted to do. We now turn our attention to the ways this was attempted.

The Logic of the Supplement

Because relations of supplementarity involve the re-crafting of identities in such a way that, despite the boundaries that separate them at the outset, they can be regarded as a unit with respect to the issues one supplements the other for, establishing a position from which these relations can become possible is very important, since it allows profound changes in the discourse to take place. Discursively, a supplement is at the same time external to and part of a given unit.⁸⁰ From the 1990s onwards, there is a clear trend to construct the relations between Mexico and the United States as supplementary.

Again, this can be observed in academic discourses. Irrespective of their content, books on the bilateral relation published since this period have very often followed a format established then, consisting in having two authors, one Mexican and the other American, who narrate the history of the relation from what is taken to represent their national perspective, classifying it into balancing headings that, for every ‘friction,’ ‘problem’ or negative feature included, also pose an instance of co-operation, solution or positive aspect.⁸¹ Pastor and Castañeda classify their narratives under headings entitled ‘barriers,’ ‘frictions,’ ‘connections’ and ‘new configurations’; for Domínguez and Fernández it is ‘conflict’ until the revolution, then ‘bargained negligence’ until 1989 and finally ‘co-operation’ since 1989, the turning point being the Salinas presidency; de la Garza and Velasco’s *Bridging*

⁸⁰ A frequently quoted example is that of the supplement in a newspaper, which can be regarded as additional at the outset, but nonetheless completes the unit.

⁸¹ I am referring here to books jointly authored as well as edited.

the Border follows the same pattern.⁸² (Pastor and Castañeda: 1988; Domínguez and Fernández, 7-15; de la Garza and Velasco: 1997; see also Rodríguez and Vincent, 1997) In other words, not only is there a desire to re-interpret —and thus re-write— history, but also of becoming both subject and object in the relationship to the other. This is in sharp contrast with the trend before 1989, when there are many more single-authored histories, from either American or Mexican historians, aiming to give their particular (received) versions.⁸³ (Meyer and Vázquez, 1989; Bosch, 1961; in journalism, Riding, 1984) The Centre for Research on the United States, created in 1989, was transformed into the Centre for Research on North America, including Mexico, in 1993. This is equally reflected in Journalism, with a column entitled “North American Panorama” dealing with the affairs of Canada, the United States and Mexico appearing in the conservative *El Universal*.

But beyond these formal aspects, the post-Cold War bilateral agenda revolved around political as well as economical, practical issues: Mexico's external debt, the fight against drug trafficking, and illegal migration. These posed the opportunity to be re-interpreted: while through the revolutionary discourse of the PRI these issues would have appeared as dividing 'them' from 'us' into the traditional relation of submission euphemistically called 'of asymmetry,' whereby the United States are always in the positive and powerful position —in these cases as creditors, consumers and hosts, while Mexico is the debtor, supplier and expeller of its poor— through the discourse that many in the elite attempted to organise these issues were framed as part of a relationship of supplementarity. Instead of opposing Mexico to the United States, these issues were opportunities to bring them closer. Through co-ordinated policies and co-operation, it was hoped they could lead to a new North American 'we' that could re-articulate the

⁸² On the realm of film studies too, *México, Estados Unidos: Encuentros y Desencuentros en el Cine* (Mexico and the United States on Film: Growing Apart and Coming Together) was another instance of the same exercise, also published at the time. (Durán et al., 1996)

⁸³ Trends in the United States were quite similar in their stress of conflict, with pre-1989 textbooks emphasising the fact that the Mexican government had stubbornly refused to sell the land in the Southwest despite the United States' repeated offers to buy it, for instance, or stating that despite Wilson's siding with the revolutionaries in their overthrow of Huerta, this was regarded by distrustful Mexicans with contempt. (Greenfield, 1989: 130; Fagen, 1983: 346)

signifiers that signified Mexicanity by grafting them into a new chain. Let us analyse how this was attempted in each case.

Drug Trafficking Control

Drug trafficking was one of the first issues to replace communism as a threat to national security in the United States. In 1985, the UN Commission for Drugs concluded that drug dealing and terrorism were “crimes against humanity...against the content and the spirit of the UN Charter.” (Arrieta, 1990: 121) In 1989, the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London stated that “drug-related terrorism is on par with communism as a threat to the western interests in Latin America.” (Ibid, 118) Various explanations for the sudden high priority attributed to drug trafficking were advanced. From the realist side, the United States simply needed to find a new reason to justify its interventions in Latin America:

“With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the compromise of Marxist-Leninist ideology largely across the globe, the United States can no longer use this framework to formulate policy in the region. Accordingly, there must be a new model for understanding US foreign and security policies in the hemisphere.” (Crandall, 2002: 7)

Others more willing to take the discourse on drugs at face value put it in terms of the authorities realising for the first time the huge scope and the importance of the growing problem: “Both the government and the society at large...decided that drug use has reached such a magnitude as to undermine the social fabric and future generation of productive Americans.” (Toro, 1989: 320) From a discourse analysis perspective however, an alternative account based on the re-drawing of boundaries for identity-instituting purposes can be advanced, for what Campbell has argued with regards to HIV as a security threat also holds for drug trafficking:

“those events or factors we identify as dangerous come to be ascribed as such only through an interpretation of their various dimensions of dangerousness. Moreover, that process of interpretation does not depend on the incidence of ‘objective’ factors for its veracity.” (Campbell, 1998: 2)

Although the issue had been a cause for concern in recent history at least since 1962, when president Kennedy raised it in the annual bilateral meeting with president López Mateos, it was only in the absence of the Soviets that (foreign) drug cartels were interpreted in the US as *the* threat against whose combat unity should be sought. A ‘war on drugs’ was officially declared, and the topic certainly became the most important one in the relationship with Mexico: illegal migration and the external debt were almost permanent themes, but not so far characterised as national security threats. The Mexican government for its part had spoken of threats to national security only once before, with regards to the need to protect the territory from guerrilla incursions from Central America. By the late 1980s, however, fighting drugs was moved from a lower priority issue in the public health agenda into the foreign affairs agenda with the high priority status of a national security threat.⁸⁴ (Sepúlveda, 1994: 64)

Before the Salinas administration, the fight against drug trafficking kept a low profile and simply re-created the relationship of otherness and dependence between Mexico and the United States. Until 1982, there was only one major incident in 1969: ‘operation intercept’ whereby the American government slowed down all automobile crossings from the Mexican border to conduct thorough searches, severely delaying all traffic and causing the fall of sales and services in the area, to confiscate 3 kilos of cocaine. But even this incident, which led to a formal diplomatic complaint, hardly received any attention by the media. Things began to change during the de la Madrid administration. Research on Mexico as a topic covered in US media between 1979 and 1988 has found that notes dealing with drugs did not appear until 1985, and that they continuously increased in

⁸⁴ Research on the discourses on drugs has found that a switch occurred in the construction of drug addiction from being construed as an illness to being described as a crime at around the same time —the late 1980s. (Arrieta, 1990)

number and remained negative to Mexico and Mexican policies until 1988.⁸⁵ (Bailey, 1989: 55-87) A CBS News/New York Times poll published in March 1988 showed that 48 per cent of the US public regarded drugs as the main foreign policy challenge facing the United States, and that 63 per cent thought drugs “should take precedence over the anti-communist struggle.” (Crandall, 2002: 32)

The similes and metaphors involved, as in the case of illegal immigrants but for more obvious reasons, were mostly from a mixture of medicine and politics, i.e. those of an —otherwise healthy— body politic, the American nation, particularly the young, being infected by poisonous substances coming from outside, whose combat thus justified the deployment of a defence system, in this case agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration DEA. Their often unauthorised presence in Mexican territory, along with the way the United States handled the whole affair, specially the question of ‘certification,’ both violated Mexican sovereignty and became an ongoing source of resentment and of diplomatic tension, particularly in the mid 1980s when various scandals took place, but at the same time this was a source of cohesion and unity of the Mexican nation against the traditional American enemy.⁸⁶

Parallel to this obvious and commonsensical account however, an alternative interpretation was possible. One needs only to de-emphasise production —or rather, in the case of Mexico, mere supply— as cause of demand as was held in the original account, and reverse the relationship: whether due to some existential emptiness, a psychological need or simply a recreational choice, there is a demand for drugs in America, and it is this demand which actually generates supply from Colombia or elsewhere, using Mexican territory while in transit. That it is demand and not supply which feeds drug trafficking is evidenced from the fact that in Mexico, where drugs were certainly available and there was restricted consumption in some sectors, there was no comparable addiction

⁸⁵ The media studied by Bailey were *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, ABC, CBS and NBC. The selection was justified on the grounds that the prestige newspapers are read by the elites in both countries and that these provide the materials for TV networks, where most Americans get information from. This research was conducted by the Government Department of Georgetown University.

⁸⁶ The murder of DEA’s agent Enrique Camarena in 1985 and the events that followed — called “Operation Leyenda”— is a case in point.

problem. Sources as diverse as the UN, the Mexican Ministry of Health and the DEA coincide on this point.⁸⁷ Far from violating Mexican sovereignty, DEA agents and the Mexican army —the country's 'immune system'— could work jointly to free Americans from consumption and Mexico from the criminal distribution cartels, that is, to achieve a common goal.

The political practices being thus summoned would be those of co-operation, resulting in a relation of partnership. After all, to construct the 'problem of drugs' in terms of 'supply and demand' more than criminalise it, likens the affair to a mere commercial deal. Should the time come when American policies legalised certain drugs, as had happened with formerly illegal alcohol during the 1930s, their lucrative trade might even become regulated in NAFTA. Salinas was initially successful in recasting the Mexican position as of supplementarity instead of opposition:

"During the presidency of George Bush in the USA and Salinas in Mexico, collaboration between US and Mexican police generally improved. In 1990 an elite group of police officials was formed, the so-called Grupo Beta, in Tijuana, designed to curb violence in the area and the influence of corruption...Mexican law enforcement, furthermore, participates since 1994 with American police in the Southwest Border Project. Also proposed are a series of Bilateral Task Forces comprised of US and Mexican police...Finally, there is co-operation between the US and Mexico on matters of police training."
(Deflem, 2001: 71-98)

⁸⁷ Although statistics vary depending on the specific drugs, age groups and social class considered, when the population at large is considered addiction in Mexico remains 'low' for marihuana —4.7 per cent compared to 32.9 in the US, the highest, and 0.6 in Bolivia, the lowest—, and 'moderate' as regards to cocaine: 1.4 per cent compared to 10.5 in the US and 0.3 in Bolivia. When only students are taken into account, percentages are 5, 49.6 and 2.9 for Mexico, the US and Bolivia respectively as regards marihuana, and 4.1, 8.7 and 0.2 in the same countries with regards to cocaine. (SSA, 2004)

This consistently became the position of the elites during the 1990s.⁸⁸ Although both these accounts had been held simultaneously by the United States and Mexico respectively, the Mexican version became the 'preferred reading' in both countries when the subject position for Mexico derived from the partnership relationship posed by what I will term the post-PRI discourse, that is, the supplementarity relationship, began to succeed, as became evident in representations of Mexicans in the media, for instance television. (Rosas, 2001)

This issue is discussed in more detail in relation to films in the section on representations, below.

Illegal Migration

Another frequent topic in the bilateral agenda since the end of the Second World War, when Mexican workers were requested via the *bracero* programme due to shortages of labour power in the United States, illegal migration became an issue following the demise of communism, as during the Cold War, "the measure of Americanism was partly redefined from 'Waspness' to anti-communism."⁸⁹ (Valenzuela, 1999: 289; Kaufmann, 2004: 36) Although the word is now used to mean 'Mexican migrant in the US,' *bracero* acquired this meaning via a synecdochal use of the arms to signify the human being. Thus *bracero* actually means something like 'spare arms.' By the time the programme was terminated, about 5 million Mexican workers had been brought into the United States as *braceros*, and it is estimated that another 5 million had entered the country illegally. The programme also served to institutionalise migration patterns. (Calavita, 1989: 158-159)⁹⁰ As in the case of drug trafficking control, two competing narratives purporting to explain illegal migration were available: the earlier one constructed migration as 'a problem' on the face of which the US and

⁸⁸ Madeleine Albright, then US Secretary of State, made exactly the same points in an interview to *El Universal*. (Carreño, 1999)

⁸⁹ Immigration in general became an issue in the North after the Soviet collapse. While the Soviet Union existed, the United States linked treatment of communist countries as most favoured nations to their allowing their citizens to migrate, and the Helsinki agreement on European security and co-operation also assumed as a basic right of individuals the right to emigrate.

⁹⁰ According to specialist in migration Jorge A. Bustamante, migration becomes 'visible' in the bilateral relation every time the US economy is doing badly. (Bustamante, 1983: 259-276)

Mexico held opposite interests and thus antagonistic positions, and the second, harmonious one, which attempted to become the hegemonic version in both countries through Mexico's position as supplement in the post-PRI emerging discourse.

According to the first narrative, which Kitty Calavita calls "the myth of the unilateral benefit," it was due to the country's poor economic performance and underdevelopment, the lack of employment and opportunities, that those most deprived, specially peasants, migrated to the United States in search for better remunerated work, and according to the American hegemonic narrative, in search of the freedom and democracy enjoyed in the United States as well. Immigration thus benefited the immigrants themselves, who once in the US improved their standard of living. (Calavita, 1989: 151) It also benefited the Mexican economy and society, as it supplied income from remittances and provided a 'safety valve,' allowing some of the unemployed to find a job in the US. For the United States however, this posed problems for various sectors of the population, typically because in accepting extremely low pay for the jobs they were offered, immigrants tended to push the general standard of salaries down; because being poor they would use up social security and the funds allocated to the welfare state, i.e. consume taxpayers' money; and because their low level of education constrained their social mobility, making it more likely that they would put pressure on the status quo, adding to the criminal gangs, particularly drug-dealing. (views quoted in Simon et al., 1993) In short, the dominant view of Mexican immigration in the United States was that it was a crime-related phenomenon. The inherent contradiction of this narrative, namely that the immigrant is portrayed as so lazy that he is bound to live off welfare and at the same time as so eager to work that she is going to take up the lowest-paid jobs pushing salaries down, was ignored. (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 199) By the mid 1990s, various 'solutions' were put forward to deal with a Mexican migration the US had hitherto tolerated out of pure altruism, which ranged from militarising the border to erecting a "North American Berlin Wall." (Hamnett, 1999: 14) This narrative, and especially the proposed solutions, was only contested by Southwestern growers who depended

on abundant Mexican labour for successful harvests, and by manufacturers in the textile, building and other industries as well as the service sector.

Meanwhile in Mexico and among most Mexican-American academics and policy makers, the ‘unilateral benefit’ to use Calavita’s phrase, was deemed to be for the Americans, whose ruthless exploitation of innocent workers paid for the American dream. Indeed, Samora’s groundbreaking study on Mexican migration was dedicated “to those valiant men, women and children whose suffering is so basic to our affluence.” (Samora, 1971) Those remittances so much remarked upon by proponents of the first account came at too high a price, it was contended: villages lost far too many of the most valuable members of their population, mostly young men, entrenching the subservient role of women in society, and remittances had a negative effect in the local economy, increasing inflation and distorting patterns of consumption, promoting demand for foreign goods. After a thorough study of a number of villages in the key sending states, namely Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco and Zacatecas, it was concluded that remittances led to “a form of internal colonialism that disturbs and reshapes the traditional...way of life in the village.” (Jones, 1984: 8) Moreover, the root of the problem was traced back to the 1847 war that severed the present Southwest of the US from Mexico, since it is only here that Mexican migrants settle.⁹¹ (Durand, 1991: 13) Approval of Proposition 187 in 1994, seeking to deny education, health care and other basic services to illegal immigrants and their children, met a very negative response in Mexico, where this was deemed as only adding to the long list of migration-related injustice.

The narrative which attempted to replace this double-sided unilateral benefit narrative proceeded in the same way as with drug trafficking, by denying the antagonism of the positions depicted. Framed in this new narrative, ‘undocumented’ migration —the term ‘illegal’ was dropped— was not to be understood as a phenomenon in which the United States was a passive victim, but the natural result of the interaction of economic variables between the two countries in the context of globalisation, which led to American demand of cheap labour, in turn met by Mexican supply. (Cornelius, 1989: 25-48; García y Griego:

⁹¹ With the exception of Illinois.

1989: 49-94) This was beneficial not only to both the United States and Mexico, but to the world economy as a whole, and mechanisms ought to be found whereby to regulate this mutually enhancing exchange. (Ronfeldt and Ortiz, 1990: 1) Statistics showing that most immigrants actually do not come from the poorest regions in the Southeast, where most indigenous communities are located, but from the mid west, and from communities where migration has become a custom, a kind of social trait facilitated by complex networks of kinship and employers, regardless of whether the immigrant was employed in Mexico or not at the time of migrating, and thus did not come from the poorest peasants at all but were skilled instead, were also used to challenge official accounts. Moreover, the role of immigrants once in the US, far from unduly benefiting from the welfare system was that of working hard, specially in jobs rejected by the native population, and greatly contributing to productivity. (Pastor and Castañeda, 1988: 363) By 1986, the Economic Report of the US President concluded that “the net effect of an increase in labour supply due to immigration is to increase the aggregate income of the native-born population.” (Weintraub, 1990: 179) Moreover, while other more tolerant narratives of migration had been prevalent in the past and it would have been in principle possible to appeal to them, the elite did not seek to do so because they were founded in the paramount role that *all* migration had had in the construction of the United States, and the project espoused by them sought to create common ground for Mexico as North America, thus their efforts underscored the specific role Mexican immigrants had had. Narratives that held that “the European immigrant was a reputed troublemaker...and was increasingly the backbone of labour strikes” were resurrected, contrasting this with the Mexican immigrant who provided “a fairly adequate support of labour” and did not often seek citizenship. (Calavita, 1989: 156) Finally, during the Salinas presidency it was widely held that Mexico itself was developing and raising its standards of living at a dramatic speed, and that in the short term it would officially enter the First World, which should narrow down the macro-economic differences that spurred migration in the first place, leading to equilibrium via self-correcting, economic mechanisms.⁹² (Ronfeldt and Ortíz, 1990: 1)

⁹² Recently, accounts on migration that seek to place ‘blame’ somewhere acknowledge “50 per

This alternative narrative met some initial success. (Carreño, 1999) In sharp contrast with the Simpson-Rodino Law at the time of President de la Madrid, which was indeed promulgated, Proposition 187 was declared unconstitutional and was never upheld. Moreover, in 1998 the Legal Immigration and Family Equity Act, allowing illegal immigrants to apply for a resident visa if they had either relatives who were American citizens or a job offer without leaving the United States and paying a USD\$ 1,000 fine was also passed. In the short term, the idea was to replace 'Operation Gatekeeper' with a sort of renewed, albeit somewhat modified, *bracero* programme that took into consideration the more skilled migrants in comparison to those of the 1950s and 1960s. In the long term, it was hoped that NAFTA would lead, through spill over, to the creation of a Union, with open borders in exchange for oil, gas and electricity: "With new leadership, the moment is ripe to consider a package deal that would involve major concessions and demands by both nations in trade, energy, intelligence and security, debt, capital flight and immigration." (Pastor and Castañeda, 1988: 370) Other broad-scope research carried out at the time concluded as well that changes in basic values in the United States, Canada and Mexico were transforming economic, social and political life among them, and that these changes were "rooted in long-term generational differences" so they would endure, and their effects would be "massive." (Inglehart et al., 1996: 171) Even more, the study concluded that "one provocative implication that flows from these findings is that the traditional, historically entrenched rationale for the existence of political borders separating the three North American countries seems to be eroding." (Ibid) While these expectations have been challenged after 11 September 2001, it was at the time widely held by epistemic communities and the elites in both Mexico and the US. (Bustamante, 1989: 293)

The Economy: the External Debt and NAFTA

cent" of the responsibility for Mexico and "50 per cent" for the United States, as if both countries constituted a unit. (Carreño, 2003)

Largely supplying the framework for the whole integrationist project, the economy was the issue that most obviously lent itself to being framed within a relation of supplementarity. Throughout recent history the United States had been Mexico's main trading partner.⁹³ During the PRI era this was interpreted as a disadvantage and a problem to be overcome. Most Mexican presidents until de la Madrid, specially López Mateos and Echeverría, engaged in considerable efforts to diversify trading partners, with varying degrees of success, Echeverría being the most successful. After de la Madrid however, it was denied that such a task was feasible. What is more, it was regarded as mistaken, since it was argued that access to the American market was Mexico's main economic strength. By the 1990s what before was termed 'dependence' was legitimated as 'integration,' effectively abandoning the aspirations to autarky inherent in nationalism, transposing them into the wider framework of the North American region. (Silva-Herzog quoted on Russell, 1994: 314)

The Salinas government renegotiated the debt with this policy of convergence in mind, making the case for the need to get out of the "low-growth, high-service debt trap." (Krueger, 1987: 163) It was in the best interests of the US, it was argued, that the Mexican economy improved so as to be able to meet its financial commitments. The relationship was thus from the outset presented as one of mutually beneficial partnership: not only did Mexico and the US share the same interests, but they also had the capacity to materialise them. Through the Brady Plan the negotiating team achieved a total reduction of USD\$5,800 million, grace periods and debt swapping, but more importantly they also achieved a shift in the discursive position for Mexico. Just as the US policy-makers were telling Latin America that with the Cold War over, it would now have to struggle to survive by its own efforts, an exception was made for Mexico, which did receive economic assistance. (Kaletsky, 1992: 10)

This in turn, together with the developments in Europe and the economic bloc emerging in Asia, allowed for what was going to be the Salinas administration most important economic project, NAFTA, to be thinkable and

⁹³ At the time, Mexico was the third trading partner for the United States, after Japan and Canada. (Russell, 1994: 316)

possible. (Bertrab, 1997: 1) As put by James R. Jones, the American ambassador at the time, NAFTA was to become “both the symbol of our new relationship and the point of departure for future initiatives.” (Russell, 1994: 331) Although originally the idea of President Reagan’s, who proposed a free trade agreement that would go “from the Yukon to Yucatan” and rejected by de la Madrid over concerns on sovereignty, within the new framework NAFTA offered an ideal opportunity to construct relations of supplementarity and was thus re-adopted by Salinas. (Agustín, 1998: 187-188; Russell, 1994: 335) In fact, NAFTA would go well beyond the mere negotiation of trade tariffs, to become a sort of all-embracing umbrella project, whose broad scope could eventually comprise all the other relationships between Mexico and the United states as ‘North America.’ More than the common police force and common policies that managing the problem of drugs involved, and the search for common ground to try to manage migration, it was the set of practices fostered by NAFTA which had the greatest impact on the discourse that made the Mexican identity.⁹⁴ A measure of the extent to which the new discourse initially succeeded in replacing the former one can be attained by assessing which sorts of institutions had to be abandoned in order to pursue it, as well as to which new institutions it gave rise. Let us now analyse the practices that both these renunciations and these newly acquired habits have involved.

First of all, new habits required engaging in substantial lobbying. This involved major changes in attitudes and values in Mexico, where lobbying was before regarded as illegitimate interference in the affairs of a foreign country, and never welcomed when carried out there. It proved however very useful indeed. Although initially the support of public opinion and of specific economic sectors was remarkably difficult to gain in both countries, recourse to the ‘new technologies’ such as conducting a massive marketing campaign in the US media in favour of Mexico in general, of the Mexican president in particular and of the

⁹⁴ Indeed, to economic historian Carlos Marichal “although trade treaties are very rarely viewed as fundamental for the countries that subscribe them, NAFTA will definitely be a watershed for Mexico.” (Marichal, 1997)

project as a whole was key to the success of the negotiations.⁹⁵ To this end, the help of professional lobbyists Shearman Sterling and Burson Martseller was enlisted, and power-broker Charles Walker was hired, on a salary of USD\$ 20,000 a month. (Marichal, 1997) Interest groups in the United States are said to have incurred similar expenses, with businesses devoting nearly USD\$ 50 million to the pro-NAFTA campaign. (Russell, 1994: 343-346) All these efforts and resources soon shifted public perceptions. Such was the success of the campaign that even the left had to give support to the project in its political platform, effectively shifting to middle ground. By 1991, former presidential candidate from the left Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas supported the project, although advocating a preferential treatment for Mexico, similar to the one enjoyed by Ireland, Portugal and Spain in the European project. (Russell, 1994: 351-352) In the US, NAFTA negotiations cut across Parties and administrations, thus cementing the treaty on what was then regarded as very firm ground. (Bertrab, 1997: 98) They also allowed the Republicans to gain the backing of some prominent Chicanos who had until then supported the Democrats.

A second entrenched habit that would be changed, it was hoped, related to voting patterns in the UN, where a higher profile was also adopted.⁹⁶ They sought to coincide with the votes of the US more often, in an attempt to match the voting pattern displayed by Canada, the United Kingdom and Israel, with whom they sought identification as close allies of the US, while distancing Mexico from the Third World.⁹⁷ Resources available at the embassy and the 43 consulates were also devoted to the cause. (Domínguez and Fernández, 2001: 83) Symbolically, the embassy itself was moved from a mural-adorned old mansion in a “shady

⁹⁵ President Salinas addressed the University of Harvard during the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and as a result “at least 45 major news stories were published, as well as 30 odd positive editorials or opinion columns.” (Bertrab, 1997: 25) Advertisements were placed in the main newspapers and on TV. Former Presidents Carter and Bush and other notable persons such as James Baker, Jean Kirkpatrick, Edmund Muskie, George Schultz, Lee Iacocca, Andrew Young and Tip O’Neill endorsed the agreement publicly.

⁹⁶ Eventually this led to Mexican participation in the Security Council, which had been thoroughly avoided by the PRI.

⁹⁷ Between 1985 and 1998, the votes of Canada, the UK and Israel coincided with those of the US on average 78.7 per cent, 87.10 per cent and 98.15 per cent of the time respectively. Mexico’s vote in the UN went from coinciding with that of the US 14 per cent of the time on average between 1985 and 1989, to 28.8 per cent between 1990 and 1998, and continued to rise until recently.

neighbourhood” to a “modern building on Pennsylvania Avenue, just three blocks away from the White House,” and its personnel considerably increased, significantly by a large number of specialists who had technical rather than political skills. (Domínguez and Fernández, 2001: 125) This was in line with images of world politics fashionable at the time, that constructed a ‘borderless world’ in which policy would be “taken out of the hands of reportedly scheming politicians, thought to have only short term interests...and passed over to the expert managers who will take decisions on ‘objective’ economic grounds.” (Clark, 2000: 82-83)

Changes embraced also occurred at a subtler but nonetheless significant level. Although unnecessary given Mexico’s latitude, a Summer time was introduced to make ‘Mexican time’ coincide with ‘American time,’ so as to allow transactions in banks and the stock market to be held simultaneously. At the same time, CNN in Spanish also included Mexican cities in their alphabetical weather forecast, thus viewers now find about the weather in “Acapulco” and then in “Atlanta” etc. The synchronisation of time and the encompassing of both countries in the same forecasts actually complemented the spatio-temporal unity sought.

As for the practices that had to be abandoned, the radically new tasks that the Mexican embassy was required to perform for the negotiation of NAFTA, which went on after the treaty had been enforced, disrupted the formal, highly elaborate nature of traditional diplomatic practices, now characterised as ‘inaction,’ thus removing another one of the PRI scripts that were enacted by former ambassadors. These became political appointees as opposed to career ambassadors. The Estrada doctrine, which had been the cornerstone of Mexican diplomacy during the Cold War, demanding total commitment to the principles of non-intervention and the peoples’ rights to self-determination, was also recently dropped, as was the Carranza doctrine, which held it that controversies and disputes involving foreign countries could only be settled in Mexican courts. (Rusell, 1994: 349) The Carranza doctrine had come about as the product of earlier conflicts with American and European interests that had been affected

through nationalisations, and it had long been regarded as crucial for the defence of Mexican national interests. (Philip, 1982: 203)

There was reason to believe that all these sets of changes would endure, leading to long-term habits and institutions. (Weintraub in Bertrab, 1997: viii) They spurred from some already-existing common ground, not least Mexican-Americans in the US Congress and other influential organisations.⁹⁸ Mexican negotiators were all fluent English speakers, who held doctorates from the same American universities as their counterparts.⁹⁹ Moreover, they all became prominent Cabinet Ministers in the Zedillo government, and some remain serving under Fox. Relevant non-governmental actors such as members of the business community also had personal relations —and shared interests— with the American negotiators, and had prominent roles.¹⁰⁰ Not only did this mean that the team in both countries shared beliefs and values, but a pattern akin to that explained by Anderson regarding the role of 'educational pilgrimages' in fostering a common identity among intelligentsias emerged, providing something like a territorial base for the new imagined community of North America. Moreover, the sudden upsurge of the Internet in Mexico early in the 1990s might well have had a role similar to that of printed materials in the nineteenth century in linking intelligentsias and government officials both in the US and Mexico. (Anderson, 1991: 140) And even if elite-started and led in the beginning, the subject positions this discourse created were soon embraced by some of the people.¹⁰¹

“Empirical evidence on public opinion in North America...surprisingly supports the shift toward the larger paradigm for trade and commerce, indeed towards political integration

⁹⁸ Such as Congressman Bill Richardson from New Mexico, whose mother is Mexican and lives in Mexico, Jim Kolbe from Arizona and Hispanics Solomon Ortiz, Kika de la Garza, Albert Bustamante, and Martin Frost. Also Ambassador Lalo Valdez. (Bertrab, 1997) Among the organisations, support of La Raza was crucial.

⁹⁹ From the Mexican team, Jaime Serra and Pedro Noyola had Ph.D.s from Stanford, as did Carla Hills from the US. Michael Cantor from the US and Luis Alberto Aziz from Mexico had both studied at Georgetown and Herminio Blanco, Luis Tellez and Hermann Von Bertrab, all in the Mexican team, were alumni of MIT.

¹⁰⁰ Especially relevant were the Business Round Table and the Chambers of Commerce.

¹⁰¹ The upper classes in Mexico, according to recent research. (Douglas, 210)

itself...one out of four Mexicans and Canadians is already prepared to accept political integration of some kind into a new collectivity.”
(Doran, 1995: 277)

The language used to construct these sets of changes employed metaphors both from the ‘objective’ and detached realm of science and from the affective one of the family. On the one hand, the bilateral relation was cast as managed by professionals, as opposed to the earlier period when passion and sentiment were said to have played a main role. The changes were constructed as objective and scientific, and therefore more appropriate to advance Mexico’s interests. On the other hand, emotional involvement was also sought, and the similes and metaphors used to represent the new relationship drew on the family: in some accounts, the relationship of the United States with Mexico is “the least foreign” of its relations, whose bonds following NAFTA had “helped isolate both countries from the impact of the global financial crisis,” while the —rather gendered— image of a marriage is used explicitly by Weintraub in his book entitled as noted above *A Marriage of Convenience: Relations Between Mexico and the United States*, and implicitly by Domínguez and Fernández in their account of the majors of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, a man and a woman respectively, crossing the border to celebrate the “arrival of the new millennium with an international hug and a kiss.”¹⁰² (Ibid, 155)

Finally, upon the signing of NAFTA President Bush declared:

“Today marks the beginning of a new era on our continent, the North American continent...we are creating the largest, richest, and most productive market in the world, a USD\$ 6 trillion market of 360 million that stretches 5,000 miles from Alaska...to the Yucatan Peninsula.” (Quoted by Russell, 1994: 345-346)

¹⁰² “Clinton analizará en México Drogas, Migración y Comercio,” in *Spanish Newswire Services*, February 14, 1996.

Emerging discourses thus constructed a North America in which Mexico belonged —not least on film, as shown on chapter five below. Partly based on discourses on world politics that were constructing a post Cold War international reality as “the coming age of regionalism,” these discourses were put forward by important sections of the elites and a variety of interest groups in both countries, and found almost immediate support among the upper classes and some of the middle classes in Mexico. (Rostow, 1990: 3-7)

Serious challenges to the meaning of national identity held by the until-then hegemonic discourse of the PRI had thus been mounted from what then seemed less and less the ‘outside.’ We now go to the equally serious challenges that arose from ‘inside.’

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Challenges from 'Inside'

Even if, as has so far been put forward, the dislocation in the discourse came primarily from 'outside' —in the sense that it was the erasure of a set of boundaries that made the Other and that also made a scope of undecidability possible that caused it— internal conditions also pushed to make the political field a different one from what it had been when the PRI first put in place the structures that allowed it to remain hegemonic for more than seventy years.

In the first place, the mere demographic growth combined with the degree of economic development achieved were already straining the system to its limits by the late 1980s. The country's population had risen from 15 million when the revolution ended, to about 80 million. During this time, the country had also passed from having a quasi-feudal economic structure with many landlords — 'caciques'— performing as governors, and a mostly rural population, to an industrialising economy. By 1980 more than 75 per cent of the population lived in urban areas, had higher levels of literacy, and included a solid and expanding middle class with access to ever more difficult to control media and technology. The rate at which the system had been coping to continually renew and transform itself in order to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances without losing legitimacy had begun to slow down. Particularly, the way it stopped recruiting from all sectors of society to turn almost exclusively to the group of 'technocrats' considerably hindered its possibilities to keep on co-opting dissent, challenging in fact the very boundaries that held together the political elite itself.

The combination of an externally-induced dislocation and a more fluid internal political field thus allowed for the questioning of the national identity to be evident in Mexico at the levels usually deployed by nationalistic ideologies, namely linguistic, ethnic and religious. It is therefore these aspects that are analysed in this section.

Ethno-linguistic Challenges to the Identity

Perhaps the most notable blurring of the boundaries that constituted 'Mexicans' by including all inhabitants of the national territory and excluding the ones beyond is evidenced today in the challenge posed to mestizos as the ethnic basis of the nation. This challenge comes, on the one hand, from the Indigenous populations, and on the other, from Chicanos. The result is that the former 'we' is being fragmented: some of those who used to be included in the post-revolutionary discursive 'we,' namely 'the Indians' now appear as 'they' —that is, as 'Indians' instead of as 'Mexicans'— while those who did not use to be included, namely Chicanos, formerly despised for 'betraying the nation' and against whom so much resentment used to be directed, are increasingly taken to embody the features the Mexican identity ought to have in the position that was being created for Mexico in the post Cold War discourse of World Politics. Not only are they included, they are being turned into the new symbol of ethnic belonging, the new mestizos so to speak. Let us see how this has been done.

The Indigenous Challenge

The indigenous challenge is expressed in what appears as pressing demands for the long-delayed recognition, acceptance and delivery of social justice to indigenous minorities, now-called 'first nations.' These unmet demands led to the Chiapas uprising, and to the ensuing transformation of the National Liberation Zapatista Army EZLN into a peaceful movement that drew most of its legitimacy and effectiveness from civil society. The current view is summarised in the following lines: "...one must understand the Chiapas rebellion as in large measure the revolt of an unrecognised and unacknowledged autonomy, excluded from the full rights of citizenship, against a central government that was viewed as an imperial oppressor." (Foster, 2002: 14) The international context is at the moment favourable to such demands, since enforcing respect to human rights in general and to those of minorities in particular has become part of the political agenda, especially after the Cold War in line with my argument here.

I contend however that this apparent call for the recognition of a multinational Mexican state can be explained more in terms of the collapse of the boundaries that sustained the revolutionary 'we': just as Foucault, in order to investigate madness, eschewed the facile assumption that our current understanding of it came from "the happy age when madness was finally recognised and treated according to a truth to which we had too long remained blind," the notion that we are now living a happy age in which 'ethnic minorities' are finally being 'acknowledged' and 'recognised' must be equally eschewed, and the ways in which they have been actively constructed through discourse must be traced instead. (Foucault, 1991: 141)

I thus contend that what now appears as 'indigenous populations' under the former boundaries appeared as 'the poor, disadvantaged peasants.' The discourse of the revolution included within 'Mexicans' a group of people who were far more acutely disadvantaged than the others. But this group was constructed in terms of social class and not of ethnicity. It is true that 'peasants' were almost without exception dark-skinned. But it is also true that many of those who would be regarded as 'mestizo' were also as dark-skinned, and sometimes almost as poor, only inhabiting urban areas. Moreover, several 'mestizos,' specially those from the north of the country which was mostly populated by Spanish settlers, are white, because, contrary to those essentialist views that hold it that mestizos are the 'real Mexicans' —i.e. the descendants from 'the Aztecs,' taken as shorthand to mean the various indigenous cultures that populated the central region, and 'the Spaniards,' again as a unified, unproblematic category, that would seem odd to the Basques, Catalans, Gallegos etc. of the 1500s as well as today— *mestizo* was just the signifier that signified a mythical ethnic 'Mexicanity,' or in other words, a link to the territory in a relationship of belonging, and to the fellow Mexicans in what the doctrine of nationalism usually terms a community of history and destiny. Indeed, one of the reasons why nationalism must go to such great lengths to emphasise and detail what makes 'us' different from 'them' is precisely to hide the difference always already existing at the heart of 'us,' what Derrida calls "the hauntology" of collective being. (Derrida quoted in Shapiro, 1999: 95)

To put this another way, the homogeneity of any ethnic category is always fictitious: 'the Spaniards' who arrived in what later became Mexico had already been conquered by 'the Arabs,' and moreover, there was such diversity amongst them that they could only appear as 'Spaniards' when pitted against 'the Indians.'¹⁰³ This has become particularly evident in the way that separatism nowadays resonates in regions of Spain such as the Basque country or, in a non-violent way, Catalonia. On the other hand, only a very crude conceptualisation — of the kind needed to make nationalism and other ideologies— allows for such a diverse set of peoples as the Aztecs, the Tlaxcaltecas or the Lacandones to be construed as 'the Indians,' for it is only when in opposition to 'the Spaniards' that they emerge as such. Before their contact with European settlers they most likely thought of themselves in terms of 'empire' in the case of the Aztecs, and 'subjects' in the case of the other tribes, or something along those lines, but not as 'Indians' at all. The lack of essence —and therefore, the contingency— of purported ethnic identities is evidenced by the fact that now "'Spanish' in Mexico means being white, blond, and blue-eyed, while in the United States it means being dark-skinned and having black eyes." (Adler and Pérez, 1987: 196) In the same manner, the signifier 'mestizo,' when articulated by the revolutionary discourse of the PRI, beyond dark, brown, 'Indian,' white or any other physical, objective feature, simply meant 'Mexican.' Objective traits people bear become relevant *only* until articulated as such within a discourse: it is the discourse that makes the traits visible and not vice versa. When territory was the key issue, MPs were chosen to represent, geographically, every state. Now some want them to represent "all ethnic affiliations."¹⁰⁴ (Valenzuela, 1999: 298)

Nor do attempts to define indigenous populations as speakers of languages other than Spanish succeed in setting the group that has emerged under the label 'indigenous peoples' apart. By this criterion, only 6 million people qualify as indigenous, and of these almost 5 million speak Spanish as their second

¹⁰³ Alternatively, they emerged as such when in antagonism to other 'Others,' such as 'the English' etc.

¹⁰⁴ So effective did the mestizo myth become, that it has recently been invoked as a way to create a unified American identity: "the blend of Anglo, Afro and Indian influences is the key to creating a new American type that is as powerful as the mestizo...is for Mexico." (Kaufmann, 2004: 39)

language.¹⁰⁵ It is true this still leaves about a million people who can claim an indigenous identity through linguistic exclusion, but it is only possible for them to do so now that the discourse has brought back the Indian subject-position from the colonial times. As Xóchitl Leyva has remarked, "it was not until the arrival of the Zapatista movement that the inhabitants of Las Cañadas used their ethnicity as a political instrument to make their demands heard at national level." (Leyva, 1998: 45) Although language is an important factor in the making of most nationalisms the fact that fourteen countries emerged out of Spanish-speaking Latin America while Swiss nationalism was able to forge Switzerland out of populations speaking German, Italian and French makes it evident that it is not language per se but rather its interaction with other cultural markers and the extent to which this interaction can be used to indicate difference from 'the Other' that is relevant. (Anderson: 1991; Gellner: 1983; Smith: 1991) A decade or so ago, linguistically classified 'Indians' of today would more often than not have been poor peasants in need of bilingual education. When demands to create a set of laws which specifically addressed the situation of indigenous populations were put forward, particularly following the Chiapas uprising, the first reaction of the government was to deny the need of such laws because, it was argued, the laws valid in Mexico were valid for *all* Mexicans. But the very fact that such demands were being made showed that one of the most important boundaries that constituted 'Mexicans' was being redrawn.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ The actual figures are: 6,044,547 people speak languages other than Spanish, and of these, 4,924,412 speak Spanish as well. National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Informatics INEGI, website, consulted August 6th, 2002. <http://www.inegi.gob.mx/difusion/espanol/fietab.html>.

¹⁰⁶ In short, "there is simply no limit to the number of ways in which people can be classified." (Gellner, 1983: 65) It is an indicator of the degree of success of a specific nationalism however that they be classified in such a way as to make the match between the people inhabiting a territory and the territory itself as close as possible. If physical traits stand on the way, alternative forms of classification are sought. Members of the nation can belong in it by virtue of a common glorious future, a sense of mission or belonging to a common faith in combination with other features as necessary to make the nation unique, i.e. 'different' from others — language, common earlier grievances etc. It is for this reason, I contend, that it is a mistake to regard the various forms of fascism including 'ethnic cleanses' as 'the ugly side of nationalism,' for what they actually represent is the breakdown of nationalism, the point at which the discourse stops producing individuals that inhabit a given territory as national subjects.

What is most meaningful about the emergence of Zapatismo however is not so much the fact that it makes the collapse of the hegemonic discourse that I contend took place evident, but rather the possibilities it offers for the re-articulation of a discourse, since, as Laclau has shown, populism is not a discourse but a *mode of articulation*:

“a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual contents identifiable as populist, but because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents —whatever those contents are...Equivalential popular discourses divide, in this way, the social into two camps: power and the underdog.” (Laclau, forthcoming: 1-2)

I will thus here argue that Zapatismo is indeed populist, i.e. a mode of articulation that is based on drawing this radical, internal boundary that relies on the polarisation between two positions, that of power and that of the people;¹⁰⁷ that the positions in question were those of ‘neoliberalism,’ ‘globalisation,’ ‘the Americans’ and ‘the government’ as paradigmatic equivalences in the category of ‘power,’ while ‘Indians’ were systematically expanded to include ‘minorities,’ then ‘the poor’ —a majority rather than a minority— and ultimately ‘the people’ in the category of binary antagonism; and finally that in the forging of these two chains of equivalence, an attempt was made —and is still being made— to recover the subject-positions of the nationalist discourse of the PRI and to return it to hegemony, albeit to the advantage of a somewhat different political elite. Let us analyse the process whereby these sets of equivalences and differentiations were made.

The sets of equivalences have been drawn in several ways in a variety of texts, written as well as visual and others, from the realm of popular and high culture, to the intelligentsia. The popular Mexican group *Mana* very clearly used Zapatismo as an empty-signifier, as broad-encompassing as had been ‘the

¹⁰⁷ Although Laclau states that the position of ‘the people’ is not the only subject-position in a binary opposition to power, since a political system in which demands are mostly institutionally satisfied produces the ‘democratic subject,’ in the particular case under analysis it is clear that the Mexican government was in a very weak position to offer institutional answers to the demands being made by Zapatismo, specially with regards to the widespread corruption of the collapsing system and the general distrust it inspired in most Mexicans. Also there is bound to be a degree of populism even in the most democratic polities. (Laclau, forthcoming)

revolution': "Zapatismo is not merely the protection of some Indians from Chiapas. Zapatismo is a concept of justice, of freedom, of land, work, health, education," while in an essay on Hieronymus Bosch's *Millennium Triptych* British art critic John Berger draws up a parallel between hell as depicted there and globalisation, then posing Zapatismo as the latter's enemy.¹⁰⁸ (Cruz, 2002; Berger, 2001: 210) Using Alain Touraine's classical typology of social movements, Manuel Castells defines globalisation as the Zapatista's adversary: "[Zapatistas] place themselves in historical continuity with five hundred years of struggle against colonisation and oppression...[reincarnated] in the current form of the new global order: NAFTA and the liberal reforms undertaken by President Salinas." (Castells, 1997: 77) Touraine himself compared the Zapatistas with the movements initiated by Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, as well as with the Polish Solidarity movement. (Bellinghausen, 1996) But to show the process whereby populism became a mode of articulation of a discourse struggling for power after the post Cold War dislocation, I rely in this section on some of the key texts written by the Zapatistas themselves.

So how can the claim that Zapatismo is a populist discourse be sustained? First of all, Zapatistas were often criticised for their lack of a concrete project, for not going beyond "the obvious condemnation of electoral fraud," for refusing to join the Party system either through the PRD or to become a political Party in themselves. (Castells, 1997: 81; Holloway and Peláez, 1998) I would argue however that this very vagueness in the signifiers of their discourse together with their ongoing deferral to become was in fact the source of the strength and scope of their appeal, for what they stood for was so broad-encompassing it could mean almost anything. The central topic of the San Andrés Accords, the document which resulted from the negotiations between the government and the Zapatistas in the town of San Andrés, was "that democracy, freedom and justice be available for all Mexicans." (Montemayor, 1997: 150) There is also constant talk of 'honour,' 'dignity,' 'life' and 'truth.' 'Man,' and 'peace' are as well constantly

¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that what Berger identifies as hell in his essay is precisely a lack of differentiation, or in other words, the collapse of identities.

deployed in their speeches. In other words, their demands remained so open almost as to become empty signifiers.

“The so-called ‘poverty’ of the populist symbols is the condition of their political efficacy —as their function is to bring to equivalential homogeneity a highly heterogeneous reality, they can only do so on the basis of reducing to a minimum their particularistic content. At the limit, this process reaches a point where the homogeneising function is carried out by a pure name: the name of the leader.” (Laclau, forthcoming)

This was actually the case of Zapatismo, which ultimately came to be synthesised in the name of ‘Marcos.’ “We are all Marcos” was the motto of all those who took part in the Zapatista march from Chiapas to Mexico City in 2000. The paradoxical familiarity of the leader’s covered face and his ambiguous identity even reached mythical proportions.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the tendency towards re-grafting signifiers in chains of equivalence, or in other words the prevalence of the paradigmatic pole over the syntagmatic one, is also evident in the way ‘the Mexican government’ became ‘the rich,’ ‘globalisation’ and ‘neoliberalism’ while ‘the Indians’ became first ‘the poor’ and finally ‘humanity’:

“During the past years, the power of money has presented a new mask over its criminal face. Above borders, no matter race or colour, the Power of money humiliates dignities, insults honesties and assassinates hopes. Re-named as ‘Neoliberalism’ the historic crime in the concentration of privileges, wealth and impunities, democratizes misery and hopelessness.”¹¹⁰

At a symbolic level, the very choice of Zapata, the one revolutionary whose struggle had been mostly about land, the use of horses and rifles and all the iconography from the revolution in a jungle setting, also point towards pre-modernity, towards a peasant attachment to particular territories rather than the

¹⁰⁹ When President Zedillo announced, on February 9th, 1995, that the government had discovered the true identity of the Zapatista leaders and named ‘Marcos’ as Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, the announcement was met with scepticism and disbelief by the population: ‘Marcos’ was far more real than his ‘true’ identity.

¹¹⁰ “First Declaration of La Realidad for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” published in January 1996, available in http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/ccri_1st_dec_real.html. All EZLN texts are also available in English: Subcomandante Marcos, (2001) *Our Word is our Weapon*. Seven Stories Press.

industrial landscapes of the urban modernity they sought to antagonise, despite their widespread use of the media and the internet.¹¹¹ Zapatistas found echoes to their concerns for the land in green Parties and environmental groups in Europe, who were in general very sympathetic to their movement.¹¹²

Finally, as to the ways in which Zapatismo has sought to re-articulate the positions from the discourse under challenge, while reconstituting it to their advantage, we must only look to their foundational texts. From the very beginning, in what might be considered the 'birth certificate' of the movement since it was also the declaration of war, Zapatistas establish their link with historically legitimate authority, thereby branding the authority not so much of the PRI in general but rather of the right-wing and repressive administrations of Díaz Ordaz and Salinas in particular, as illegitimate, refusing official historical versions that set them apart from the Conservatives and as belonging to the governments of the revolution. Furthermore, they link them directly with 'foreigners,' claiming they receive military advice from abroad, setting them apart from 'Mexicans'; drawing on the traditional metaphor of the family, they address fellow Mexicans as brothers and sisters, and do not fail to bring up the issue of land when they call for the halt of the 'robbery of our resources' towards the end of that text.

"We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not starve due to the insatiable ambition of a 70 year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups. They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the 'scientific' Porfirista dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad

¹¹¹ In fact so important is the symbol of Zapata that the Zapatistas have not been alone in their attempts to appropriate it: the alternative project also attempted to do the same. Krauze offered a re-interpretation of Zapata's views on ejidos so that the revolutionary hero appeared to endorse small private property and capitalism, while accusing Cárdenas of having used a misrepresentation of Zapata's ideals for political purposes. (Aviles, 1991) In both these ways, there was an attempt to sever the link between Zapata and the discourse of the PRI.

¹¹² Zapatista Committees in Barcelona, Berlin, Toulouse and London were particularly active. (Leyva, 1998: 48)

workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones that today take everything from us.”¹¹³

Translating words into actions, the Zapatistas founded, in a place called Guadalupe Tepeyac, a settlement they called Aguascalientes and called for a convention to take place there, in a clear re-construction of the revolutionary convention that had taken place in the state of Aguascalientes on 27th October 1914, in which the Zapatistas led by Emiliano Zapata parted from the other two factions also fighting the revolution, namely the forces led by Venustiano Carranza and Francisco Villa. They also changed the names of towns and villages in Chiapas, calling for instance the municipality of Las Margaritas a rather more Catholic-sounding ‘San Pedro Michoacán,’ Michoacán being of course the state of birth of that other mythical fatherly figure, Lázaro “Tata” Cárdenas. The government for its part also actively contested the Zapatista appropriation of the legitimating historical narrative of the nation, but with considerably less success. In his message to the nation on the 6th of January 1994, President Salinas said of the Zapatistas: “...this is not an Indian uprising, but the action of a violent, armed group against the peace of the communities, public peace and the government...it is an action against the national interest...this group is against Mexico,” while the name-changing of places prompted his successor President Zedillo to state that “there is no Zapatista land in Chiapas. All the land in Chiapas is Mexican land,” i.e. Zapatista equals non-Mexican. (Montemayor, 1997: 54, 153)

The style of their later texts always mixed that of the Bible and that of Náhuatl literary classics. It is therefore wrong to regard Zapatismo, as some theories on social movements do, as having opposed the PRI.¹¹⁴ (Harvey, 1998; Leyva, 1998: 38) Although Zapatistas do oppose the political elite as re-defined by the borders drawn during the Salinas administration, Zapatismo in fact became the repository, the inheritor, as it were, of the nationalism on which the PRI had built its hegemony, and more generally, of all the categories that anchored the

¹¹³ EZLN, “First Declaration from the Lacandona Jungle,” published in a variety of media and available in English in their website. <http://www.ezln.org>

¹¹⁴ Indeed, amongst the various theories as to the origins and the funding of the Zapatistas, one that had some currency during the 1990s posed that a large percentage of their resources had come not quite from ‘the government’ as such, but from certain members of the political elite. (De La Grange and Rico, 1997: 347)

meanings of their discourse. In the words of Antonio, an elderly Indian character who often appears in Marcos' texts, they knew when it was time to declare the war because "the motherland was being sold to foreigners, and while hunger and starvation can be put up with, not being Mexican cannot be tolerated."¹¹⁵ (Montemayor, 1997: 141) And since nationalism runs of course counter to Marxism, it is also wrong to regard Zapatismo as Marxist, despite 'Marcos' obvious attempts to emulate Che.

The loudest and clearest call to restore in the Mexican political field the subject-positions constructed by the revolutionary discourse is perhaps most compellingly expressed in the following paragraph, where Zapatistas, in the voice of their leader, explain what it is they seek out of their movement. They want, they say

"The opportunity to return again to the silence we hold still, to the night whence we emerge, to the death that we inhabit, the opportunity of disappearing in the same way we appeared at dawn, without a face, without a future. The opportunity to return to the bottom of history, to the bottom of the dream, to the bottom of the mountain."¹¹⁶

In short, the Zapatistas aim at the restoration of the boundaries of 'revolutionary' nationalism, inside which they seek to, once again, melt away.

¹¹⁵ The same feeling was echoed in the recent declaration of Rosendo Flores, the electricians' union leader: "The government and Enron's *entenados* must understand our position as Mexicans very clearly, which is to build our own future *as that which we are: Mexican*, and that we do not need *them*." (Cárdenas, 2002 my emphasis) "Entenado" is a derogatory term for a stepchild.

¹¹⁶ Speech by "Sub-comandante Marcos" on the 8th of August 1994 at the National Democratic Convention in "Aguascalientes, Chiapas," available in their website: http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/marcos_cnd_aug94.html.

The Chicano Challenge

At this point, it will be useful to recapitulate the argument thus far. In chapter one, the argument was advanced that the Cárdenas nationalist project achieved the subjectivisation of Mexicans as ‘mestizos,’ turning them into what we may term the ethnic basis of the nation, by discursive means that, among other strategies, involved the objectivisation of ‘the Indians’ or ‘the ancient civilizations from pre-Columbian Mexico’: the (conquered) Indians were turned into an object to be known —by present-day Mexicans—, displayed in a variety of institutional means available —museums, history-books narratives, cultural products such as paintings, etc.— in order to perform as the ancestors that would serve the triple function of legitimating the right of the mestizo majority to the land, of binding them together in a relationship of kinship, and crucially of becoming the origin, i.e. of representing both a mythical Golden Age, an age before injustice, and a source from which ‘authenticity’ could be drawn. The population that, following the dislocation of the discourse, now appear as Indians as discussed in the section above, were under the Cárdenas project integrated within the mestizo population by their sharing with them the realm of subjectivity. The homogenising drive characteristic of every nationalist discourse sought to put in place a classificatory scheme whereby subjects would be constructed primarily in terms of social class, which is not a threatening cleavage to ‘the nation’—and in this case succeeded until the late 1980s. Around that time, American citizens of Mexican origin and Mexican immigrants settled in the United States, until then often referred to as ‘Pochos’ and currently as ‘Chicanos,’ began to undergo a marked improvement in their social standing in Mexico. Here we will see why.

In the celebration of multiculturalism that has become characteristic of ‘the age of globalisation,’ essentialist theories have conceptualised Chicanos — and others— as either a hybrid identity, i.e. a wholly new and unique identity resulting from the combination of two cultures, or as a juxtaposed identity, a sort of compound identity made up of holding two separate identities at the same time. (García-Canclini, 1995) Within the framework of this thesis however, ‘multiculturalism’ must be understood as a dislocation of nationalist discourses,

and the Chicano identity must be conceptualised as a problematisation of the Mexican identity which it both affirms and denies. Because membership of this group results through simultaneously claiming the Mexican identity and the American identity that was its opposite, often keeping all the Mexican relevant cultural markers such as language and religion beyond the second generation of migrants, but living this culture out of the territorial boundaries, thus questioning the fit between the political and the territorial unit that nationalism struggles to create, the Chicano identity was either ignored or rejected by the dominant discourse. (Paz, 1967) Its undecidability exposed the contingency of the hegemonic meaning of Mexicanity.

Accordingly, Chicanos were formally excluded. Mexican laws did not allow a double nationality, and to be entitled to hold public office it was a requisite not only to have been born in Mexico and to have lived in the country for the previous five to ten years depending on the position, but also to be the child of Mexican parents.¹¹⁷ Mexican representations of Chicanos in popular culture were few, and when available they were always negative. Research has found that in the more than one hundred Mexican films depicting Chicanos produced in Mexico since 1922 and until the 1970s, Chicanos are always presented as fake, “assimilated, pro-American individuals who have lost their identity” in opposition to “authentic” Mexicans. (Maciel, 1992: 110) Needless to say there were practically no cultural products by Chicanos in the media or the establishment. But despite occupying these marginalised positions, Chicanos continued to exert considerable influence informally, mainly through the remittances they sent their families, which contributed to sustain the idea of the United States as a sort of promised land that stood in opposition to Mexico, and which fostered the maintenance and development of the networks that promoted the further migration of whole communities through their kin.¹¹⁸

But the need to find an alternative representation for the ethnic Mexican identity that followed the decline of the hegemonic discourse posed an

¹¹⁷ Mexican nationality could be claimed either through being born in Mexico regardless the nationality of the parents, or through being born abroad if both parents were Mexican.

¹¹⁸ It has been estimated these remittances are worth USD\$ 4,000 million a year. (Valenzuela, 1999: 289)

opportunity to reassess the Chicano position and to construct it not as the site of conflicting identities condemned to remain unresolved, epitomised in the derogatory connotations the word Chicano and its synonyms used to convey, but on the contrary, as the evidence that a Mexican-North American identity was both possible—in fact, already existing—and desirable. In short, what I contend is that in one of the projects contending for power, Chicanos are fulfilling some of the same discursive functions in the creation of a ‘we’ that indigenous populations fulfilled in the Cardenas project.¹¹⁹ Firstly, because since a group of descendents of those Mexicans who inhabited the land of what today is the American southwest when it was lost by Mexico are included within the signifier “Chicano,” Chicanos legitimate the claim to the land north of the river. In fact some in the movement sustain there should be a re-definition of who the *real* illegal immigrants to that land were. As put by Chicano leader Luis Valdés, “We did not come to the US, actually the US came to us.” (Gorodezky, 1993: 143) Secondly, in most of their cultural production Chicanos stress community and family values, reinforcing the view of the nation as an extended family, in this case regardless where the members may settle.¹²⁰ Finally, the political project is promising a ‘Golden Age,’ but rather than to place it in the past, at the origins as nationalist discourses do, it is placed in the future, as befits modernising projects, and equating it with ‘the American dream’ closely linked to Enlightenment narratives of technology, science and progress.

Thus as of the late 1980s, just as ‘the Indians’ are more and more ‘them,’ Chicanos are more and more ‘us,’ that is, there for ‘us’ to identify with. The crafting of the Chicano position as one that can be adopted by Mexicans inside the territorial boundaries more generally has been attempted in three ways. First of

¹¹⁹ This is also evident in the way the North, more influenced by Chicanos, has tended to predominate in recent years, eclipsing the central region that was home to those indigenous civilisations that were key to the discourse of the PRI. In fact, a majority of members of the present cabinet either come from the state of Nuevo Leon or graduated from the Technological Institute for Higher Education in Monterrey. The same is true of the neoliberal PRI presidents. (Carrizales, 2000)

¹²⁰ In the film *Santitos* (Springall: 1998) for instance, there is a scene where the main character, who has gone all the way from Veracruz to Los Angeles looking for her daughter, whom she believes has been kidnapped, finds a mural where a huge Virgin of Guadalupe has been painted. She thereupon remarks: “You as well came all the way here? The things one does for one’s children! Doesn’t one?”

all, there has been the role of the neoliberal presidents heading the project. In a speech to Mexican-American elected officials in Dallas, former president Zedillo told them: "You are Mexicans —Mexicans who live north of the border." (Buchanan, 2002) In 2000 President Fox addressed a group of Chicanos a speech in which he reassured them the new government would support them in their efforts to "dream the American dream."¹²¹

"We fully agree with you and share your views, but not because we wish our people to leave their own country or because we approve of illegality, but because we know we are not talking about Mexican or American families here, but rather of binational families...We acknowledge the fact that an integrated north-America is here, and is here to stay!...there shall be no more rhetoric or Mexican ambiguity, no more need to read between the lines." (Venegas, 2000)

Perhaps partly as a marketing strategy in order to establish a "plebiscitary presidency," he also sought to project this image himself: a tall, white Mexican president wearing boots and jeans and even a cowboy hat, often working from his ranch in Guanajuato instead of either the National Palace or the official residence in Los Pinos, which he is fond of calling "Mexico's White House," in sharp contrast, almost in direct opposition, to Benito Juárez, the Indian hero-president of the PRI. (Loaeza, 2003) The Fox government has also created a number of institutions to further the interests of Mexicans in the US, such as the Institute for the attention to the migrant, and has notoriously espoused issues such as taking protests against the death penalty imposed on some Mexican immigrants in the US to the International Court of Justice.¹²²

Apart from the image supported and projected by the president, there have been recent changes to the legal status of Chicanos. As of 1988, the government re-defined the nation in its national development plans by stating that "the Mexican nation goes beyond the territory that circumscribes its boundaries." (Valenzuela, 1999: 282) In 1995, efforts to reincorporate Chicanos as fully-

¹²¹ A group which contributed enormously to the financing of the President's campaign through his foundation, "The Friends of Fox." (Aguirre, 2000)

¹²² The very key project around which he had originally sought to organise his administration was a negotiation to turn NAFTA into the North American Union, a project that recently collapsed.

fledged Mexican citizens started, with Mexican Congress passing a law allowing dual nationality. It is estimated that between two and four million US residents who had been reluctant to give up their nationality took advantage of this to become American citizens.¹²³ (LaFranchi, 1995) Chicanos have become closely involved in the political life of their communities of origin, working jointly with governmental authorities—and in some cases, actually replacing the authorities—in the planning and development of infrastructure and political participation in general, thus paradoxically being more present in their absence, or more accurately, being all the more ‘visible’ while being under erasure. (Smith, 1998: 151; Derrida, 1976) At present mechanisms to entitle Chicanos and other Mexican citizens to vote from abroad is being sought. These have already been approved in the state of Zacatecas, where a law was also passed to create two permanent positions in Congress for representatives of migrants or bi-national citizens. There are now calls for other states with a high rate of migrant population to do the same, and Chicanos actively participate in the funding and setting of agendas of political Parties. (Amador, 2003)

Finally, Chicanos and Mexican artists who embrace their subject position have enjoyed an improving standing in the cultural establishment as regards to museums, film-making and book publishing, in detriment of the intelligentsia which provided the PRI with the artistic representations of the nationality.¹²⁴ (Gorodezky, 1993: 140-141) Just as films by Chicanos and on Chicanos are being promoted, exhibitions of Chicano paintings being organised and books authored by Chicanos on their experience get published, key books by authors favoured by the PRI such as Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz, Rosario Castellanos, Carlos Fuentes, Carlos Monsiváis and others have been removed from the list of books to

¹²³ According to the National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Informatics INEGI, which significantly now collects information on Chicanos as well, 22.6 per cent of Mexican immigrants now living in the US have a double nationality. (INEGI, 2002: 24)

¹²⁴ Among others, exhibitions were held between the late 1980s and the early 1990s at the Mexican Fine Arts Centre Museum in Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City, the Corcoran Museum of Washington and the Houston Museum. (Gorodezky, 1993: 140-141) Many more have been held since then.

be stocked by state school libraries.¹²⁵ (Alemán, 2002) In fact the intelligentsia was recently branded “the single most insurmountable obstacle for the establishment of a new relationship with the United States, based on a redefinition of the national identity,” by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Jorge Castañeda, in direct opposition to Chicanos, whom the former Minister would presumably regard as the single best opportunity for the redefinition sought by the new elites. (Molinar, 2002; Monsiváis, 1996: 137) Potentially, Chicanos could be conceived as resolving rather than problematising the Mexican identity as North American. In his serigraphy entitled “Yes, it can be done,” one of Vicente Fox’s slogans while in campaign, “visual historian of the Chicano people” Malaquías Montoya synthesised the claim as follows: a Mexican identity, represented in the sword-like leaves of a spiky cactus, grows from the top of the main character’s head as if it were his hair, tearing in the process the protective cloth that covered his head, perhaps providing some shelter, the American flag. (Gorodezky, 1993: 38) The wall that excluded him has been left behind, but the ghost of a security mesh lingers on, dimly, before his eyes (see photograph 3 in the Addendum).¹²⁶ The same theme, albeit in a more problematic fashion—a Mexican identity forged by tearing through Americannes—is echoed in Chicana feminist Jessica Roa’s poem “Reclamation,” also found at the Addendum.

However, the paradox here is that more often than not Chicano cultural products tend to ignore their Western heritage and rely on the indigenous past in search for authenticity. Mythical Aztlán, which is the place whence the Aztecs first migrated to Mexico City according to the legend, and which is vaguely described as ‘in the north,’ has been appropriated by the Chicano movement, with the claim that Aztlán may actually have been located in the area that is now the

¹²⁵ Again drawing on an example from the realm of film, a major work on Mexican cinema published in 2001 explicitly states in the introduction that one of its key assets is the fact that it “includes Mexican, American and Chicano authors.” (García and Maciel, 2001: 15)

¹²⁶ Although this image could also be read the other way round, with the American flag being the hair and the cactus a sort helmet or horns, the former reading is more likely the preferred reading, since the cactus, being a plant, is alive.

American southwest.¹²⁷ There are frequent quotes of Náhuatl poetry. They reject abstract art and prefer expressionism. In fact many have turned to muralism, in the same style used by Rivera and Siqueiros: in his mural entitled *Mythology of Corn*, Antonio Burciaga shows a Last Dinner where icons of Mexicanity under the PRI such as Zapata, Benito Juárez, Sor Juana and Frida Kahlo share a table with Chicano leaders Joaquín Murieta, Luis Valdés and Ernesto Galarza. This mural says "...and to all those who died, scrubbed floors, wept and fought for us" so the new heroism is not so much to die in a gun-battle anymore, but in a battle against exploitation, which also has its martyrs. (Gorodezky, 1993: 46) In short, it is not at all clear that Chicanos, either as objects or subjects of representations of the national identity can be appropriated by the political project sponsored by the elite headed by Fox and others, to supply new meanings to the ethnic and territorial dimensions of the identity. Chicanos have themselves relied on the Mexican national identity as constructed by the PRI and this would make it easier in principle for the contending project to appropriate their movement, which anyway has its own agenda in the US.¹²⁸

Thus it can be concluded that while the 'ethnic' identity constructed for 'Mexicans' by the PRI has certainly been challenged by processes that involve the eventual exclusion of 'Indians' and the inclusion of Chicanos, the new political project has not been successful in its attempts to forge an alternative representation. From a discursive perspective, this failure must be interpreted as due to the lack of a clear 'Other' against whom unity must be sought. The 'Indians' cannot perform this role because they cannot be construed as posing a threat to the nation. Their claims for autonomy can be and have been channelled

¹²⁷ It is for this reason significant that a museum aiming at reassessing the worth of the indigenous tribes in the north, which had so far been dismissed as 'uncivilised' compared with the 'ancient civilisations' of central Mexico, was opened in 1994. Furthermore, the Museum of the North would be devoted to *all* northern pre-Columbian indigenous peoples, including those who lived in what now is the United States: "It will be news that we shall finally get rid of a political division which has never existed even if it has been drawn in the maps." (Matadamas, 1994: 28)

¹²⁸ The cowboy image that Fox so cultivated during his campaign and the first years of his administration, can also be read as that of a Charro, that is, a wealthy, conservative, Catholic and nationalist member of the older generation, among whom owning a ranch and horse-riding has been a symbol of status and thus an identity-marker. (Adler and Pérez, 1987: 223-224) In the mass media, Charros have traditionally constructed the Mexican identity as Hispanic rather than as North American.

through existing means of political representation in ad-hoc commissions and eventually in Congress. In order to re-graft signifiers in chains of equivalence, there must always be chains of differentiation against which the equivalences will derive their meaning. But probably due to the very disintegration of 'the West' in the broader discourse on World Politics discussed in chapter three, the political project led in Mexico by Fox has failed to convey convincing alternative meanings. The project organised around the figure of Marcos on the other hand has resonated far more among the majorities—as opposed to the upper classes who are still very committed to the neoliberal project—but it has done so only by focusing on class rather than national antagonisms: it had to go beyond the not very persuasive 'Mexico/United States' to 'the powerful/the exploited.' The recent trend in World Politics to rely on a boundary that sets 'Christians' apart from 'Islamists' has further contributed to the difficulties in conveying meanings for the Mexican identity that are any different from the proposed and cultivated by the hegemony of the PRI.

The Linguistic Challenge

Language had not been an issue in demarcating the political field of the nation at the time of independence, in the sense of distinguishing Mexico from either Spain or the rest of Latin America. Spanish was first codified after the foundation of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in 1713, and Mexican terms were first incorporated in 1884 in an attempt to "acknowledge and foster the cultural links that united Latin American countries with Spain," thus signalling the formal acceptance of 'Mexico' as a sovereign nation, an acceptance symbolised in the recognition of the rights of local elites to have a share of the 'correct,' and most importantly, normative version of the language, i.e. a share in the hegemonic code. (Pérez, 2002)

The role of language in giving unity and cohesion to the nation by providing a common cultural basis in reference to which other differences such as class can be relativised became relevant after the triumph of the revolution, when the strong state privileged the codified version of Mexican Spanish as the national language, not only over the more than fifty languages spoken by indigenous

minorities, but also over the quasi-medieval Spanish spoken in rural areas. At the time it was said of the Cristeros that “their educated contemporaries from the city did not understand one word in three of their beautiful Castilian speech of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.” (Meyer, 1976: 182) The educational system thus incorporated the study of Mexican Spanish under the label ‘national language,’ while bilingual education leading to privileging Spanish became available in rural areas.

At stake at present however is not the dominant status of Spanish, but its state of fluidity: the codified language has become, from normative and a prerogative of the dominant and educated classes, more a mere record of the language as actually spoken, that is, now it is “usage that makes the canon” and not vice versa. (Pérez, 2002) Now there is an attempt to update the dictionary on a daily basis with the help of electronic media, as opposed to the previous practice of editing the dictionary every ten years. This move, although not initiated by the Mexican academy, is strongly reminiscent of the Party’s attempt to institutionalise the revolution, a clear attempt to arrest the flow of meanings.

Also because the political system when hegemonised by the PRI largely relied on rituals to invest authority, and these rituals involved highly elaborate, formal scripts, the current preponderance of the informal, colloquial language that has been dominant in politics after the Zedillo administration points to a lack of alternative mechanisms to produce positions of authority. (Bourdieu, 1991: 115) The same sort of language that gave Vicente Fox a high rating of approval while in campaign has worked against him once in office, since the public perception is that in his refusal to enact the scripts that make the president, he is not effectively presiding, a case of what the speech-act theory would call ‘infelicitous performance.’ This can be illustrated by his characterisation of the Presidential Palace as “some dingy hovel” when early in his presidency he said he would not “lock himself up in some dingy hovel, but would be close to the people,” or in his description of what used to be called “micro-enterprises” as “changarros,” a rough equivalent to the English expression “Mac-jobs.” (Loaeza, 2003)

Political analyst Soledad Loaeza has accounted for this sort of language as a key component of a presidential project she calls “plebiscitary,” consisting

mainly in manufacturing an image for the president where he is “just one of us” in order to capitalise on his chief asset, namely his personal charisma. (Loaeza, Ibid) According to Loaeza, the aim of this (failed) project would have been to give Fox some room for manoeuvre given that his Party does not control Congress. I contend however the situation can be better comprehended as part of the more general crisis in the structures of power that takes place when there is a dislocation in a hegemonic discourse, as was the case with the liturgy when what had until then been the hegemonic discourse of religion began to decline. (Bourdieu, 1991: 115) At first Latin was replaced by the vernaculars, which marked the first stage of the decline since the point for participants was, more than to understand the uttered words, to take their places in the ritual in which the priest was invested with the authority to give the people their subject-positions: this enabled them ‘to be’ (Catholic), i.e. it gave them a Catholic identity, with all the meaning-making this entailed. Later the words in prayers themselves were ‘updated’ to mirror common usage, a second stage in the decline. Finally, the point was nearly reached when, as one parishioner put it, “Hail thee Mary” would become “Hi there!” and at that point there would be no power whatsoever left in such a discourse:

“What is at stake in the crisis of the liturgy is the whole system of conditions which must be fulfilled in order for the institution to function, i.e. the institution which authorises and regulates the use of the liturgy and which ensures its uniformity through time and space by ensuring the conformity of those who are delegated to carry it out. The crisis over language thus points to the crisis in the mechanisms which ensured the production of legitimate senders and receivers.” (Bourdieu, 1991: 115)

Likewise, the presidential institution, which in Mexico authorised and regulated during the era of the PRI a discourse that revolved around the nation, whose legitimate representatives could produce very meaningful subject-positions for the people as Mexicans, is now in crisis.

We will turn our attention to the link between religion and national identity in Mexico today in the following section.

The Religious Identity Challenge

Catholicism was central to the formation of the Mexican national identity from the very beginning, not only because of the crucial role the clergy had in the forging of the Mexican state, but also because through a variety of syncretic practices, of which the Virgin of Guadalupe and various deities of the land are the best examples, it allowed for the various indigenous religions to be subsumed and incorporated into a common faith held by nearly all those encompassed within the territorial boundaries. (Smith, 2003: 212) Catholicism has had a “key and generally hidden role in the system of symbols that define the national.” (Luengo, 1993: 85) However, whether based on Marxian ideas that posed all religion as an obstacle to be overcome to achieve progress and ultimately emancipation, and Catholicism in particular as part of the ideological superstructure of a backward, pre-capitalist mode of production, or perhaps influenced by Weberian ideas that attributed the economic welfare of the West to the Protestant ethics, the revolutionary project sought at first to forge a secular national state. As mentioned in chapter one, this led to the Cristera war, which the government won in military terms, but lost ideologically. What ensued was a compromise with the Church, whereby it acquiesced to retaining a somewhat privileged position while not pursuing its challenge to the authority of the government any further. Although all the laws that were promulgated against the church remained in place, they were largely ignored. (Muro, 1994: 15)

But more than a mere mutually reinforcing power-share, this apparently unlikely alliance between the recalcitrant Jacobins and the Church is to be understood as a key identity-making boundary, for while frequent appeals to ‘Christianity’ are found in discourses on politics today, with ‘Christianity’ opposed to ‘Islam,’ at the time the Church rather served to break up the potentially unifying ‘Christianity’ into the Mexican Catholic and the American Protestant.¹²⁹ In other words, the Catholic Church provided an additional but crucial dimension to the political discourse that the revolutionaries constructed in

¹²⁹ Efforts to develop a European identity for instance draw on Europe’s common Christian heritage —although in its present, secular form— as unifying.

opposition to Díaz. They provided a social dimension in opposition to the Americans, at that time the most relevant Others. The Church provided a space in which to perform some of the ritualistic aspects of nationalism, for instance festivities —the day of the dead, posadas, etc.— around which time and work were organised and whence their meaning derived. Moreover, inasmuch as the Church was an interest group and a strong institution, educating and forming cadres and mediating between the state and society, it assumed a variety of roles that were vital for the stability of the regime. Mexican nationalism became a “secular religion,” or what Smith calls “neo-traditional,” in that it subordinated religion as a key component of the nation. (Smith, 2003: 13) Thus a symbiotic relationship between the upper hierarchy of the Church and the political leadership began then, and the situation did not change until the Salinas administration further devolved the Church all its earlier privileges and openly restored to it the condition of a legitimate political actor.

Several explanations were put forward by political analysts to try to account for these seemingly inchoate actions of President Salinas. To try to legitimate the power of the Catholic Church when it was already exerting enough within the constraints of the dominant arrangements seemed to be totally antagonistic to the North American re-definition of the national identity he and his faction of the elite sought. Although this set of reforms was presented as in line with the broader objectives of enhancing freedom and democracy in the country, and thus not in opposition to the neoliberal project but a requisite for it, traditional explanations stressed instead the need of an extremely unpopular president who had clearly lost the election to draw legitimacy and support from the Church, a support that he obtained in exchange for the constitutional reforms that restored the Church its former privileges. (Alemán, 2002a; Barranco, 2002; Loaeza, 2002a) Either way, since then the Church has participated actively and openly in the political life of the country, mostly to promote the interests of those factions within the PAN that back it up, and of the far right. In some areas it has also given support to emerging social movements. In sharp contrast with the low profile it kept after the Cristera war, it has literally ‘gone on strike’ and closed down the Churches as part of its involvement in political campaigns of the PAN. The

Church also began to take over a number of the ritualistic and performative dimensions of the national identity that used to be within the exclusive domain of the state, for instance controversially singing the national anthem at the end of a service by Archbishop Rivera at the Cathedral in Mexico City and presiding over ceremonies to worship the flag. President Fox added to these controversial actions when he bowed and kissed the Pope's ring during the Pontiff's most recent visit to the country. There are various interpretations however as to the extent that this very much increased participation should be regarded as proof of the power and influence of the Church in the political and social life of Mexico now and on the extent to which it still operates as a difference marker within the national identity.

Contending Interpretations

Those who argue that the Church is indeed powerful and that its influence is very considerable point to the mobilising power of the Pope, who during his first visit drew twenty million people to see him. His very active conservative Papacy has presided over a true revival of Catholicism in the country, crucially including the turning of Indian Juan Diego, to whom the Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared according to the myth, into a saint in 2002. The Basilica of Guadalupe comes second only to Mecca as the most visited holy place in the world, continuing to attract around fifteen million pilgrims every year. (Orozco, 2003) The Church network is ample and very responsive: five days after the earthquake in 1985 they had raised USD\$ 850,000 in an independent trust; a month later, the figure was USD\$3 million. 88.9 per cent of the population declare themselves Catholic, and although that figure is down from the early 1990s, the decline is only 1.38 per cent in twelve years. Protestantism has increased by 0.27 in the same period. (INEGI, 2002: 23; Luengo, 1993: 113-160) They also point to the Church's ability to cut across social class and age divisions, with a small but very influential minority of the upper classes completely committed to its project —

some in fact now serving in President Fox's Cabinet— and many teenagers among the ranks of a few of the most fundamentalist movements.¹³⁰

They see evidence of the Church's influence in the successful attempts at censorship it has led: museums have been closed down and directors forced to resign after allowing exhibitions that are deemed controversial, works of art have been destroyed or stolen and television programmes have been forced into self-censorship.¹³¹ (Vargas et al., 2000; Manrique, 1997) Finally, they point to the apparent validity of the Catholic ethical code for most of the population: 70 per cent of those who get married have a religious wedding as well, and many more seek to baptise their children and impart sacraments to the dying. (Luengo, 1993: 130) The majority are rather conservative with regards to moral attitudes, particularly sexual mores and the role of women, although they do not uphold the Church's policies on contraception. In International Relations, discourses on world politics attempting to account for the rise of religion in politics—and for overlapping authorities in a given territory— drew on the metaphor of a 'neo-medieval revival' involving the shifting of loyalties and identities. (Falk, 2000)

¹³⁰ Minister for Labour Carlos Abascal is the son of Salvador Abascal, who was until his death in 2000 a prominent Member of the Movement that fought the Cristera war and sought to put in place a regime equivalent to that of Franco's Spain. (Martínez, 2002) Carlos Abascal, who pursued studies at the Institute for Business Administrators IPADE, an institution closely linked to Opus Dei, is also said to be an advisor to Cardinal Norberto Rivera. Minister for Development Josefina Vazquez is also an IPADE alumna, while Head of the National Commission for Human Rights José Luis Soberanes is another member of Opus Dei. In general, Opus Dei is strong in Mexico, where approximately 10 per cent of its 85,000 members are located, all among the upper class. The creator of the Order, Spaniard Jose Maria Escrivá de Balaguer, was turned into a Saint by Pope John Paul II in 1990. (Román, 2002)

¹³¹ In 1987 conservative groups backed by the Church shut down the Museum for Contemporary Art in Mexico City because one of the paintings in an exhibition depicted the Virgin Mary with the face and breasts of Marilyn Monroe, while another one showed Jesus Christ with a Pedro Infante face. In Aguascalientes in 1997 an exhibition of photographs by Carlos Llamas was postponed and some photos were stolen because they were deemed 'immoral,' while theatre play *Violation to Intimacy* was banned in Hidalgo in the same year on the same grounds. In August 2002, Yolanda Carvajal, director of the "Jose Luis Cuevas" Museum in Mexico City, resigned after she failed to ban the exhibition of a painting entitled *La Patrona*, depicting a naked Virgin. The painting was torn to pieces while on display the opening day, an action applauded by Cardinals Rivera and Sandoval. In other cities also governed by the PAN, attempts have been made to ban mini-skirts. (Manrique, 1997; Vargas et al., 2000) As for television, the Mexican version of Big Brother faced a massive withdrawal of publicity and, although after considerable struggle it was allowed to go on air, it was substantially 'toned down.'

On the other hand, those who regard the importance of the Church as declining and its influence as very limited point to the low levels of attendance to Sunday service; the decline in 'callings' to priesthood and life in convent; the low rate of priests available with regards to the population; the moral crisis that the church is facing world-wide, with scandals of paedophilia, and in Mexico with the links between the Church and the drug barons exposed in the news as well. (Loaeza, 2002) Before the canonisation of Juan Diego, controversy was fuelled in May 1996, when Guillermo Schulenberg, the Abbot at the Basílica de Guadalupe, declared the Virgin of Guadalupe had never existed, but had been an instrument for the domination of the Indians by the Spaniards. Although the Abbot was immediately pronounced mentally ill and parted from his temple, his declarations exposed deep divisions at the heart of the top hierarchy, at the moment said to be undergoing a fierce competition given the increasingly deteriorating health of the Pope. The Church also failed to boycott the exhibition of *The Crime of Father Amaro*, a film widely regarded as highly critical of the institution in Mexico, despite a very thorough campaign ran with the aid of various conservative groups in civil society, some of whom even called to violence.¹³² Although not necessarily reliable, surveys conducted throughout the country after the film was shown indicated a vast majority of the population disapproved of the active political stance of the Church. (Rodríguez, 2003) Finally, the point is made that modernity, understood as the loss of authority in general, the weakening of family relations in decision-making, the loss of customs and traditions and the professionalisation of roles previously taken on by the Church with the emergence of psychologists, counsellors, charities, etc. have negatively affected the position of the Church. Inasmuch as it is true that "belief withdraws from a myth and leaves it almost intact, but without any role, transformed into a document," the Church would now have turned into a mere museum that displays the nostalgic reminiscence of itself. (De Certeau, 1984: 181) Moreover, some argue, the apparent comeback the Church has made since the Salinas reforms returned its power and privileges can be explained away if it is interpreted within the

¹³² Except for one city in the very religious state of Michoacán. The film is discussed on chapter four, "the challenge on film."

framework of postmodernity, which in ascribing science to the category of a metanarrative has also allowed formerly derided religion the same status.¹³³ (Luengo, 1993: 1-14)

But both those who maintain that the Church is a leading force in contemporary Mexican politics and those who hold instead that its real influence is very little are at pains when trying to account for the continued support the Church has received from presidents Salinas, Zedillo, and most decidedly from Fox. If a need to obtain legitimacy was the reason that led Salinas to devolve to it power and privileges as received explanations would have it, that does not account for the reasons of Zedillo and Fox, who boasted reasonable margins at the presidential elections. This is especially puzzling in the case of Fox. The Party that brought him to power is internally divided between the traditional Conservatives in favour of the nationalist project endorsed by the Church, different from the revolutionary nationalism only in that they wish to undermine the secular basis of the state, and those who favour instead the re-definition of the national identity along North-American lines. While appearing in the beginning as willing to pursue the latter project, he has instead promoted, it is speculated that for personal reasons, the interests of the Church. I would contend however there is an alternative, discursive way to attempt to account for the role of the Church in contemporary Mexican politics, and more specifically on the national identity.

A Discursive Interpretation

First, it must be acknowledged that, inasmuch as 'the Church' as a centre of power was, during the PRI era, part and parcel of the ruling elite, the schism that split the elite into the tradition-seeking nationalists and the modernising technocrats also allowed for the signifier 'the Church' to be split into two contending versions of the meaning of Mexican Catholicism. As the formerly solid PRI hegemony fractured and political projects emerged contending for power, a faction of 'the Church' became attached to the project led by the

¹³³ It must be said that others contest the link between modernity and secularism, and postmodernity and 'disbelief in metanarratives,' since the United States is supposed to have been modern and religious, while presumably it is now post-modern and still religious.

Zapatistas, which could broadly be described as ‘progressist’ and ‘the left,’ while another faction, now unhindered by the constitutional reforms, openly sided with the PAN, which, although itself split into a number of factions, can broadly be described as ‘the Conservatives’ or ‘the right.’ Let us first see how this schism was constructed discursively.¹³⁴

Although Liberation Theology is a Latin American movement often traced back to 1971, when Dominican Father Gustavo Gutiérrez from Peru first published his book of that title, it was not until the 1980s that it lent intellectual support to the faction of the Mexican Catholic Church that attempted to graft Catholicism within the discursive chain led by the Zapatistas. (Gutiérrez, 1988) A group of priests with parishes in the southeast not only endorsed Zapatismo, but became in fact its most ardent advocates, setting themselves in opposition both to the Vatican—with the exception of Nuncio Justo Mullor, who was decidedly a sympathiser of Chiapas Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the Zapatistas—and to the Party leaders, on the side of ‘the people.’ (Harvey, 1998: 228) Liberation Theology was also successful in the dioceses of Cuernavaca, Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez, Tehuantepec and Hermosillo. (Muro, 1994: 16) They used the same discursive strategies as the Zapatistas, namely an exclusive ‘we’ in all cases; the passive voice to refer to acts of the government, rendering them into impersonal processes; the establishment of a link of equivalence between ‘modernity,’ ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘evil,’ while in opposition to this they placed ‘the movement,’ legitimated by its historical links with the Spanish priests that had defended the Indians at the time of the conquest, and equivalent to ‘the people.’ Samuel Ruíz, then Bishop of Chiapas and a leader of the movement, declared in a letter to the Pope:

“On the face of the challenges posed by modernity and the cruelty of neoliberalism, which we have experienced directly, we raise our voice along with the prophets,’ to say that the poverty generated by this lacking is an evil, and it is totally against the will of God.” (Ruíz, 1993)

¹³⁴ Although the political project sponsored by the modernisers is apparently in power, it is far more debatable to what extent it in fact has power: none of the key government initiatives has been passed by Congress in four years.

In the same letter, he expressed his wish to form “an autochthonous Church...which finds expression in [the people’s] culture, which enriches itself from their values.” (Ibid) An instance of how this was attempted in practice would be the application of the biblical exodus to the specific case of displacement suffered by various Indigenous communities, who could then interpret the Bible as making reference to them directly, and use this to legitimate the re-colonisation of the zones where they relocated. (Leyva, 1998: 41) Ruíz then established a frontier between the Vatican and the Church he represented, by placing the former in a chain of equivalence with the —illegitimate— political elite:

“The Church has, at various times, wisely complied with its prophetic mission. However, at other times it became mundane, legitimating the colonial or the independent state’s governments, or enjoying privileges it was thereon granted to attain property and power. Our local Church, marked by the evangelical faith of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, has chosen in recent decades to occupy its rightful place at the margins of society, side by side with its poorest members.” (Ruíz, Ibid)

Compare this with representative of Opus Dei in Mexico, Monsignor Rafael Fiol Mateos’ call to reach sainthood via the delivery of top quality performance at work:

“If all of us Mexicans resolved to avoid mediocrity we would see the indicators of competitiveness and other indicators of the quality of work rise. And those who, according to their faith, decided to offer their work to God, the nurse or the peasant, the electrician, the businessman, the housewife or the lawyer, would be contributing to their own sainthood, because sainthood is not ‘only’ to work, but to work for the love of God and our fellow men. ‘Sainthood’ is a word that has been misunderstood for centuries.” (Fiol, 2003)

Elsewhere in his same piece Monsignor Fiol also quotes US former Treasurer of Mexican origin Rosario Marín as an example of what it means to be a “successful” Catholic. Marín renounced to her job in George W. Bush’s government in order to run for the US Senate for the state of California in 2004. While Monsignor Fiol’s interpretation of the meaning of (Mexican) Catholicism—the pursuit of sainthood via work, preferably leading to the United States—

may be shared by some of the Catholic members of the upper class in the far right, so far it is the view put forward by Samuel Ruíz that has found echo in the majorities.

But to account for the contradictory interpretations of the role of the Church in contemporary politics it is not enough to acknowledge that the institution, like the PRI, was divided after the fall of the Soviet Union and that among the factions there is a struggle for the meaning of Catholicism, so as to graft it within the contending projects they espouse.¹³⁵ There is also a struggle on the meaning of 'the nation' and nationalism, for just as the particular Catholicism practised in Mexico became a cohesive force in the development of the national identity, the Mexican Church equally derived its power from being recognised as 'our' Church, and from being 'threatened' by a 'hostile' government. The Charisma of the Pope and his continuous efforts to revive the faith would not have resonated nearly as much were the Catholic religion viewed as an import from either 'the Vatican' or 'Europe,' and aided by a government at times viewed as corrupt and unjust. The Salinas reforms, therefore, in granting a higher profile to the Church, in making its overwhelming importance visible, also exposed it to be undermined, rendering it vulnerable. But while for Theologians of Liberation there is no contradiction in their interpellating the people as Mexican from within the revolutionary nationalism discourse, since as discussed above Zapatistas seek to restore this project, only becoming the 'true inheritors' of the revolution, the Church on the right too must interpellate 'Mexican Catholics' from within the revolutionary nationalism discourse —that is, a Mexicanity ethnically based on Indian ancestors and antagonistic to the United States— as it is from this that they too derive their power. Archbishop Rivera knew this when he said, in relation to Schulenberg's declarations: "the controversy generated around the *milagro Guadalupeño* has unmasked those who would like to see the country divided, without faith, without hope, devoid of patriotic symbols and in danger of being absorbed by alien cultures and alien powers." (Guarneros, 1996) And Cristeros

¹³⁵ Again, paradoxically, the fall of the Soviet Union deprived the Pope of a valuable enemy against whom he built part of his stature as a statesman in the West during the 1980s.

before the Cardinal had already denounced Liberals as “Yankee-phillic” and “un-Mexican.” (Martínez, 2002)

To sum up, the Church is internally divided and thus not only do ‘its’ actions appear as contradictory, but ‘it’ also appears to be drawing support—and attacks— from unexpected, contending interest groups in a currently dislocated society. The Mexican people that the Church has interpellated as ‘the faithful’ since Cárdenas consolidated the revolutionary project have become very heterogeneous, due to the reasons discussed in the introduction to the chapter and of course to the dislocation itself. Moreover, although the Church was in the beginning mostly the institutionalisation of a religious discourse, it acquired during modernity and its co-existence with other discourses various social dimensions. All these factors render its influence uneven among the high percentage of the population that declare themselves Catholic. Finally, the Catholic Church in Mexico was instrumental in the forging of the national identity and is by its very nature committed to the revolutionary nationalism sponsored and promoted by the PRI. The most evident obstacle the Liberation Theologians face to succeed in articulating their meaning for Mexican Catholicism is that ‘the Other’ against whom the discourse they need to rely on has also changed. On the other hand, the greatest challenge faced by the conservative faction of the clergy is to be able to support the group within the PAN that seeks to redefine the Mexican identity as North-American, perhaps by appealing to ‘Christianity’ instead of ‘Catholicism,’ or, less likely, by seeking that religion is not one of the boundaries used in the establishment of an identity.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ An alternative account to the one I have put forward here conceives of the Mexican Catholic Church as simply attempting to survive in an increasingly secularising society, thus tending to side with whichever happened to be the hegemonic group: for as long as the political system was not seriously challenged, it sided with the elite, while in those areas where ‘the right’ is now hegemonic Opus Dei and Legions of Christ dominate, and in the areas where there is a majority of organised resistance such as Chiapas the ‘pastoral line’ adopted Liberation Theology strategies. (Muro, 1994) This hypothesis is persuasive, but it fails to address the link between the Church and national identity, which can be accounted for through discourse analysis.

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The Challenge on Film: 1989-2002

The last section of chapter two was dedicated to the analysis of, on the one hand, the interpellation that national cinema did of subjects as Mexican, among other ways, through the provision of persuasive representations for identification, and on the other, to the positions created for Mexico as represented on Hollywood films during the Cold War, oscillating between a developing member of the West and a trustworthy ally, and a communist or a cultural/ethnic threat in the making. Likewise, we will now turn to films produced and consumed after the end of the Cold War to provide evidence of the challenges to the hegemonic discourse that constituted the identity and which have been dealt with throughout chapters three and four.

In short, I have argued that the end of the Cold War radically challenged the hegemonic discourse in that it did away with the sets of oppositions that in most contexts invested meaning to 'Mexicanity.' This threatened, to varying degrees, existing political and social institutions as well as ethnic and religious basis of the identity. But this also posed an opportunity to re-frame the relation between Mexico and the United States in terms of complementarity rather than antagonism. Although film production of the past decade is vast and not free from fragmentation and contradiction, there is evidence of both the challenges posed and the opportunities involved in three sets of films: first, there were those Hollywood films which presented alternative representations of Mexicans, especially as regards migration, their role in drug traffic control and their involvement in the economy. Then there were those Mexican films that sought to present Mexico as already belonging in the West, that is, as industrialised and developed, and as a country whose Christian heritage still informs social values and ethics but is mostly devoid of religious fervour. And finally, there are those films that sought to undermine the legitimacy of the political system, and to a lesser extent the Church since it too belonged in the PRI alliance, calling for democratisation. We will now discuss these three sets of films in turn.

The View from Hollywood: Representations of Supplimentarity

As explained in chapter two, Hollywood enjoyed throughout the Cold War a privileged position as a manufacturer and disseminator of representations, and this position was strengthened when the Cold War came to an end, as it enabled the same sort of vertical integration of the industry that had originally taken place domestically to take place world-wide, with Hollywood becoming a major stake holder in the production, distribution and especially the exhibition of films through the 'multiplex' system, albeit to varying extents in the different geographical regions. (Balio, 2003: 58) The balance between domestic and foreign revenues shifted in the US film industry throughout the 1990s towards a ratio of 40:60 and even 30:70 for some blockbusters produced with the international market in mind. (Chapman, 2003: 152) This trend would have been aided by the fact that films were negotiated as industrial rather than cultural products under NAFTA, which gave Hollywood far more access to the Mexican film market, worth approximately USD\$ 360 million in ticket sales annually.¹³⁷ (Sánchez and Ugarte, 2000) Today, about 60 per cent of all new films screened every year are American, and more importantly, they are shown on 75 per cent of all theatres for much longer periods of time than the national production. Although there are 122 distributors in the country, 90 per cent of the highest grossing films were all distributed by just 3 enterprises, two of them American.¹³⁸ (Sánchez-Ruíz, 1997) It may be because of this that after the signing of NAFTA, representations of Mexicans increased slightly in number and were generally regarded as less negative. (Wood, 2002) By 1989 the view of depictions on television, also applicable to film was that:

¹³⁷ Although around 150 million tickets are reportedly sold in Mexico annually, these are cheap compared to other countries, costing around USD\$3.70 in 2000. In the same year, tickets in the US and Japan cost around USD\$9, while the world average price was USD\$6. (Estrada, 2003; Sánchez and Ugarte, 2000)

¹³⁸ United International Pictures, Columbia and Videocine, account for the distribution of 91.73 per cent of all films. (Sánchez-Ruíz, 1997) In Mexico it is estimated that distributors receive approximately 40 per cent of every dollar spent on tickets, while producers get about 12 per cent. (Estrada, 2003)

“...we are entering a new era. US Latinos now star as admirable Hispanic characters in television dramatic series: Edward James Olmos as a stalwart, astute police lieutenant Martin Castillo in *Miami Vice*, for example, and Jimmy Smits as slick, articulate lawyer Victor Sifuentes in *L.A. Law*.” (Cortés, 1989: 117)

It would thus seem that apart from NAFTA, another factor driving the change is the growing Hispanic population, on the one hand, as consumers. Historically, Chicanos have been assiduous movie-goers, since films provided the opportunity “to escape from their hard and often oppressive world, [while at the same time allowing] them to keep the culture, values and Mexican traditions within the community, including the Spanish language. Films effectively fought assimilationist trends.” (Maciel, 1966: 165) They also provided alternative “history lessons,” compensating for the neglect with which the official curriculum treated the Chicano Mexican heritage. (Ibid) All Mexican stars paid visits to theatres in the US, especially the *Million Dollar* in Los Angeles. In fact, attending cinema was a distinctive way to partake in the community: early on, politicians and personnel from the consulates were often invited to the opening night, and theatres were adorned with the Mexican flag. Audience participation and reaction to the films was very high. (Iglesias, 1999: 242-244) And although Mexican films dealing with Chicanos were not always shown, for they tended to reflect the resentment felt in Mexico against its migrants, whole new genres dealing with the border developed in order to cater for this particular segment of the population. At present, with 37 million citizens —13 per cent of the total population—, Hispanics are now the United States’ largest ‘minority’ and the fastest growing, increasingly becoming a market of a considerable size.¹³⁹ 25 million of them are of Mexican origin. (Census, 2000)¹⁴⁰ Thus more favourable depictions could simply be the result of a need to adapt to the tastes and demands of the expanding market in Mexico and the emerging market in the US, in the search for profit: the

¹³⁹ The American population of Hispanic origin is said to grow at a rate five times higher than that of the white population and other minorities. (Valenzuela, 1999: 289)

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, persons of Mexican ancestry in the United States outnumber those of French, Polish and Scottish ancestry, ranking after those of English, German, Irish and Italian origin. (Russell, 1994: 326)

careful balance between repetition and innovation that characterises genre films would thus tilt towards innovation as regards the roles of Hispanics. Moreover, research on content analysis has identified cinematic representations of minorities in Hollywood films as going through four stages: at first they are ignored, then ridiculed, then they appear in regulatory roles and finally on roles of equality. (Herrera and Ballesteros, 2001) It would thus seem that Chicanos are currently undergoing the third stage.

One such instance would be *Stand and Deliver*. (Menéndez, 1988) The film is based on the 'real' story of Jaime Escalante, played by Chicano actor and activist Edward James Olmos. Originally from Bolivia where he is now retired, professor Escalante taught mathematics in Garfield High School, an east-end Los Angeles school with little material resources, where he led a group of disadvantaged and under-performing Chicano students with a very limited competence in mathematics to achieve remarkable success in their advanced placement exams on calculus. The racist authorities refused to accept the results, accusing them of cheating. The students decide to take the test again, closely guarded by dedicated invigilators, and again pass with the highest marks. They — and the educational system — are vindicated. Interspersed with complimentary remarks on the students' Maya ancestors 'who invented the zero' and 'contributed enormously' to advance our knowledge of mathematics, and with sub-plots depicting the many hardships the students must face at home to be able to pursue their studies, the film was hugely successful and for many years became a staple in high school classes and faculty workshops. In fact Mr. Escalante's class was visited even by such celebrities as former President George Bush.

On the other hand, it is not only as consumers that Hispanics may be driving the change. Some Chicanos have themselves become cultural producers reaching beyond the marginal scope they used to be allowed and into the mainstream. Among them, film directors such as Robert Rodríguez (*El Mariachi*: 1992, *Desperado*: 1995, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*: 2003) and Gregory Nava (*El Norte*: 1984; *My Family/Mi Familia*: 1995, produced by Coppola; *Selena*: 1997) have directed films which, although conforming to Hollywood's traditional codes, display further polysemy than usual, i.e. tell more ambiguous stories, and

thus offer more alternatives for viewers to engage with the films and negotiate meanings. In *El Mariachi*, for example, a kind of homage paid to Quentin Tarantino, Rodríguez goes beyond mere polysemy and actually reverses stereotypes. It is a fight between good and evil, there is the bad guy and the hero, there is technology versus tradition. But it is the 'gringo' who is the drug dealer and the hero who is Mexican, and what makes him a hero is not being strong nor handsome but being educated and having an artistic sensitivity. He does not even smoke nor drink, which makes him a kind of anti-macho hero. Technology, in the form of electronic keyboards, sound equipment and other gadgets is the source of evil, as it is the cause that this traditional Mariachi fails in his attempts to find a job, when all he wants to do is play the guitar and sing, 'as his father and his grandfather had done before him.' Although Columbia did agree to distribute the film after signing in Rodríguez for a major two film contract, *El Mariachi* was deemed "stunning but unmarketable" because it differed too much from viewers expectations and would likely result in a box-office dud. (Ramírez-Berg, 1996: 119) It was thus remade so that it became 'less ethnic' and was sold through the video and DVD market together with its remake, *Desperado*.

But it is perhaps the work of Luis Valdéz that best exemplifies the discursive transition I argue Chicanos have been undergoing: from the story of estrangement and isolation told in films such as *Zootsuit* (1982) —and others with titles like *Please don't Bury me Alive* (Gutiérrez, 1976) and *Roots of Blood*, (Treviño: 1977)— it goes full circle to tell a mainstream triumph story in *La Bamba*, (1987) itself about a Chicano singer, Ricardo Valenzuela, who pursued and attained the American dream, becoming rich and famous. The film was a commercial success. (Noriega, 1992: 147) Back in 1987, when Valdéz was criticised in Mexico for *La Bamba*, he retorted: "I am Indian and a peasant, but I am North American too because I belong in the twentieth century." (García-Riera, 1990: 139) Needless to say, a film such as *La Bamba* would hardly draw any criticism in Mexico today. Apart from Chicano directors, the work of academics and film critics such as Professors Charles Ramírez Berg, Chon Noriega, David Maciel, and Chicana feminist Rosalinda Fregoso has also added to the importance

of 'Chicano Cinema,' now a field of research in its own right. (Ramírez-Berg, 1996; Noriega, 1996; Maciel, 2001; Fregoso, 1996)

Other favourable representations of Mexicans have come from Mexican directors and actors who joined Hollywood during the 1990s. *Like Water for Chocolate* (Arau: 1992) presented a romanticised vision of a rural Mexico from the times of the revolution, readily packaged for the consumption of 'tradition,' including recipes of local dishes. As a film made with the international market in mind, it was careful not to alienate its Mexican audience. (Tenenbaum, 1997: 162) Although this was an instance of constructing 'the Other' through idealisation in the fashion of those films mentioned in chapter two, what is different this time is that this is being done by Mexicans and that the aim is to provide a certain — sizeable— segment of the American public, namely the more conservative, a representation of Mexicans they can identify with: according to critics, American audiences, especially women, liked the film because it evoked in them

“a baffled nostalgia for a time when mothers really mattered and women's work was defined differently than it is today, when dinner all too often for all too many comes from a box and satisfies only the most elemental hunger. There is something alluring for them about a solid family tradition, according to which children live at home until marriage and do not move so far away they cannot come back for Sunday dinner every week.” (Tenenbaum, 1997: 171)¹⁴¹

Other Mexican directors also successful in Hollywood have been Alfonso Cuarón (*Great Expectations*: 1998; *Harry Potter*: 2004), Luis Mandoki (*Message in a Bottle*: 1999) and horror movie specialist Guillermo Del Toro (*Cronos*: 1992; *The Devil's Backbone*: 2001). However only Cuarón has dealt with representations of Mexico and Mexicans in films such as *Sólo con tu Pareja* (1991), the comedy that initiated the yuppie cycle discussed below, and *Y tu*

¹⁴¹ Some Hollywood films have featured Mexican maids which stand for strong family values, and the children they care for become strongly attached to them. Such was the case in *Irreconcilable Differences* (Shyer: 1984), *Another Man's Child* (Erman: 1983), *Goonies* (Donner: 1985) and *The Believers* (Schlesinger: 1987). (García-Riera, 1990: 108)

Mamá También (2001), a sort of road movie and travelogue that received some very positive critiques.

Apart from the more noticeable presence of Chicanos and Mexicans in Hollywood, even some American directors display the same shift in their representations of Mexicans, a shift consistent with the attempt to re-graft signifiers in new discursive chains that I maintain has been taking place. In 1987 Robert Redford directed *The Milagro Beanfield War*, a story about the struggle of the (Chicano) poor against an almighty corporation, where the poor win. Julie Taymore recently directed *Frida* (Taymore: 2002) on the life of Mexican and nationalist painter Frida Kahlo, featuring Mexican actress Salma Hayek.¹⁴² As was the case in *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Frida* too contributed to the 'othering' of the Mexican identity through the strategy of idealisation, selling similarly packaged 'ethnicity' and 'tradition.' However, the fact that Mexico is posed as a site of 'culture' and 'high art' breaks with the pattern of Mexico as 'nature' in opposition to (American) 'civilisation,' and has roles for Mexicans other than greasers, bandits and drug dealers. Other films display a similar polysemy to that of Chicano and Mexican directors, and confirm the hypothesis put forward in this thesis: what makes Mexicans and Mexican-American 'better characters' in Hollywood recently is the fact that they are conceived of as supplementary to the US instead of antagonistic, as will become evident from *Traffic* (Soderbergh, 2000) and *Bread and Roses* (Loach: 2000) discussed below.

Traffic

Because it is a film about drug-trafficking, this film's very release is a contribution to 'writing' this issue as a problem that needs to be addressed, and as one where Mexico has an utmost importance. What is more, in its bid for realism, the film blurs the distinction between 'documentary' and 'entertainment':

¹⁴² Earlier attempts to take Frida to the screen had failed as the choice of actress became politicised: "When Luis Valdéz selected Laura San Giacomo to play the lead in *Frida and Diego*, Latino actors and actresses in Los Angeles protested vehemently...accusing the Chicano director of selling out and of replicating Hollywood practices of marginalisation." Although Valdéz defended his choice when he replied "Who is to say what determines a Latino identity if we start counting drops of blood?" referring to Frida's German father, eventually he abandoned the project. (Stock, 1999: 269)

California Democrat Senator Barbara Boxer, directly involved in the debate at the time, makes a cameo in the film and both the director Steven Soderbergh and screenwriter Stephen Gaghan gave interviews admitting they had had experiences with drugs, the latter stating he had used his previous experience as an addict to add layers to one of the characters —Caroline, the judge's daughter. (Mitchell, 2001; Schaefer, 2001) This contributed to the writing of drug trafficking as a problematic link between the US and Mexico from two perspectives simultaneously: the discourse of popular culture, reflecting but also actively crafting widely spread beliefs and values, and the supposedly more authoritative discourse of institutionally-sanctioned knowledge, i.e. that of experts and of those with first-hand, unmediated experience.

Adapted by Bill Patterson from a 1989 six-hour BBC mini-series whose plot took place in Asia, Europe and the UK, *Traffic* transposes the action to the United States and Mexico. It tells different versions of the story of the 'war on drugs' from three different perspectives: that of the newly appointed anti-drug tsar, a former judge with an impeccable record whose daughter is herself a drug-addict, that of the naïve wife of a dealer who is being tried for trafficking, and that of an honest Mexican policeman, doing his best to fight the cartels almost by himself, despite facing many shortcomings. Although these stories only tangentially intersect, it becomes clear that they are really the same story, one whose referents in 'real-life' are found in the cases of mafia drug baron Amado Carrillo, said to have died during a plastic surgery operation, the Tijuana and the Juárez cartels, and the controversial arrest in February 1997 of the Mexican anti-drugs tsar, General Juan Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, under drug dealing and corruption charges.

Traffic is a heist crime, thus all the elements comprising the genre that needed to be iterated were duly included: the film can be read as a typical Hollywood mainstream film, posing at the outset a conflict which needs to be resolved through violence, telling the story of a fight between good and evil, where the actions of mostly male heroes is required, specially that of the white, upper class American, to bring about the happy ending. Hollywood being an industry where the star system is used in the process of marketing particular stars

appealing to specific target audiences, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones in the leading roles connoted the escapist experience of the traditional thriller they often feature in.¹⁴³ (Dyer, 1983) And this is in many ways what the film is all about.

Indeed, the film reinforces conventional wisdom and stereotypes, and in general conforms to the version of Mexico as drawing its meaning from its opposition to the United States in many ways. From the very beginning, when introducing the settings, the film establishes an opposition between nature and civilisation, i.e. between Mexico and the US: through a sepia filter similar to the colour of early photographs, thus connoting backwardness and decay, Mexico is introduced as a wild, dry, dusty, deserted landscape, where the law is about to be broken, not only by criminals themselves but also by those in charge of fighting crime, namely the Mexican army —when ‘confiscating’ the drugs, they even steal the policemen’s handcuffs! This is in sharp contrast with the way the United States is introduced: filtered through a blue light, connoting modernity and cool detachment, we are taken to a Court of Justice, where a criminal is being tried and, despite being rich and influential and thus benefiting from the defence of a top class lawyer, he is being rebuffed; no place for corruption here, justice is being done. In addition, while the United States is Ohio, California and Washington D.C., Mexico is only the border city of Tijuana, and briefly and remotely —only in one scene— Mexico City. And while we are introduced to places in the US via shots that show facades frontally from the ground level perspective, thus including the spectator in the scene from the beginning, Mexico City is introduced via a trip, from above, from a helicopter, objectifying it while putting the viewer in a position of power in relation to it. Monstrously huge as it is, once it has been sepia-filtered and quickly panned through by the camera it is possible for the judge in the helicopter —and for us as the audience, since it is him we are meant to identify with— to tame its threat and to gain control over it.

¹⁴³ In the case of Michael Douglas, there is also a history of involvement in conveying social messages through films. In 1987 he starred in Oliver Stone’s criticism of the greedy aspects of capitalism in the film *Wall Street*, albeit in the villain role, and he is a campaigner for the abolition of nuclear weapons, a registered charity in the US which he sponsors. He was also named “UN messenger for peace” by Koffi Annan in July 1998. See <http://www.michaeldouglas.com>

When dealing with characters, the film fares no better. While most Mexican characters are rather caricatured, conveyed mostly through dressing and props, the American characters are presented with more depth. The Mexican general, a bald, brute, insensitive, tough man, capable of torture and murder, with scars and tics, whose idea of treatment is that the addicts ‘treat themselves’ — “eventually” he tells the judge “the addicts just overdose and then there is one less to care about”— is a synecdoche for the whole of the Mexican government: an authoritarian mockery of institutional order, the illegitimate authority of weapons easily turned against the people, existing only to aid and abet crime perpetrators, driven exclusively by greed and self-interest. Although it is acknowledged that there is one honest Mexican policeman, Javier Rodríguez, he is clearly meant as the exception rather than the rule.¹⁴⁴ Any American bad guys are either Latino or black —although some good guys are black as well—, and even when a Latino is cast as a good Mexican-American policeman, he is nonetheless a male chauvinist, who keeps on telling silly sexist jokes, and more than a bit stupid: there is a scene where he simply panics after a shooting and begins to shoot his gun quite recklessly, killing or wounding someone by mistake. He is sceptical about the drug dealer’s wife innocence, and on this he is more or less vindicated when the (Latino) wife, although forced by the circumstances, does enter the trafficking business herself. He is portrayed as dishonest, if in a harmless way, when he bets the wife is guilty and fails to return his partner’s change to a ten-dollar note. Finally, he also fails to realise the danger that lurks in the parking lot and gets killed while trying to get in the car where a bomb has been hidden. His black counterpart is far more clever, more efficient and committed, and even has a better sense of humour. The film is also negative to homosexuals, in that Frankie Flowers, a ruthless serial killer working for the drug lords, is a Latino gay and when he gets caught early in the film it is because he had attended a gay bar.

On the American side however, the judge is an honest, incorruptible, intelligent and sensitive man. He is also very virile: in the opening scene from

¹⁴⁴ The theme of the honest Mexican policeman dates back at least from Orson Wells’ *Touch of Evil* (1958), also made at a time when Hollywood was constructing Mexico as a reliable partner. So much so that the Mexican character was acted by an American: Charlton Heston. On this film ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are equally found in the US and Mexico.

Washington, a strong drink makes his black assistant cough, but the judge does not so much as blink. His daughter Caroline is not merely young, innocent and beautiful but also an achiever, popular, good in sports, who always comes top of her class. It is clear that here the judge is a synecdoche for the American government, strong, wise, institutional, loving and caring to its people and fully committed to their well-being, while his daughter is one of the American people in danger and in need of being rescued. The metaphor of the family, so dear to nationalism, and traditional gender roles are being here deployed to symbolise the relationship between the two, the government in the powerful, parenting position, the daughter as weak and dependent but respectful and right in leaving it all in the hands of her father. Of course why the daughter in such a happy family that has it all turns to drugs in the first place is in this case conveniently overlooked. The film also betrays its realist pretensions in its overly optimistic assessment of the daughter's speedy and unproblematic recovery, and she never appears to have really sunk that low in the first place.

How then could such an account be read as positing Mexico under any mildly favourable light, let alone in the position of a supplement? I contend that the key issue here, the one which crucially allows for a change in signifiers of Mexicanity to open up and signify something else, is that the very negative approach taken to the formerly hegemonic nationalist discourse of the PRI, represented here institutionally in the army, is diametrically opposed to a very positive approach taken towards the newly emerging post-PRI discourse, represented in the film by individual members of the civil society, that is, by the Mexican people as opposed to its institutions. While the authoritarianism and moral rot of the army is a metonymy for the whole post-revolutionary Mexican political system, portrayals of the people are far more generous —Javier's friend Manolo, who was originally going to help the DEA agents, albeit for money instead of for real concern regarding the drug problem, is nonetheless presented as a policeman who is not corrupt, as a loyal friend and a good husband. In the hour of his death, he regrets any wrongdoing, apparently sincerely, his thoughts are about dying with dignity and for his wife Ana. She too, is a trustworthy and decent young woman, caring and hardworking —in the film we see her

ironing¹⁴⁵— and who struggles hard to get by—in another scene, we see Javier carrying heavy water tanks to bring them to her small, poor flat.

Even Javier, a key character whose performance won actor Benicio de Toro an academy award for his role as best supporting actor, is more relevant as an honest man, since the police to which he belongs is almost as hopeless as the army itself and he ends up working for the DEA anyway. But Javier is there to do more than that: he is there to represent the new North American Mexico, one which shares common interests with the United States. In the opening scene, Javier is telling his friend Manolo about a nightmare he had the night before. His mother, he says, was drowning in front of his bed, and there was nothing he could do to help her. Given that both the United States and Mexico can be construed as drowning motherlands, in the film one in drugs and the other in corruption, and that what is relevant about Javier is his desire to fight the traffic, there is an ambiguity as to which of the two is Javier's mother: perhaps both. In a scene later on, Javier refuses bribes and makes it clear to the DEA agents that his only concern is "that children in Tijuana can be safe to continue playing baseball," that all-American sport. Finally, although he says he feels "like a traitor," he shares the insider information he has gained with the Americans both because it is the right and moral thing to do, i.e. the American youth is no different from the Mexican youth, and out of loyalty to his friend Manolo. More importantly, Javier's co-operation proves crucial, both for the success of the DEA operation and for the fall of corrupt members of the Mexican government.

But Javier's character is not the only way this position is laid for Mexico. During the cocktail party when Senator Boxer makes her appearance, the Mexican version that the best way to deal with 'the drug issue' is to focus on consumption rather than production is explicitly endorsed by various characters, while the views that 'a war on drugs' is the wrong metaphor and the need to construct the issue as a health problem and not as a crime problem are also voiced. Besides, at one point the judge himself draws a parallelism between Washington and the Third World—Calcutta, meaning Mexico by displacement—, saying he finds

¹⁴⁵ And in other household chores, as traditional gender roles are not challenged by the film.

them pretty similar at core, although with the difference that there is considerably more wealth in the US.

Geographically too, the physical border, when shown, is not the massive wall often described as the Berlin Wall of the Americas but a mere plate in the ground: it is small and round, and it has a parting down the middle: "United States" and "Mexico" can be read on the top and bottom respectively. The characters talk about the border actually disappearing after NAFTA. And in fact, what we are shown on screen is that crossing the border by car implies, at worst, no more than putting up with a bit of a traffic jam. Moreover the very fact that there are so many Mexican-American characters is itself indicative of the degree to which Mexico is part of the United States. There is the issue of language as well. Although more than a third of the film is in Spanish, it is not always translated. This one, too, is a language spoken in its own right in this part of the world.

Ultimately and despite its rather low budget, it is all these challenges to conventional meanings, this refusal to comply with the straightforward, Manichean repetition of received but increasingly outdated narratives what made *Traffic* different and innovative, what won it acclaim in the form of academy awards for Soderbergh and del Toro, and what made it a box office hit.¹⁴⁶ While before *Traffic* Soderbergh was merely characterised as an independent director whose work was of "widely varying quality," after *Traffic* his reputation was much improved. Recently he has been compared to Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman and Francis Ford Coppola for "crafting movies that deepened and advanced filmmaking" and he recently did a remake of Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. (Gilbey, 2003)

However, *Traffic* has so far been almost an isolated case, and although important, the contribution from Hollywood to the shaping of the discourse where Mexico is conceived as a supplement to the US is marginal when compared to the work of Chicanos and Mexican directors, critics and actors. It is evidence of a struggle to impose a discourse, rather than of any already hegemonic meanings.

¹⁴⁶ *Traffic* was made with 49 million dollars.

Bread and Roses

To those familiar with the work of Ken Loach, whether admirers or detractors, it might seem odd to include his *Bread and Roses* (2001) in a section dealing with Hollywood films. In fact, his work is often described as anti-Hollywood. Moreover, production for this film was wholly European, and it was far more successful here than in the United States. But since *Bread and Roses* is, as I will show here, a contribution to the writing of Mexico as a supplement to the US, equivalent to *Traffic* in many respects but with regards to migration, it is nonetheless appropriate to deal with it in the section devoted to Hollywood. Moreover, while not exactly ‘Hollywood’ in its choice of topic and the case it seeks to make, there are other ways, I shall argue, in which this film shares some aspects of the Hollywood product.¹⁴⁷

Based on the success of the 1990 “Justice for Janitors” strike at Century City, L.A., *Bread and Roses* is about the plight of Mexican —and Central American— illegal immigrants, told from the perspective of Maya, a girl who crosses the border with the help of her sister Rosa, who is herself married to an American and has lived in the US for some years. Maya joins her in her job as a cleaner in an office building belonging to Los Angeles entertainment-industry power brokers, where at USD\$5 an hour and no benefits, and forced to relinquish their first month pay as a ‘commission’ to the manager who hires them, they are thoroughly exploited. Soon she meets Sam, a union organiser who helps the janitors strike, and although they face some difficulties, by the end they succeed in obtaining a rise and benefits. The end is not completely a happy one though as

¹⁴⁷ This film shares a number of features with *Traffic*: it too is a docu-drama, albeit in the British social realism style that has been the hallmark of Loach. To this end, there are cameos, here by Benicio del Toro, Tim Roth and Ron Perlman who appear in a party scene meant to reflect the Hollywood environment. And equivalent to Douglas’ credentials to star on *Traffic*, leading actor Adrian Brody had previously participated on films about the plight of —Jewish— minorities suffering discrimination: he starred as Van Kurtzman in *Liberty Heights* (Levinson: 1999) and went on to win the Oscar for the best actor in a leading role for *The Pianist* (Polanski: 2002). Elpidia Carrillo too has starred in a number of films on the fate of Latin Americans, such as *The Border* (Richardson: 1982), *Salvador* (Stone: 1986) and *My Family/Mi Familia* (Nava: 1995). Finally, there is some influence of Loach in Sodenbergh, who used scenes from *Poor Cow* (Loach: 1967) as footage for his thriller *The Limey* (1999).

Maya, who had previously robbed a shop so that a fellow worker could attend Law School, is caught and deported.

The film got a mixed reception. On the one hand, critics and audiences ‘on the right’ quickly dismissed it as a predictable drama of class struggle, didactic in nature and using a standard formula: lovable working-class characters confront the faceless agents of corporate oppression, and win. It was “insultingly simplistic and overstated,” with “one-dimensional characters” and it presented conflicts stripped of all nuance. (Kehr, 2001; O’Hehir, 2001) Some critics also regarded it as an instance of “European anti-Americanism.” (Lurio, 2001) But beyond the arguments made on its artistic merits—or rather, the lack of them—all these critics held the view that the main premise on which the film built its case was simply wrong. There are no grounds, they argue, on which somebody who has broken the law should demand a minimum wage or benefits, nor join a union. In short, this audience subscribes to the narrative that regards Mexican migration as a crime-related phenomenon suffered by the United States, or “the unilateral benefit myth” as discussed in chapter three above.

On the other hand, most critics and audiences ‘on the left,’ including critics of the *New York Times*, praised the film in equally vehement terms, describing it as “an impassioned work of integrity,” making “a timely, powerfully persuasive case” and “a human drama of observation, insight, and great import.” (Wood, 2001; Scott, 2001) The work immigrants do in the United States is necessary, they argue. The economy depends on workers who will accept substandard wages. What is more, such low wages mean that both parents will have to work and their children will be led to trouble. It is thus low pay that is at the root of the over-crowded American prisons, in which ethnic minorities are grossly over-represented. The film does a good job raising all these issues. (Ebert, 2001) This audience increasingly subscribes to the mutual benefit, supplementary account.

Both audiences agree this is a film on the under-privileged, exposing the injustice Latino immigrants endure at the hands of the Americans, but while the latter audience celebrates the fact that such a film is made, the former audience deplores it, contesting the view that the exploitation suffered is at all undeserved.

The point is particularly accurately made in a climatic scene towards the end of the film, when Rosa, who has sold out her fellow co-workers in order to get a promotion that will enable her to pay for medical treatment for her diabetic husband, confesses to Maya that she was only able to support her family for all those years through prostitution, and that this was the source of her remittances. While the latter audience found this scene deeply moving and immediately sympathised with Rosa, the former described the scene as providing an alibi for a Latino character who has committed a despicable act to remain 'morally worthy.' The director himself manifested he had wanted to show

"just the way people [in Latin America] are forced into sending kids away; the kids have to send money back, who knows what they're doing on the other end. We obviously went down to Tijuana when we were researching [the movie]. The sadness of those lines in the red light district is just really desperate...The pain of that is part of what it means to be in America's backyard." [Thus the movie tagline:] "The balance of power is about to change." (Loach in interview with Adams, 2001)

So just how can a film which almost subscribes to the narrative on migration that used to be held in Mexico when the identity drew its meaning from its relationship of antagonism with the US, namely the myth of the unilateral benefit for the Americans, be construed as forging a supplementary position for Mexico? Beyond the plot and the manifest intentions of the director, it is the way the story is told and the paradigmatic choices that were made to tell this particular version of the story that we will focus on to answer this question.

First of all, this film is truly bilingual. All characters, Mexican and American, slip into and out of English and Spanish in a seemingly perfectly natural way, regardless of whether they are speaking to fellow Mexicans or Americans. Subtitles translate whichever one of the two languages is being spoken.¹⁴⁸ This use of subtitles naturalises both languages for the same

¹⁴⁸ Although DVD versions subtitle either Spanish or English, depending on the region.

communities on a par level, sharing the role as main means of communication on an equal basis. Those who liked the film praised this original feature as ‘realistic,’ while those who did not resented it, ostensibly on the grounds that it “made it difficult” for the viewer to follow the dialogue. (Lurio: 2001) What actually happens, I would argue, is that those who enjoyed it were happy to be interpellated as belonging to this particular community, while those who rejected it do not find here an appealing position to take up in the construction of their identity, both in the US and in Mexico where the film was not short of critics. Moreover, a large number of American citizens of Mexican origin appear in various roles, notably as policemen and managers as well as guards and janitors. Del Toro also appears in his role of successful Latino actor. Apart from the ways the various audiences engaged with this feature of the film, its role as text is certainly putting forward a United States in which if Mexicans were foreigners at the outset, they are now as ‘natural’ as Americans themselves. Also romance develops between Sam and Maya, despite the fact that she had an alternative honest and hard working Mexican suitor.¹⁴⁹

The second important feature is that in setting out the meaning-making oppositions on which the film is based in terms of class and gender, the film overlooks —indeed, almost effaces, despite the manifest intentions of the director, his prior work and the way critics from both sides of the spectrum chose to engage with his film— the opposition between the United States and Mexico, turning it on its head and presenting a wholly supplementary position instead. Let us deal with the class-based opposition first. This is evident in a number of ways, beginning with the choice of actors for the leading roles. Although there are two Latino women, —Pilar Padilla and Elpidia Carrillo playing Maya and Rosa respectively— for the film is ostensibly about empowering the disenfranchised as is evident from its very title, they nonetheless share credits with a white American male —Adrien Brody playing Sam— whose intervention is necessary to solve the problem posed by the plot, albeit on more or less equal grounds with the women.

¹⁴⁹ Most of the Mexican audience was thus alienated, reading Maya as La Malinche, who thereby loses all heroism and the sympathy for her character the director was seeking from viewers. For such a representation to succeed in the Mexican market, it would have to be a Mexican male falling in love with an American woman.

Rosa's husband, a white, poor American, is also good and definitely part of a 'we' which includes his wife, sister in law and Sam, who are in fact fighting so that he can gain access to medical treatment. There are also a few other white American janitors fighting for justice along the Mexican immigrants.

Apart from there being poor white Americans on the side of Mexicans, there are also Mexicans among the powerful, against whom 'we' —that is, the 'we' in which the film seeks to involve its viewers— must fight. It is Mexican 'coyotes' who demand outrageous fees in order to help immigrants cross the border and later abuse them, in fact one of them almost succeeds in raping Maya. While in other films it is the border patrol —"la migra"— that brutally assaults and even kills would-be immigrants, in Loach's film injustice and misfortune for Mexicans in the US come from (certain) Mexicans themselves. The first job Maya gets before becoming a janitor is as a waitress in a bar where most customers are Latino immigrants, and there she is abused by men from Central America. The company manager who eventually hires her, demanding the first month of her pay in return, is Mexican, or rather, a Chicano. What is more, it is he alone who is to blame for there being illegal immigrants, since it is he who hires them. His boss, as they say, 'knows but doesn't know.' And the —American— boss of his boss "doesn't know and doesn't care," so Americans, although involved, are not actually directly responsible. Far from being about what it means to be "in America's backyard," Loach's film is faithful to a truly Marxist perspective where it is the poor against the rich and nations do not matter.

As for the opposition in terms of gender, women tend to be good and when they are not, as in the case of Rosa as noted above, they have very good reasons not to, while men tend to be the source of trouble. The smugglers (*coyotes*), customers, manager and building owner are all male characters, the first three Mexican. Then while Rosa is confessing to having resorted to prostitution, the reason she identifies at the root of her and her family's problems is her father having abandoned her mother, thus she as the eldest sister had to take on the responsibility for raising her family. The cause for the poverty that in some narratives is what actually impels some to migrate is thus not institutional, it does not have to do with the Mexican government being corrupt or pursuing the wrong

economic policies or being a victim of American imperialism draining Mexico of its resources, all reasons frequently mentioned in various competing accounts, but rather the irresponsible behaviour of some men who, for personal reasons, abandon their families depriving them of a bread-winner. Consistently, female characters choose community over individuality and sacrifice themselves if need be. Rosa did it for her family and later for her husband. Maya robbed the shop so that her friend Rubén could attend law school. Earlier she had lectured him about solidarity when he had stated his intentions not to participate in the strike because he would not risk his studies. Other women cleaners who appear as secondary characters support their families in their home countries as well as in the US, and show solidarity in every way: Bertha, a character who gets fired for refusing to tell who had organised the strike; another lady who also gets fired for arriving late and forgetting her glasses receives plenty of support; and a black woman who teaches Maya how to vacuum clean following a rhythmic pattern, as if she were dancing and the appliance were 'her man.' And in the scene where Maya robs the shop, she locks the shop assistant up in the toilet, telling a customer who has just entered that she locked him there because he is a pervert.

A third way in which this film avoids the opposition that would have constructed a Mexican 'we' versus an American 'they' is by avoiding contrasts. Although as in *Traffic*, Mexico is introduced as 'nature,' this time in a scene that takes place in the jungle, through sharp camera movements that suggest viewers are running among the immigrants, followed by American 'civilisation' in a scene that takes place in a city with wide freeways, no further contrasts are made. For instance, Rosa's home, which is not particularly poor, looks quite similar to the American union-organiser's flat. Family photos and plants adorn her home, as would be the case in any American home. Conspicuously, religious icons, always a staple in any mise-en-scène depicting Mexicanity, are missing here. We do see some Mexican snacks at her table, but again it is of the type available in Western supermarkets and consumed around the world. Finally, parallel to a party attended

by Hollywood stars the janitors too attend a party of their own. In sum, all opportunities for the crafting of antagonism are renounced.¹⁵⁰

Finally, and crucially, the end vindicates the system: justice means earning USD\$8 instead of USD\$5 and it is achievable through orderly demonstrations in which both police and demonstrators are thoroughly polite and civilised, the former in fact are even kind, no repression whatsoever is suffered. Maya is deported, but the community as a whole has gained a great deal and she might try again as most immigrants do. What is more, those janitors who have the will power find time to study and eventually, as in *Stand and Deliver*, even make it to Law School. According to Loach “it seemed like it would be nice to make a film about the immigrants, particularly the Mexicans...in Los Angeles, because it’s the city where they make the American Dream, but [they]... are just invisible here.” (Ibid) The film does make Mexicans visible, and moreover it tells them that the American Dream that they ‘make happen’ for Americans can also happen to them in the United States. Those in the US who disliked the film did not do so because of its purported anti-Americanism, but rather because the meaning for the American national identity it puts forward is one they wish to contest. This film encourages Mexicans to dream the American dream, which with decent pay can work for everyone concerned. Pure partnership here, concluding with a resounding rallying cry, that might as well have been Chicano: Yes, it can be done!

The View from Mexico: Challenges to the Identity

Perhaps the best evidence of the close relationship between national cinema and national identity can be found in the fact that historically the rise of the industry has been linked to periods of dislocation or challenge to the hegemonic discourse,

¹⁵⁰ Other films made around the same time that also follow the strategy of equating Mexico and the US through the avoidance of contrasts were *The Garden of Eden* (Novaro: 1994), where poor peasants who leave Mexico do not end up in a glittering high-tech American metropolis, but rather working as peasants in the southwest American countryside, which is identical to the Mexican north where we formerly saw them. And in *Santitos* (Springall: 1998) the US is presented as a continuation of Mexico: a woman named Hope believes her daughter has been kidnapped and taken to the US where she is being forced into prostitution. Her journey to find her begins in Veracruz and continues through Tijuana and Los Angeles, which appears to be a Mexican city in every respect.

and therefore periods when the 'people' are interpellated as 'Mexican' in specific ways by the elites, while national production has declined at times when a discourse has succeeded in becoming hegemonic.¹⁵¹ Thus the early years of cinema, which coincided with the revolution, the years of Cardenismo and the presidency of Miguel Alemán were among the most prolific as regards to films that dealt with telling stories of who 'we' are, depicting a bounded community with clear-cut parameters for inclusion and exclusion, and putting forward their different sites for identification, as shown in the section on cinema in chapter two. Another particularly prolific period came with the presidency of Echeverría, who for political and personal reasons had a special interest in cinema. (Maciel, 1999: 201) The state became the major film producer, a unique case in a non-socialist country, and quotas requiring theatres to devote half the screen time to Mexican productions as well as low fixed-price tickets were imposed. (García Riera, 1990: 16; Maciel, 1999: 202) However during the López Portillo and de la Madrid administrations these trends were reversed, with the private sector accounting for 95 per cent the total production, and production itself began to decline. (Maciel, 2001: 305) This was despite the fact that IMCINE, the Mexican Film Institute, was founded during the de la Madrid administration in 1983. During the Salinas administration IMCINE, headed by Ignacio Durán, was instrumental in the production of the comedies discussed below.¹⁵²

As mentioned above, the end of the Cold War opened new markets for Hollywood and the American film industry became truly global in every respect. (Chapman, 2003: 158) As Hollywood doubled its market share, national film industries around the world declined severely during the 1990s.¹⁵³ The Mexican

¹⁵¹ By national cinema I mean here those films that dealt with themes of nation, rather than all the film production in the country. "Themes of nation are topical, rather than perennial, and involve a process of marking and flagging [the 'national'] that distinguishes them." (Hjort, 2000: 103) This is hardly surprising since "topical works are frequently politically motivated and serve as interventions in ongoing discussions within a given social context." (Ibid, 106)

¹⁵² Ignacio Durán later became cultural attaché at the embassy in Washington, where he directed a sustained effort to "win the hearts and minds" of people in the United States through the promotion of Mexican culture since "people who appreciate the culture of a foreign country can feel identified with that nation." Cinema was central to these efforts: a festival of Mexican cinema, screening 120 films ranging from 1932 to the present was organised in 2001. (Durán quoted in Notimex website at <http://www.terra.com.mx/ArteyCultura/articulo/099150/>).

¹⁵³ With the caveats for Asia mentioned in chapter one.

industry under NAFTA was no exception. In 1993 the Salinas administration introduced major changes with the privatisation of a media package for USD\$ 645 million, including the state near-monopoly of theatres, *Compañía Operadora de Teatros* and the second largest studio. It also introduced a price liberalisation that brought with it a reconfiguration of the audience. These developments meant that many theatres catering for the working classes were forced to close down, while the multiplex system opened state-of-the-art facilities in the wealthier urban areas of the country in 1994. The decline of the industry from then on was dramatic, both in terms of production and market share. Between 1988 and 1997, 591 films were made in Mexico, 442 funded by the private sector, 86 funded by the government and 63 made with foreign capital. (Maciel, 2001: 313) The lowest point was reached under Zedillo in 1998, when an industry that had in its heyday produced well over a hundred films per year produced a mere ten. Market share for local films had dropped to 9.8 per cent by 2003. (Mateos, 2000; Rosenthal, 2003: 326) Key topics of these films were a re-interpretation of the past, the economic crisis, the border, the provinces and the pressures on women and the family, often from a feminist perspective.¹⁵⁴ And most importantly, a series of overtly political films and of highly successful erotic comedies, a genre which, through humour, strongly pre-disposes its audiences into a favourable mood for the reception of messages put forward. Indeed, inasmuch as laughter is self-effacing behaviour, when humour is used on films chances for audience identification with characters increase. Humour is also a challenge to the solemnity required by authority for the performance of meaning-investing rituals. "Laughing can be subversive of the order we take as sovereign...The unconscious erupts in laughter. Laughter is in some sense unmasterable." (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999: 10)

¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the 1990s was an especially fruitful decade for women directors. While only 14 films by women were made throughout the century and until 1990, in that decade alone 26 such films were made. (Vega, 1999) Among them, the work of Maria Novaro, Maria Elena Velázquez and Maria del Carmen De Lara dealt directly with national identity. This would seem to point to a re-appropriation of the nation by groups that were formerly disadvantaged, enabled by the challenge to the discourse. "The fact that nations are invented and fictional means that they can be re-defined and re-appropriated...in other words, a repossessing of the nation by excluded groups is possible." (Hayward, 2000: 99)

Despite the events of the 1990s the Mexican film industry is at present still among the ten largest in the country, and it is the second source of foreign currency. There are now 2,618 theatres, 452 of these in Mexico City. (Mantecón, 2001) And although current sales of 150 million tickets per year are still well below the 302 million sold by the end of the 1980s, perhaps partly due to availability of VCRs and DVDs, audiences continue to attend frequently, on average ten performances per year, recently increasingly demanding local alternatives. (Estrada, 2003; Bonfil, 2003: 212) Moreover, rather than fighting Hollywood, recent —albeit scant— production has benefited from a partnership with the ‘majors,’ especially Fox and Columbia. More important for our purposes here however is the way that films then aided in the creation of ‘classificatory frameworks’ that would put ‘Mexico’ within ‘the West,’ and how they eroded the *moments* of the until then hegemonic discourse of the PRI by disarticulating chains of equivalence and differentiation that comprised that discourse —for instance the equation of “Catholic ‘mestizos’ living within the territorial boundaries” with ‘Mexicans’ and the differentiation that constructed ‘Mexicans’ as the opposite of ‘Americans.’ This is the topic that we will discuss in this, the last section of the chapter.

Representations of Mexico as a Member of the Post-Cold War ‘West’

As I have argued above, when the opposition between ‘the West’ and ‘the East’ collapsed, a period of uncertainty followed when various alternative narratives on world politics were contending to become hegemonic, i.e. to become the preferred interpretative framework with which to make sense of international reality in a persuasive and enduring way, just as the Cold War divide had been during the second half of the twentieth century. While these various narratives continue to contend, with varying degrees of success, ‘the West’ as the opposite of ‘the Rest,’ also construed as a division between the North and the South, provided a new meaning for ‘the West’ as developed, industrialised and secular. During the 1990s erotic comedies similar to those of other national cinemas about “young upscale urbanites working in a sector of the culture industry” whose protagonists were “attractive, successful and around thirty” became the preferred genre. (Rentschler,

2000: 263) The narratives occupied “the liminal space between a bohemian everyday and a bourgeois existence...With their triangulated desires and mismatched partners, their schematic constellations and formulaic trajectories, these yuppie comedies of errors follow strictly codified patterns.”¹⁵⁵ (Ibid) Far from indigenous ancestors, charros, fallen women, the poor or people in the liberal professions, the middle and especially the upper classes became the subjects of these films, all of which presented thoroughly positive, even somewhat heroic portrayals of businessmen, executives and entrepreneurs.¹⁵⁶ Especially successful were *Sólo con tu Pareja* (Cuarón: 1991), the film that began the trend, and both *Cilantro y Perejil* (Montero: 1996) and *Sex, Shame and Tears* (Serrano: 1999), the highest grossing Mexican films in those years respectively. Here we will discuss their general features as well as the individual contributions they made to the construction of Mexico as Western in the sense described earlier.

First of all, and contrary to most films discussed in this thesis so far, which introduce ‘Mexico’ within the context of an opposition between nature and civilisation as ‘nature,’ either in the form of a desert or a jungle, to be contrasted with ‘America’ in the form of a variety of urban spaces, all of these films introduce ‘Mexico’ as a developed metropolis: the settings are various upmarket neighbourhoods of Mexico City, and tall, modern buildings, broad freeways and spacious, well furnished mansions or flats figure prominently.¹⁵⁷ Development is further connoted through expensive cars, luxurious restaurants, state-of-the-art appliances and gadgets, especially computers, mobile phones and video and photographic equipment, which in some cases provide the anecdote around which the problem to be solved takes place. The main characters are highly educated,

¹⁵⁵ An alternative explanation to the rise of this type of films in many national cinemas at around the same period is that: “The rise of all national cinemas...has been contingent on the rise of a self-conscious national bourgeoisie. With the rise of global capitalism, national bourgeoisies are incessantly mutated into a globalised civil society bereft of any organic, enduring institution of national consciousness.” (Dabashi, 2002) In the specific case of Mexico however this was also part of an ongoing effort to re-define the national identity within the framework of a new discourse.

¹⁵⁶ The exception being those films made to mark the 500 anniversary of the discovery of the Americas, funded mostly by the Spanish government, which did deal with the indigenous past from various perspectives.

¹⁵⁷ Additionally, in *Sólo con tu Pareja*, where the story is presented in a series of ‘chapters,’ each introduced with a related epigraph, quotes are drawn equally from poems by E.E. Cummings, Mexican popular songs and poems and slogans in Latin.

well-travelled, smartly dressed and lead healthy life-styles including exercise and health-conscious diets. In short, what David Foster said of characters in *Sex, Shame and Tears* is also applicable to other comedies of the series: they are “privileged, end-of-the-millennium high-rise apartment dwellers...with sophisticated tastes and wide experiential horizons...[who] live comfortably and with a notable degree of ostentatious splendour...they adhere to a US comfortable middle class norm.” (Foster, 2002: 36)

More importantly, their sexual mores are distinctly different from what is the norm in a conservative, Catholic society where adults leave home only at the time of marriage. All characters in these films are single or divorced people in their own flats and engage in a number of safe-sex affairs. Challenging the extended family which is the unit of Mexican society, these films are starred by childless couples or where there are children they are seen as obstacles to individual fulfilment or are in other ways the source of trouble. Women enjoy sexual relationships with various partners and in the most conservative of these films, *Cilantro y Perejil*, although marriage is fully vindicated and the family values upheld in the end, there is a homosexual character who is shown to be honest, noble and highly educated, whose relationship with his partner is in everyway equivalent to the heterosexual relations of the other characters. Machismo is often put into question, and the main female character explicitly deplores the sense of partnership and team she built in her relationship with her ex-husband, which she decries as dependence, since it is really ‘only the individual’ that matters.

Mexico is also shown to be industrialised. In *Sólo con tu Pareja* airplanes and the airport are directly relevant to the action, and the main character, Tomas, is in charge of a publicity campaign for a food packaging factory. In *Cilantro* secondary characters mention they are attending the heavy machinery fair in Atlanta in order to shop around. Secularism is also conveyed in various ways. Religious rituals are restricted to weddings and it is made clear that it is for social reasons rather than for reasons of faith that religious marriages take place. Two of the characters in *Sólo con tu Pareja* even have intercourse the day the woman is getting married to someone else, in her wedding gown. Religious icons and

paintings adorning houses are there as works of art rather than as objects for worship, or are shown to be at the same level as yoga, holistic medicine and esoteric beliefs held simultaneously by some of the most eccentric characters. And finally, it is science that is used as the ultimate guarantor of 'truth,' in the form of psychologists and doctors, whose accounts of interpersonal relations are given credence and held as authoritative.

Nevertheless, while this mixture of secularism, development and industrialisation tended to minimise national specificity, presenting Mexico as pretty much any 'Western' country, or as would have been put by Gellner, emphasised the similarities of the formula "for the medium of the fully developed industrial goldfish bowl," they also deliberately stressed brand-differentiating characteristics. (Gellner, 1983: 52) From among the 'flagging approaches' of the national identified by Hjort, namely the monocultural, consisting of "a hyper-saturation of the audiovisual field with national elements," and the intercultural, based on "the contrastive mobilisation of *different* national cultures" it is the latter and more effective that is used on these films. (Hjort, 2000: 111, emphasis in original) Notably, however, the contrastive culture is not the American, but the Japanese in *Sólo* and the French in *Cilantro*. In the former, Japanese doctors attending a congress for the medical profession provide the counterpoint to Mexican mariachis, serenades, cacti, puns, tequila and tours to landmarks such as the Latin American Tower. Moreover, Mexicanity is also conveyed in the nightmares suffered by the main character, all related to perceived threats to his masculinity arising from his emancipated female boss, his ethnic past and the relative power of the Japanese. In *Cilantro*, French characters are somewhat of a nuisance with their demands to experience authenticity in the form of typical dishes. *Sexo* merely stresses the global citizenship of the characters, some of which have just returned from South Africa while another one lived for long periods in London, Paris and Tokyo.

In brief, given the strategies employed, the representation of the country put forward by all these films is one that, while distinctively 'Western,' is also distinctively 'Mexican.'

Challenges to the Ethnic, Religious and Political Dimensions of the Nation

Parallel to the various representations of Mexico as Western that were put forward on film during the 1990s, efforts were also made to undermine the legitimacy of the PRI and the discourse on 'Mexicanity' it involved. This trend started with the privatisation of the industry explained above, which enabled alternative groups to forge and circulate their own versions of the identity, and continued with the selective removal of censorship, including the passage of the Film Institute from the Home Office into the Ministry of Culture. (Maciel, 1999: 223) During the Salinas administration, films openly critical of the Party were shown for prolonged periods for the first time, including *La Sombra del Caudillo* (Bracho: 1960), on the series of betrayals and assassinations that had taken place shortly after the revolution among the leaders themselves, and on the way the presidential succession worked within the Party. The film had been banned for over thirty years. *Rojo Amanecer* (Fons: 1990), dealing with the role of the army in the student repression on 2 October 1968 was also shown, and became the highest grossing national film that year. Equally successful from then on were other films in the same vein. Here we will discuss the most relevant, both in terms of being the ones posing challenges to the discourse, and in terms of the reach and resonance they had among domestic and in some cases foreign audiences: *Amores Perros* (González-Iñárritu: 2000), *The Crime of Father Amaro* (Carrera: 2002) and *Herod's Law* (Estrada: 2000) all produced by Altavista Films.

Amores Perros (Love's a Bitch)

Like *Traffic*, *Amores Perros* tells three apparently different but interconnected stories, which can also be understood as parts of a broader story about life in present-day Mexico City, and like in *Traffic* there is a 'social problem' common to the three, in this case urban violence. It also shares with Sodenbergh's film the bid for realism, using "real people from the dog-fighting world and...some real fighting dogs" whenever possible as opposed to actors or extras. (Romney, 2000) Perhaps for reasons of budget, no attempt was made to use stars to help market

the film so no additional meanings were connoted by the use of actors and actresses: these people could be 'anybody.' But unlike *Traffic*, González's film does not stick to one genre but mixes drama, thriller and some suspense. Although it would be exaggerated to cast *Amores Perros* as a direct response to *Traffic*, González is certainly aware of participating in a debate about what it means to be Mexican. "I am not a Mexican with a moustache and a sombrero and a bottle of tequila, nor am I a corrupt cop or a drug trafficker. There are millions like me. And this is the world I live in and the one I want to show."¹⁵⁸ (González in interview with Patterson, 2001)

The first story is one of poverty and hopelessness. Octavio falls in love with Susana, his violent brother's teenage wife, and because of the lack of opportunities for social mobility is forced to enter his dog into dog-fighting in order to get the money to leave the family home and take her and her son away with him. His hopes however are dealt a fatal blow when a gang leader attempts to kill his dog, and after stabbing him he is forced to escape his murderous accomplices in a frantic chase, which ends up in a horrendous accident. The car he crashes against is driven by top-model at the peak of her career Valeria Amaya, who has just moved into a brand-new flat with her wealthy married lover Daniel. The crash however leaves her legs horribly scarred, eventually she even has one amputated, and she suffers further when her dog falls into a hole in the floor and is trapped somewhere inside, while she is unable to help. At the time of the crash "El Chivo," a former guerrilla-fighter, now a dog-loving tramp who makes his living out of trash-collecting and as occasional hit-man for a cop, tries to help both Octavio and Valeria and rescues Octavio's dog, whom he later nurses back into health. 'El Chivo' has his own story of family loss and is trying to reunite with the daughter he abandoned as a child to join the guerrilla, who believes he is dead.

It can be argued that the Mexico and Mexicans represented in the film in many ways reinforce the identities that were in place in the post-revolutionary

¹⁵⁸ However unlike the comedies discussed above the film meets expectations of inherent violence and lawlessness that have been a feature of Hollywood's Mexico: In *Amores Perros* it becomes evident that "the devastating portrait of visceral violence and fatalism becomes the privileged image of Mexico that most successfully travels abroad." (Elena, 2003: 229)

project. Despite the desire to appeal to a broad market, Mexican dialect is used throughout as opposed to more standard Spanish. Gender identities are certainly reinforced, with all the female characters introduced either in the kitchen, cooking typical food or performing household chores, with the exception of the model, whose job anyway conforms to gender expectations, while male characters are depicted as breadwinners and are almost always introduced in scenes of violence. Avoiding crude stereotypes, there is a broad array of Mexican people from all social classes and occupations in the film. There is also religion in the background, in the shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe and the picture of the Pope in Octavio's poor home as well as in the silver crucifix in Daniel's colonial-style family home. And where the director could have chosen an anonymous highway for the chase sequence a landmark of the city can be seen: the Latin American Tower.

But despite all this, it can also be argued that the film is too about exposing the contingency of these identities, showing them in the process of being unfixed. From the beginning, the film starts with a nostalgic dedication "to Luciano, because we are also that which we have lost," indicating this will be a film about being and loss, or rather being through loss, i.e. being as a process of becoming. Indeed, over and over the characters in *Amores Perros* are shown either among photographs, as in the love scenes between Octavio and Susana, or contemplating photographs, as the model when remembering her former, beautiful self and Daniel when looking at the family pictures on his office desk, or "El Chivo" when examining the wallet he stole from Octavio during the crash, and earlier when avidly examining his daughter's photographs when entering her house. It is as if in these 'post-modern' Mexico, characters had a need to have their identities confirmed by the photographs, as if they were looking forward to their reminding them who they and others are, as if they were relying on them as sorts of aids for their telling themselves the stories of their lives, for their articulating a coherent narrative giving them meaning.

Evidence of the dissolution of boundaries is also found in the representations of the family. Not only is it that the parents are absent "as a sign of the dissolution of authority." (Arriaga in Mateos, 2000) The family, often

drawn upon as a metaphor for the nation in nationalist discourses, is under siege in the film both among the poor and among the rich: if Octavio and his sister in law challenge its boundaries and even its legitimacy, so does businessman Gustavo, who hires “El Chivo” to kill his brother, although he says he is merely his dishonest partner. The role of “El Chivo” itself is very interesting, since he symbolises the old guerrilla movements that the PRI was always able to control as well as the EZLN, which it was unable to control. And it is precisely “El Chivo,” now a wiser, older and ‘post-modern’ guerrilla who manages to get hold of Gustavo’s wealthy brother when he is coming out from a Blockbuster video outlet: just when that bit of Mexico, the upper classes, were entering into development and the First World symbolised by America, that other Mexico, the guerrilla, caught it by surprise and brought it back to a harsh reality at home. In the film however the role of the guerrilla is quite positive, because it does not help rich Mexicans to kill one another, to kill ‘their brothers’ as it were, but just forces them to face each other and invites them to sort out their differences through argument, even if it does leave a gun on the floor for them ‘in case they cannot talk their problems out.’ It is also very concerned with the safety of its ‘daughter,’ one would think civil society, in that it was very much the politicisation of the middle classes what prevented the government from crushing the EZLN, and the movement is often credited with raising awareness in this layer of the population, one which was crucial for Fox’s democratic victory in 2000, and one which is regarded as young, fragile and in need of protection.¹⁵⁹

Other than ‘El Chivo,’ upper classes in the film also badly collide with the poor in the shape of Octavio’s car, and ultimately it is this savage crash and not the sort of more intellectual challenge of the guerrilla itself that causes the real pain and suffering to both rich and poor, male and female, with religious and secular beliefs, but this is quite by accident. And if the accident is conceptualised, following Paul Virilio, as “both diagnostic for an excessively accelerating technology and as potential event for the re-establishment of human agency” the

¹⁵⁹ Marcos described the birth of Mexican civil society in the following terms: “We thought that either the whole Mexican people would rise up in arms with us to fight for the same thing, or that everyone would be against us and we would be crushed...it never occurred to us that a movement would emerge that would place itself in the middle, this that we call ‘civil society.’” (Montemayor, 1997: 146)

role of the United States in the Mexican crash, symbolised in the ‘excessively accelerating technology’ of the car, as well as that of the possibility of agency by the people in the re-shaping of their identities, becomes clear. (Virilio quoted by Der Derian, 2001: 671) Inasmuch as the accident is “before all else a disruption in the predictable flow of events, a breakdown of the present en route to the past, a rude awakening into the contingency of the future” the crash in the film can be read as a further indication of the contingency of what had hitherto seemed essential identities, allowing for the re-grafting of what before signified the identity into new discursive chains in order to produce new meanings. (Der Derian, 2001: 674)

But important as it is in binding the individual stories together and thus rendering them into one single, coherent overall story of the city, more than the accident, it is the fact that all those involved in it own dogs that stands out. The dogs as metonymies for the fate of their owners, and of dog fighting as symbolising the violence of the city, where ‘dog eats dog,’ are often mentioned in critiques and reviews of the film. The dogs are as helpless to influence the lives of their owners, especially in relation to them, as their owners are it seems in attempting to control their own destinies: “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans,” says a character. But although plausible these observations are only too evident. The very preponderant role of dogs and their relations with humans and among themselves in the film begs the question about what the dog stands for as a symbol. A first, obvious meaning connoted by dogs, in their role of man’s best friend, is that of faithfulness, and in the film the dogs as symbols of fidelity are ironically juxtaposed to the stories of infidelity in which their owners star. From Octavio and Susana who betray brother and husband Ramiro to Valeria and Daniel who betray Daniel’s wife to “El Chivo’s” wealthy victim who is also cheating on his wife with a married colleague from work, the characters in *Amores Perros* are overwhelmingly unfaithful. Thus one of the meanings connoted by dogs is successfully deployed by the director to establish an opposition with which to contrast —and define— the identities of the characters.

Dogs have also symbolised courage and bravery, and it is connoting these meanings that they are often used as metaphors for guardians and in the case of

nations, the army. They were so deployed in Orwell's allegory, *Animal Farm*. But although brave, the dogs in *Amores Perros*, do not have a clear role of guardianship or protection. Only Octavio's dog is condemned to continuously fighting for his life. Ritchie, the model's dog, is more of a lapdog, for company. And apart from them, the other relevant dogs in the story belong to 'El Chivo.' And it is here that the challenge to the identities as traditionally articulated is more forceful and evident. For what the drunkard tramp 'El Chivo' actually stands for, inasmuch as he is an outcast, a pariah not so much at the outskirts but rather out of society, living like a dog and among dogs, is a present day Diogenes, systematically denigrating the familiar and embracing the foreign, 'cynically' displaying 'the performative politics of exile': "Through a strategy of alterity and defamiliarity, the Dog reclaims the polis from its 'low' materiality or 'high idealism.' The canine motto...becomes the need to 'alter the political currency.'" (Constantinou, 2001: 794-795)

And in the film it is 'El Chivo' who, through his contempt for riches, pleasure and comfort, honour and glory, in short through his contempt for everything the others hold dear, is able to save himself. While all the other stories have unhappy endings, 'El Chivo' who searches neither love nor money gets them both and gives them away, and it is him who is able to 'learn from his dogs,' to understand the violence trap into which he is caught, and ultimately to escape it. Not only does he not kill Octavio's dog 'Cofi' when he discovers Cofi has killed all his dogs, but he forgives him: "you are not guilty," he says "this is what you were taught to do." 'El Chivo' and his dogs thus symbolise the ultimate challenge to established identities.

Thus on balance, although the film does make reference to 'that which we have been,' it is only to tell us the extent to which we have lost it. We are too what we have lost, but we are definitely being something else in the process.

The Crime of Father Amaro

Greatly helped by the interest arose upon the sudden lifting of long-held censorship and by the intense campaign the Church and groups on the far right orchestrated against it —as well as by the marketing campaign sustained by its

distributor Columbia Tristar— *The Crime of Father Amaro* was shown in 400 theatres throughout the country on its opening night, slightly more than those allocated to *Spider-Man* (Raimi: 2002) and *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas: 2002). It also beat these Hollywood blockbusters in the box office, where tickets were sold for USD\$15 million. Many theatres had sold-out tickets for the opening night from internet bookings and disappointed movie-goers flocked from the early hours of the morning to try to get tickets for other performances, unique in the history of Mexican film. *Father Amaro* thus became the most commercially successful national film so far, as well as the one that has produced the most reflection and debate.¹⁶⁰

Loosely based on the homonymous novel written in 1878 by Portuguese writer José María Eça de Queiroz, the film is the story of Amaro, a young priest who arrives in the small village of Los Reyes, full of enthusiasm and eager to serve the community. However he soon realises he is surrounded by hypocrisy. Father Benito, who is in charge of the parish Amaro has been assigned to, has had a relationship for several years with ‘Sanjuanera,’ a woman who runs a small eatery, thus breaking his celibacy vows. Moreover, Father Benito is having a hospital built with funds given to him by well-known drug baron “el Chato” Aguilar. There are accusations that Natalio, another priest in a nearby parish, is involved in the guerrilla. And to complicate matters further Amaro himself falls in love with Sanjuanera’s young teenage daughter, Amelia. The girl eventually gets pregnant and dies while having an abortion that Amaro persuaded her to undergo. To save his reputation —and his future career— Amaro spreads the word that Amelia, desperate because she was pregnant by her former boyfriend Rubén, died while Amaro was trying to help her, taking her to a hospital. The film ends with a mass being held for the sake of Amelia, with Father Amaro leading an “I confess.” Although the film’s narrative structure is quite straightforward, with events focusing around the main character and unfolding in a linear sequence, expressing meanings at a far more denotative than connotative level, it is

¹⁶⁰ Before *Amaro* the Church on films was “a silent presence, a structuring absence.” (Ramírez-Berg, 1992: 26)

nonetheless ambiguous and it gives grounds for at least three different 'preferred' readings:

The one preferred by the media and public debate, took for granted that, despite the director's vehement protestations to the contrary, the film was first and foremost a very specific attack on the Mexican Catholic Church. There were various reasons for this. First of all, to succeed on its bid for the suspension of disbelief the film largely relies on the monocultural flagging approach mentioned above, depicting a 'national reality': a rural setting has been chosen instead of an urban one, featuring traditional, colonial architecture and colourful landscapes, and focusing mostly on the poor; all food depicted is traditional; the main character, Amaro, speaks with a local accent; the lyrics of one of the songs sung during a mass state "may Jesus forever reign in our motherland and our soil, the nation belongs to Mary"; in sum, the film leaves no doubt this is a local 'reality.' Then, although the director argued the film should be seen as a story about the gradual personal degradation of an individual in his relentless pursuit of power, a story that "might as well have been about a film director willing to sell out his principles and film a story he did not believe in" the fact is it is not only Amaro's crimes that constitute the plot. (Carrera: 2002) In fact, only the last third of the film is devoted to the story between Amaro and Amelia, the only anecdote from the original novel, the other two thirds dividing almost equally between Benito's links with the drug barons and Natalio's involvement with the guerrillas. Moreover, even secondary characters such as the two priests from a nearby parish who once attend a meeting are shown to indulge in excess, both through gluttony and drink. And the upper hierarchs are just as guilty of other crimes: the bishop turns a blind eye to the origins of Benito's parish income and blackmails the owner of a newspaper that covered the story threatening to have the publicity, and thus the paper's main source of income, withdrawn 'with a single telephone call.' He also harasses and eventually excommunicates Natalio for failing to comply with the Church's demands. The Church's basic narrative itself sounds cheap and hollow when Amelia is teaching her Sunday school: "This old man with the beard

in the picture is God' she tells her student 'and this one here is the holy spirit: you can see the little wings, right?'¹⁶¹

At the institutional level then, Amaro would stand for a corrupt, decadent Church, that blatantly deceives that —vast— sector of the Mexican people who are the most disadvantaged, the naïve, ignorant and vulnerable. Those from among them who realise this and eventually denounce it —such as Martin, the Sacristan that tells Benito about the affair— are punished: Martin was thrown out from his home despite having a severely disabled daughter.¹⁶² Those who are better educated, the middle classes represented by Amelia's boyfriend Rubén, who is a journalist, are sometimes able to face the Church more successfully but at the cost of alienating the poor: Amelia is furious and breaks up with Rubén after he published his article.¹⁶³ The government, here in the form of the municipal president, unwilling to alienate the masses, is reluctantly driven to support the Church. In the end the Church would be a vivid incarnation of everything that it supposedly condemns. The film would thus, according to this interpretation, be a call for those being 'seduced' to realise the treacherous nature of the Catholic Church and desert it.

There are however other possible 'preferred' readings for this film. It could be said to do the very opposite work, namely to legitimate the Church with a tale that renews the validity of its central (patriarchal) narrative. For Amelia here is of course Eve the temptress, and Amaro falls down only after doing his best to resist her various advances. She agreed to be compared to the Virgin Mary and to wear her shawl during intercourse, a sacrilege. Moreover, perhaps in order to avoid censorship and reach adolescent viewers, the sexual scenes themselves are thoroughly marked by the extreme Puritanism of Catholic morals: there is never a full frontal nude and when Amelia dons the shawl she is wearing her underwear.

¹⁶¹ Sometimes attention was also drawn to the Ripstein family, the Jewish producers who supplied most of the financing for the film. But given their long career on Mexican cinema, and the wide variety of the topics they have covered, this point did not always receive much credence.

¹⁶² It is a slightly sarcastic detail that, upon being sacked, when Martin has packed his few possessions and put them and his paralysed daughter on a cart for their departure, we can see he has used empty cardboard boxes of a well known Mexican detergent called "Roma"!

¹⁶³ In another earlier scene when he voices scepticism to the Church's narrative Amelia is alarmed and accuses him of being a Communist.

Besides she died only because she was herself attempting to murder her innocent child, so her death can be interpreted as deserved punishment. This view is reinforced since at the moment she is dying, the very same words Amaro uttered to her when they had sexual relations, namely verses from The *Song of Songs* complimenting her on her beauty are heard at the background. Other female characters fare no better: appropriately named *Dyonisia*, a sort of witch who only appears to have embraced Catholicism but who in reality continues to perform pagan magical rituals, who lives surrounded by cats, is the person to take Amaro and Amelia to the abortion clinic and thus to Amelia's death.¹⁶⁴ Amelia's unmarried mother has been involved with Father Benito. The Sacristan's disabled daughter, who is mute and paralyzed, is called Getsemani, a place of utmost suffering for Christ. On the other hand in the enlightened middle classes there are hardly any women. Rubén's family consists of only his father, and all people in the professions —the doctor, a photographer— are men. Even the municipal president's wife, in theory better educated, is depicted as rather plain, silly and banal.

Moreover, Father Benito may have had a relationship with 'Sanjuanera,' but we find from the film that he also supported her economically and emotionally when her partner abandoned her, and by the middle of the film he has thoroughly repented. He may take money from drug barons but he does not use this for personal gain but for the good of the people. Thus the Church was actually assisted by the film, to turn the 'real' story of the very lucrative links between Nuncio Prigione and the Guzmán brothers into far less questionable links involving merely an ordinary village priest and crucially allowing him to exculpate the Church via the honest use he gives the funds. Besides, while the audience will draw on their cultural background for their condemnation of drug barons, the film is not at all negative in their depiction: they are shown to be people like everybody else —albeit admittedly better off—, christening their new born child and generously assisting Father Benito to undergo an operation when he falls ill. This is consistent with what happens in some regions of the country where dealers have very nearly replaced the state, especially investing and

¹⁶⁴ Dionysia is in many ways the female equivalent to 'El Chivo' in *Amores Perros*.

providing infrastructure for the communities: they are known to enjoy the support of the majority of the population. (Manrique, 1998)

The key point is that the Church is ultimately legitimated: it is not the institution that fails, but the people. And inasmuch as they repent, they too are saved. From the paradigmatic point of view, it is significant that a very willing beautiful young lady is chosen instead of an abused child, which has been the case in the news very often recently. From the syntagmatic point of view, it is also significant that the statues of saints and the virgin all appear in long shots followed by close ups, either lateral or from below, shots which put them in a separate, higher realm from our human one. At no point do the walls of the church itself crumble to the ground, which would really have spelt the end. But had the director made these alternative choices, it is most likely that the film would only have been shown, if at all, among outbursts of violence.¹⁶⁵ This would explain why, despite the stance against the film taken by most priests and most bishops, it was not the stance taken by Cardinal Norberto Rivera, who, although ambiguous and evasive, did not oppose the exhibition. (Román, 2002) This would also explain the apparent contradiction between Fox's personal ostentatious Catholicism, his conservative government largely composed by active members of the religious far right and the —relatively minor— economic support lent to the film, as well as their refusal to censor it.¹⁶⁶

But the film also gives grounds for yet another 'preferred' reading, one that calls for a negotiation between the two perspectives outlined above. Inasmuch as it is true that the story is one of an individual fall down, the question must be asked what role the institution plays in this fall. Amaro was after all honourable when he first arrived in Los Reyes. The bus in which he was travelling had been burgled and he had helped a fellow traveller, a poor old peasant, by giving him all the money he had. When tempted with promises of a career in Rome he had sincerely resisted them explaining all he wanted to do was to serve his

¹⁶⁵ This was indeed the case of *Canoa* (Cazals: 1975), a film that tells the 'true story' of a group of students who were lynched by a mob in Puebla after a priest accused them of being communists.

¹⁶⁶ 3.5 million pesos, approximately (Editorial of *Evangelización Activa*, a publication of the Monterrey dioceses, available online at <http://www.arquidiocesismtty.org.mx/circulares/2002/2002-circular-019.htm>).

community. At one point he questions the grounds for celibacy vows, stating that priests are also men and that human beings are as much body as they are soul. From this perspective, with which many young viewers identified, more than an attack on the Church the film would be a call for the Church to modernise, to attempt to redress the mismatch between an outdated moral code and the actual way people attempt to live their lives. More than a criminal, Amaro is as much a victim as Amelia of an obsolete ideology obsessed with the sexuality it so thoroughly represses. This was clearly conveyed in one of the trailers, where the words “The Crime” appear at the top and at the bottom “Amar,” ‘to love’ in Spanish. Then the phrase is completed with “of Father” appearing next to “The Crime” and an “o” completing his name. After all according to specialists on religion, rather than a growing secularisation as has been the case in Europe, in Mexico there has been a phenomenon of people adapting religious tenets in a way that suits their personal beliefs. (Masferrer in Román, 2002) If it is true that on films dealing with social taboos actors can be regarded as surrogates for the audience as some psychoanalytic theories of film contend, viewers would find *The Crime of Father Amaro* a cathartic, and thus rewarding transgressing experience. (Monaco, 2000: 276)

Furthermore, the film is thoroughly positive towards Liberation Theology, represented by Father Natalio.¹⁶⁷ It is true that various characters in the film, from all sectors of society express condemnation, notably the bishop, Father Benito and Rubén’s atheist father, who are both Spaniard, as opposed to Natalio, who is Mexican, but he is presented, throughout, as a committed, responsible, principled character, the only one who does not betray the spirit of the Church and who stands by his ideals regardless the consequences. While religious music is used in scenes relating to the Church and Northern folk music —‘narco-corridos’— in scenes where drug dealers appear, thus establishing an opposition between them, only sound effects and background noise are heard when Father Natalio appears. Natalio is seen chopping wood and building lodges, making coffee and in the wake of a peasant that has been murdered. The government systematically fails to convey any idea of ‘the law,’ in fact it is quite the opposite, the municipal

¹⁶⁷ Which means, in Spanish, to be born.

president plays poker and drinks, whereas Natalio's work in the jungle is clearly praiseworthy. At this point it will be useful to compare this film with *Herod's Law*, for the parallelisms are truly remarkable, to the point that they could be regarded as twin stories, the one dealing with the Church, via drama, the other with the Party, through comedy, proceeding in exactly the same way in terms of script and narrative structure, and even in terms of cast.

Herod's Law

Like *Amaro*, *Herod's Law* was also first shown amidst scandal and pressures for censorship. It was actually shown for only four days in two theatres and then withdrawn, but shortly before the elections its exhibition in 250 theatres was finally authorised and it proved a great success. It relies on the same anecdote: in 1947 a well-meaning PRI member, Vargas, is sent to a tiny village in the sierra to replace the municipal president, who has been murdered.¹⁶⁸ He is honest, enthusiastic and has the best intentions, but soon discovers he is doomed to failure due to the utter corruption that surrounds him and gradually sinks as low as it is possible to conceive. In his merciless exploitation of the peasants he is aided by the local priest, who gives him handy tips, obtained from confessions, on Vargas' enemies, mainly the village doctor, a puritan member of the PAN who also speaks English. His wife runs away with an American engineer he was forced to host at home, since he had contracted with him a debt he had been unable to repay. The owner of the restaurant, the only truly honest character in the film, is forced to leave when he is unable to afford crippling taxes. The situation gets so bad that Vargas' boss is forced to intervene. But having lost all touch with reality, Vargas has no scruples in killing even the boss. The 'Indians' have no choice but to attempt to get rid of yet another municipal president, but just as they are running after Vargas he is saved by a group of gangsters that were after his boss, working for a rival. A new municipal president is sent over to the village, bound to repeat the story, the audience knows. Vargas however is totally rewarded: the film ends

¹⁶⁸ This is an intertextual reference to *Rio Escondido* (Fernández: 1947) where diva Maria Felix played the role of a young rural teacher who had been sent by president Miguel Alemán to spread the modernising policies of the PRI in a tiny village. That film, however, was meant to glorify the achievements of the regime, while *Herod* thoroughly contests them.

with the new Senator addressing fellow members of Congress in a speech about how their aim shall be to remain in power ever after, for they alone can uphold the true meaning of the revolution, to a standing ovation.

The two films are thus obviously part of the same project, and so is *Amores Perros*, although in a more artistic, less obvious way. *Amaro* and *Herod* share the basic outline for the plot as well as several narrative devices. *Amaro*, concerned with repressed sex, is overflowing with cats, *Herod*, dealing with politics, follows the Orwellian metaphor with pigs, and *Amores Perros*, on betrayal, with dogs, the symbols of fidelity. The two films also share screenwriter Vicente Leñero and most of the actors, who play their roughly equivalent characters: Ernesto Gómez, who plays the governor in *Herod's Law* also plays the bishop in *Amaro*. Pedro Armendáriz, Vargas' boss, is the municipal president in *Amaro*. Vargas himself, Damián Alcázar, is Father Natalio. *Herod* deals with the Church only tangentially, through a secondary character, while *Amaro* deals with the government in the same tangential way. In both the Church is criticised for the misuse it gives information obtained in confession. Hit men characters in both films are called "Tiburón." And *Amaro*, which came later, makes a reference to *Herod* when Father Benito says in a confession: 'Like Herod, I too chopped off the heads of innocents.' Finally, the three depict a complex relationship with the United States, differing in their assessment of whether it is good or bad, but crucially, unlike the erotic comedies of the 1990s from the Salinas and Zedillo days, the Americans figure consistently as an 'Other.'

Perhaps because of their focus on the poor rather than the upper classes, it is easier to tell the 'Mexicanity' of the characters. *Amores Perros* makes reference to 'the North' —not the US, but the border city of Tijuana— as, if not a promised land, at least a space to overcome the economic and social constraints of the characters' asphyxiating existence. In *Amaro* there is an open reference to the US as a promised land —but with that very Mexican expression long used to signify the United States, 'the other side'— from the peasant who is burgled in the bus at the beginning of the film: 'If my plans to set up a shop fail, I'll go to the other side. I have a daughter there.' *Herod* is also ambiguous: on the one hand, the American character is an engineer, connoting higher education and technology.

This is evident when he helps Vargas to bring in electricity into the village, i.e. 'progress and modernity,' when he helps him repair his car, i.e. industrialise, and when he teaches English to his wife. He also brings technology in the form of a phonograph into Vargas' home, which his wife very much enjoys. He is a bit of a swindler when he significantly overprices his services to Vargas and demands upfront payments and high interests, but it was wholly Vargas' responsibility to hire him, and at one point Vargas attempts to leave without paying, so he is not very honest himself. Besides, he does not force Vargas' ill-treated wife to go with him but, like the Church, seduces her into it. However, it is also true that at one point of the story when conservative PAN Candidate —appropriately called Dr. Morales— asks the American engineer, in English, whether Americans consider democracy to be the best form of government, he replies 'Not necessarily, we also quite like some dictatorships, like yours' and to the question of whether his government was still angry about the oil expropriation he replied 'A little, but we know that one day we will recover everything we have lost and more. We just have to be patient.' It could thus be argued that the film portrays the US as utilitarian, cynical and hypocritical about their relationship with Mexico, in the very style of traditional PRI narratives, especially since this scene is not essential to the plot and might as well have been omitted. Be it as it may, 'the American,' either in a role of direct involvement as a key actor in the making of 'Mexico' as represented in *Herod*, or as a remote presence constructing the limits of the discursive horizon of 'Mexico' as in *Amores* and *Amaro*, through its presence as 'the Other Side,' is absolutely crucial for the making of the Mexican identity in all three cases.

However, the three films put these similar features to work for very different ends. In *Amaro*, the Church is apparently denounced, but only in order to save it. There are grounds for various 'preferred readings.' 'Good' and 'bad' characters are not so clear-cut, and the responsibility for 'bad' actions is not that clear either. There is sin but there is repentance. Gael García, who plays Father Amaro and with whom the audience is asked to identify, was also Octavio in *Amores Perros*, and has starred in other highly successful films as the hero. In *Herod*, on the contrary, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the film is an

attack against the PRI, which systematically assaulted the poor, murdered and betrayed to remain in power, exposed the middle class to the influence of a foreign culture until this was assumed as 'her own' —for the narrative is highly gendered as well—, offended and harassed the private sector until it was forced to flee the country and rewarded the corruption that perpetuated it.¹⁶⁹ Significantly, it is a brothel that Vargas initially fails to shut down, which was nearly the only sound business in town, the brothel standing as a metaphor for the whole of the Mexican political system. And all references to 'the Law' are made via 'the Constitution,' characterised by brothel-owner Doña Lupe as 'that thick book,' i.e. dead letter as regards to justice, although a powerful weapon to raise 'funds,' especially if used in conjunction with Vargas' gun, which his boss gave him. By the end of the film Vargas is even re-writing the constitution to suit his —'tax' collecting— ends. There can be no misunderstandings. Only Lázaro Cárdenas is vindicated, when a character explains 'the school was built in the times of *Tata Cárdenas*' but municipal presidents who came later 'sold even the bricks.' This renders evident the attempts to the appropriation of the very myth on which the PRI relied, namely that of Cárdenas, by an alternative political project that seeks to bind it in its own —perhaps soon to become hegemonic— discourse. If the American engineer brings the 'know how' for the progress of the village, it is all those anonymous Indians who cannot even speak Spanish that the audience sees supplying the labour power to make it happen. They may not have a single character to represent them, but their background presence as 'the masses' that economically supported the whole edifice is definitely highly visible. This, together with the stance taken against the American engineer, the fact that PAN Candidate Dr. Morales turns out to be molesting his teenage indigenous maid, and the duplicitous role of the ambitious priest means that *Herod's Law* could very well be the version of contemporary Mexican history for the masses told from a

¹⁶⁹ In this way, the lack of a place in the conceptual architecture of Christianity for a woman other than that of virgin or whore is in Mexico expressed through the binary opposition between the Virgin of Guadalupe and 'La Malinche,' the Indian princess said to have taken sides with the Spaniards and who thus stands for treason. To portray the middle and the upper class as traitors here, they are gendered female and incarnated into Vargas' wife as a modern day Malinche, preferring the American engineer to the 'husband' —in its sense of administrator— of her own kind.

PRD-friendly perspective. The favourable stance taken towards Liberation Theology in *Amaro* and the Chiapas insurrection in *Amores Perros* could well be understood in the same way.

To sum up, although the films that attempted to undermine the PRI regime through the questioning of the ethnic, religious and political basis of the identity were persuasive and acutely critical, they did not necessarily endorse the project that sought to define the national identity in the way the other films discussed here did. These films have been more ambiguous, and although they have certainly challenged the hegemonic discourse, they seem to be sponsored by alternative power centres, making attempts at the construction of contending discourses, of a kind that put forward positions for identification that are appealing to a broader range of the population. Moreover, recent discourses on world politics opposing 'the United States and new Europe' to '(Islamic) terrorism' offer no position for Latin America. The whole discursive project on which the emergent neoliberal elite depended, constructed at a time when one of the images on world politics most successfully deployed was the one of a "coming of regionalism" has all but collapsed. (Rostow, 1990)

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Conclusions

It only remains at this point to summarise the main arguments that have been put forward in this thesis and to add a few concluding remarks that can be drawn from them, both at a general, theoretical level and for the specific case of Mexico, that was analysed as case study. The theoretical background is discussed at some length because it is the basis on which all claims are made. Chapters one and two are summarised more succinctly as their function is mostly that of setting the historical background and establishing the meaning of the national identity before the challenge to the hegemonic discourse that I have demonstrated took place. Chapters three and four, where all key contentions are made, are summarised to comparably more length. Finally, reference is also made to the films, which were deployed as evidence on chapter five.

The Methodology

This research was undertaken as an attempt to apply to the study of national identity some of the key tenets of a relatively recent but increasingly important tradition in International Relations theory based on 'continental philosophy.' (Foucault, 1978; Derrida, 1984) While not claiming that this theoretical framework helps to fully explain every single aspect involved in the formation and transformation of national identities, I do contend that it goes a long way into accounting for the phenomena as perceived in the Mexican case in the period under study, that some findings can be extrapolated, and that it is without doubt a better, fuller account than either its phenomenologist or its structuralist-based predecessors, the former relying too much on individual agency, the latter unable to account for change. The key tenets underpinning this research are as follows.

Firstly, that it is indeed possible and fruitful to conceive of international relations as a discourse on world politics, which on the basis of various sets of sub-discourses, such as the academic discipline of IR itself and other related disciplines and social sciences but also, and crucially, on the basis of the mediated discourses of the news and the output of the media more generally, systematically

construct the identities of its objects of study, among them national states, understood primarily as territorially-based units of belonging to which large numbers of people subscribe and on the basis of which they and their governments interact with each other and with one another. (Shapiro, 1990, 1993; Der Derian, 1989; Campbell, 1990; Edkins, 1999; O'Hagan and Fry, 2000)

Secondly, that difference is at the root of all identity and it is the interplay of difference that produces meaning. I have thus argued that (national) identity can only be conceived as a result of the interaction with the Other(s) —as the enactment, so to speak, of this play of difference— and that these Other(s) are in turn formed by procedures that institute boundaries, i.e. by the application of 'classificatory frameworks' which help make sense of reality by bringing a given subjectivity into existence. Far from being independent, accidental and/or external to the self, the Other should be instead regarded as constitutive, as that which lays the conditions under which the self can exist as such. I have argued that for these very reasons the study of nationalism and national identity on the basis of this methodological framework is a particularly well suited task to be undertaken in International Relations studies, since it has implications both at the theoretical level, bearing on the way IR engages with its subject ontologically, and at the level of foreign policy decision making and other boundary-construction processes.

But the discourses that forge identities can never be final, for three reasons. The first one is that all identities are contingent, that is, nothing binds the signifiers that convey them and their meaning beyond the links between them performed by discourse itself. (Laclau, 1996: 90) Discourse can, in fact, be understood as an attempt to bring suture to identities and become 'final' but it is by its very nature bound to fail on this endeavour. The second reason is that discourses are the result of the exercise of power and power is always permanently contested: "power, whether it be 'in' or 'behind' discourse, is never definitively held by any one person or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through social struggles in which it may also be lost." (Fairclough, 1989: 43) And the third reason is the inherent impossibility of

accounting for everything: there is always a “non-symbolisable surplus.” (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999: 5)

Thus any discourse will by necessity be constructed around a fundamental lack, the impossibility of realising a transcendental identity, which it attempts to hide through the articulation of a coherent narrative that provides a provisional identity, a national identity in this case. Due to the crucial role of difference, the more polarised the binary oppositions that constitute and delimit a discourse, the less the contingency of the identities will seem to be. Precarious and unfinished, discourses can only become hegemonic inasmuch as they successfully articulate a majority of signifiers into a coherent narrative that gives (national) identity a meaning. But this narrative will continuously be challenged by rival political projects which will attempt to appropriate key hegemonic signifiers and to weave these and any signifiers not articulated by the hegemonic discourse—that is, ‘floating signifiers’—, into an alternative narrative of their own. The process whereby signifiers are appropriated and woven into discourses consists of either binding them into chains of equivalence or breaking their current bindings to set them apart. In other words, signifiers are articulated into contending discursive chains by means of re-grafting them into either equivalence or differentiation with other signifiers.

Therefore, in order to analyse a discourse and gain insight into the identities it engenders, attention must be given to the representations of signifiers that it produces and puts forward, since it is in this way that they are appropriated and articulated. Representations are a way to interpellate their addressees so as to seek to place them within a subject-position that gives them an identity that makes sense within the broader discourse:

“...the subject is interpellated into the social or symbolic order through a process that takes place in terms of language...This interpellation or hailing, constitutes the subject at the level of the symbolic: the subject becomes that which occupies a certain place—as citizen, consumer, intellectual—in the social order.” (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999: 4)

Since representations are both the product of and in turn produce the reality they claim to represent, representations act also as the empirical evidence on which research can rely in order to test hypotheses as to the nature of a particular discourse and the way it is producing subjects. These attempts at interpellation however are not always successful, and even when they are and a discourse is relatively stable over a long period of time, the fundamental lack around which it is built and the challenges from competing, would-be-hegemonic groups and the floating signifiers it is unable to articulate eventually cause a dislocation, a crisis that exposes it in its vacuity —thus the ‘empty signifier’—, and social change takes place.

The specific discourses that produce national identity will seek to produce ‘the national subject’ by means of complex narratives regarding a series of ‘cultural’ traits that bind her or him with the national territory, to which they are thereby historically entitled, and that bind them with their fellow nationals in a community of history and destiny, setting them apart from all Others. These traits are typically a combination of language, religion and ‘ethnicity,’ interacting together to set the physical —territorial— and the mythical boundaries of the group. For these reasons, metaphors of the national subjects as an extended family and/or a chosen people, of the territory as a homeland, and gendered metaphors of the nation as the mother constitute the backbone of the nationalist imagery. Discourses that produce national identities therefore can be thought of as a particular type of Kantian ‘productive understandings’ or ‘classificatory schemes’ that classify people according to a dynamic combination of linguistic, religious and ‘ethnic’ criteria, criteria which, although ‘objective’ in the sense that it is effectively borne by the subjects so classified, is wholly contingent, there is absolutely nothing necessary about it except that it is the criteria articulated by power for the specific ends of the (re)production of the national state. At the same time, discourses on world politics contribute to the reification of the national state through their construction of a place for it that fits the given narratives being offered as theories or explanations of international relations, be they clashes of civilisations, a bi-polar Cold War order, an age of regionalism, etc.

Thus conceived, discourses of national identity would be part of the discursive formation of modernity, a period when the level of technological advance made it possible for representations of the nation and the national subject to circulate within a community, firstly among the literate elites, by means of the printed word and later, with the development of the visual media, photography but especially cinema and later television, among the masses. (Anderson, 1991) The national subject-position has proven a remarkably resilient one, perhaps because of the way it has successfully addressed deep psychological imperatives and because of the way it intertwines practical aspects of everyday life with fundamental emotional issues of dignity and transcendence, in a way that alternatives such as 'market states' and pan-regional states cannot. (Bobbitt, 2003) Although the discursive formation of modernity in which the national state originated may now be exhausted, since the narrative of the Enlightenment on which it crucially depends is fast ceasing to be hegemonic and technology now allows for a veritable proliferation of contending narratives from all fronts, people all over the world still resort to varying extents to their national identities as a means to make sense of reality and their lives.

The Case of Mexico

So how does all this translate when the abstract theoretical concepts are faced with dealing with the practical case of the Mexican national identity? What evidence is there to claim that there has been an attempt of transformation? What has been the role of the Other(s) that was described above as so fundamental? Which types of representations of the identity have been forged and put in circulation and by whom? Are these representations constructing persuasive subject-positions that 'the Mexican people' embrace? And what does this tell us about the meaning of being Mexican, and about Mexico's 'international relations'? Can any of these answers be, at least partly, extrapolated to other national identities 'in the age of globalisation'? These are the very questions that this research set to answer. Let us now rehearse them briefly again here.

The Beginning: from 'creoles,' 'mestizos' and 'natives' to 'Mexicans'

Applying the methodological framework outlined above, the architects of the Latin American nations were the descendents from the Spanish conquerors who, in a process well documented in the literature on the field, engaged into constructing the Spaniards living in Spain, with whom they shared language, religion, ethnicity and every cultural trait involved in the national subject position except for place of birth, as 'the Other,' and the native population and the offspring of their inter-marriages as 'We.' (Anderson, 1991: 47-66) Apart from the 'cultural pilgrimages' that gave this elite an awareness of being a group with interests in common, crucial to the early nation-constructing process were literary representations of the identity in the nineteenth century novel, which introduced concepts of chronological simultaneity whereby anyone in the position of the 'national subject' could imagine others they would never meet in a similar position at the same time, and which also endowed all those reading them with a shared cultural background. During the 20th Century it would be cinematic representations that, through features such as parallel editing and the chronotope, served the same function, bringing the nation to the masses.

While Spain was for obvious reasons the most relevant Other at the time, or in other words, the identity the descendents from the European settlers most sought to differentiate themselves and the inhabitants of Hispanic America from, once they succeeded in their wars of independence their unity broke and a succession of challenges to territorial authority saw a number of differentiated countries emerging, which again were populated by groups of people that shared in common the culture that three hundred years of Spanish empire had imposed on their ancestors and which they had inherited.¹⁷⁰ This time therefore Others were made by reclaiming particular links with the indigenous populations that had inhabited specific territories before the invasion. This depended on the actual proportion of European descendents and Native American descendents, with countries mostly in Central America having the highest proportion of the latter.

¹⁷⁰ As put by historian Alfonso Reyes on the Mexican rejection to the Spaniards' spelling of "Méjico": "Those differences that appear as most striking are the ones between similarities: the differences on that which is most like us impress us the most. The clash can be perceived even as grotesque." (Reyes, quoted in De Los Reyes, 1987: 1)

'Mexico' emerged from the northern lands of 'the New Spain' around the Aztec empire which had flourished in its central region and which was chosen to represent, i.e. to stand for, all Native Americans. Almost every cultural product from an indigenous origin had to be reassessed so as to form the background for the national heritage. (Smith, 2003: 203) Formerly 'pagan idols' that ought to be destroyed became instead 'works of art' to be gathered and exhibited in museums. The 'blood thirsty savages' that the discourse of the Enlightenment —and, some contend, European fantasies and repressed desires— had carved out of the Native American populations became instead 'ancient civilisations' and the times before the empire, the Golden Age when a free society had prospered in justice and freedom.¹⁷¹ (Hall, 1992: 276-314)

Throughout this early period the United States was simply not present in the awareness of the masses and it was certainly not perceived as a threatening Other by the elites. On the contrary, the Liberals, who became hegemonic, in the processes of making an Other out of Spain systematically pointed out the similarities between Mexico and the United States, attempting to put them into a chain of equivalence. The United States had been the first country to recognise the new nation. Both countries, they argued, had been born out of the struggle against unjust (European) imperial domination. And both were committed to democracy—that is, 'democracy' as the opposite of 'monarchy'— since it provides legitimacy, and thus a way out of the 'national conundrum': to the question 'who should govern?' the answer is 'we should govern ourselves,' i.e. 'us.' The American economy did not seem hugely superior: a dollar was worth as much as a peso until the early 1970s and by the end of the 1960s inflation was actually lower. (Philip, 1991: 71) And, significantly, the first meeting ever to take place between a Mexican and an American president happened at the border, with neither of them crossing their territory. (Domínguez and Fernández, 2001: 84) Finally, although the Americans certainly became a threat to the territorial integrity of the nation after the invasion in 1847, Europe continued to loom for the Liberals as more of a threat, perhaps because it did not come only in the form of

¹⁷¹ The account of the 'Indians' living in peaceful ownership of their land until the arrival of the Spaniards was always challenged by 'criollo' elites, who stood by the 'civilising mission' version, but it became more hegemonic as the proportion of mestizo population increased.

fears of another European empire but also from the challenge of the Catholic Church to their civil authority, and the legitimacy the Church lent instead to the Conservatives. The American government provided some help and support for the government of Benito Juárez when he faced would-be emperor Maximilian of Habsburg, and later to the Liberals who fought against Díaz during the early stages of the revolutionary war.

After their victory against the French, the Liberals bound 'the Conservatives' into 'Otherness': they had been the ones responsible for bringing a foreigner into the country, for seeking the enslavement of Mexico under alien rule again. They were trying, in short, to prevent 'us' from being. Well until the end of the twentieth century, the word 'Conservative' still powerfully connoted backwardness and treason. In the early stages it belonged into the Liberal/Conservative dichotomy, where the former were linked to progress, modernity, secularism, social justice and the United States. The latter were linked to the reaction, to dubious traditions dating from the empire, to the Catholic Church, subjugation and to Europe.

The Revolution: from Outward-looking Modernity Seekers to Authenticity-cravers

Building on earlier research carried out on the Mexican revolution from the discursive perspective, I have argued here that after the successive fights against foreigners, the revolution provided the most recent opportunity to engage into becoming 'us.'¹⁷² It came at a time when society was bitterly divided between an upper-class, Conservative minority that looked up to Europe—to France—for its models of modernity and a majority of dispossessed, oppressed peasants and an emerging middle class who longed instead for 'authenticity,' and thus back to 'the origins.' The claims and grievances that the various groups had in common, although wholly unrelated, were bound into a chain of equivalence by virtue of being opposed to the Díaz regime—it was this that united them and gave them coherence. Thus demands for 'land and freedom,' for 'no re-election,' for the

¹⁷² For earlier research on the Mexican Revolution from a discourse-analysis perspective see Buenfil, 2000: 86-99.

defence of the rights of workers and the creation of trade unions, etc. all became demands for 'social justice,' demands for 'the revolution.' The different groups that carried out the various battles later became, put together, 'the revolution' itself. Therefore upon its triumph, i.e. upon the ousting of Díaz, 'the revolution' had been emptied of the meaning of the several different demands that had originally sparked the conflict, but had acquired instead the status of a master, empty signifier around which a whole discourse providing a meaning for the national identity could emerge.

I have also argued that this discourse took the form of an opposition to the Díaz regime on every front. Where he had stood for private ownership of the land to the benefit of the landed few, most of them still European descendants, and to the detriment of the hacienda pawns and of mostly indigenous peasants, the revolution proposed, as the other term of a binary opposition, 'ejidos,' a form of collective land ownership from pre-Columbian times, aimed above all at guaranteeing subsistence. Where Díaz had privileged foreign investment for the industrialisation of the country, the governments of the revolution would privilege domestic investment, in fact mostly government-generated. Where Díaz had privileged the tiny circle of those closest to him known as 'the scientists,' in that all sorts of positive connotations attached to them from their high standing in the status quo, the governments of the revolution sought to put the working classes and peasants at the heart, for instance turning them into both subjects of high art, as their object of representation, and as consumers of it. To the patriarchal hierarchies of the times of Díaz, women's rights were explicitly defended in the Constitution and other laws, and by the mid twentieth century the government 'granted from above' the right of women to vote without any demands being made from below. The imagery of the revolution was particularly keen on the depiction of 'Adelitas' and 'soldaderas,' the women who had helped the rebels fight the revolution and who would therefore have a (subordinate) subject position of their own within the broader national subject position, that would subsume their gender identity. Finally, to the capitalist emphasis that Díaz had placed on individuality, the inheritors of the revolution opposed an emphasis on the

community, which they depicted as 'natural,' as 'authentically Mexican,' while the Díaz one appeared as alien, temporary and aberrant.¹⁷³

A detailed description of the process whereby this discourse became hegemonic can be found in chapter one. It started with the creation of the Party, above all a consensus-making mechanism whose main objective was to ensure the unity of the new political class, known as 'the revolutionary family.' (Bailey, 1979: 94) The Party ensured there were no further military challenges to the government and effectively became the whole political system. The process continued with an ambitious, very large-scale state building in which the regime engaged. The welfare state is one of the most successful media to foster loyalty and identification with the national community. The Mexican state became very large over the twentieth century, and it made a point of providing compulsory and free education for all, with the use of freely distributed textbooks, where of course the historical narratives attached Díaz to the illegitimacy of foreigners and the Conservatives, the most pervasive obstacles that should be surmounted so as to realise the national self. Centralised education at the same time ensured a general background that would be shared by all Mexicans, regardless of how they chose to engage themselves with it at later stages in their lives. The provision of free health care through the national health service (IMSS) was also key in fostering a sense of community. Almost all other social services, from transport to tourism, were provided by the state, which also heavily subsidised some food and the provision of water and electricity in Mexico City. (Philip, 1991: 111) It had a large bureaucracy who enjoyed even further state-granted privileges. For several years it remained broadly open, recruiting from all social layers, seeking to co-opt dissent, specially amongst the intelligentsia, and resorting to very selective repression. Finally, after the 'Guerra Cristera' the political class settled into a somewhat distant but symbiotic relationship with the Catholic Church that further consolidated the hegemony of discourse, epitomised in the 'institutionalised revolution' of the Party.

¹⁷³ Another less emphasised difference between the Díaz regime and the early revolutionary governments is that the former was anti-American and pro-French, while the latter were pro-American and anti-French.

The Cárdenas Administration: Land Reform, Art and Nationalisation

But while all of the elements mentioned above were relevant, it was without doubt the radical administration by Lázaro Cárdenas that turned out to be essential. It was the only one which, if briefly, attempted to incarnate the spirit of the revolution and it provided a myth that all subsequent administrations would draw on in search for legitimacy until the collapse of the Party. The Cárdenas administration was crucial in at least three ways: in binding the national territory to the national subject position by means of the 'ejido,' endowed with the 'authenticity' that its indigenous origins conferred; in binding the national subject in the community of history and destiny by means of the objectivisation of the indigenous past, and the 'Mexicanisation' of any living descendents of the Native Americans and mestizos by means of the centralised educational system and of representations of the government in a powerful, fatherly position that took care of its children/people; and finally, in uniting Mexicans across gender and class in antagonism with foreign, mostly American and British, owners of the oil industry which President Cárdenas nationalised.

With regards to the land, during the Cárdenas administration, the most thorough land reform that the PRI regime would ever undertake was carried out, bringing the national land to bear deeply and directly on the national identity.¹⁷⁴ After Cárdenas, 'ejidos' became a key signifier that any group contending for power would have to articulate if it was to produce a persuasive alternative discourse. During the Alemán government for instance 'ejidos' were re-interpreted as pieces of land granted to the poor not in order to be owned by the community and jointly cultivated for subsistence, but in order to set the basis for small-scale private property that would form part of a capitalist market. Before Salinas ended the land reform and allowed ejidos to be sold, a re-interpretation of revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata's 'real ideals' regarding land ownership, was offered by historian Krauze, which he posed as being those of the "petit bourgeoisie." (Krauze in Avilés, 1991)

¹⁷⁴ See 'ontopology.' (Derrida, 1994: 82)

The Cárdenas nationalisation of the oil industry is perhaps the PRI's most lasting legacy to the national identity. All nationalistic metaphors, from the extended family to the remains of ancestors becoming the very soil that provides the population's subsistence, the soil in whose depths lies the oil that would become the basis for the autarkic aspirations of later governments, and of course the battle against the foreign enemy were deployed in a way that struck deeply into the psychological cord of 'the nation.' Rituals were constructed around the nationalisation, including the turn of March 18th into a public holiday. Even during the Salinas presidency, when the whole of the PRI discourse was systematically challenged and undermined by the President and his team and when neoliberalism as a prescriptive interpretative framework on the ownership of property was at its highest in Latin America and pressures for privatisation strongest, it proved impossible to undo this key, foundational myth. Recent attempts by the current government to question how 'something' that belongs to 'everyone in general' can have a meaning to the individual people as belonging to them in particular have been met with scepticism by a majority.

In short, the discourse based on the revolution as an empty signifier which the victorious elite constructed in opposition to Díaz, briefly attempted into existence by the unique administration of Cárdenas, whose main contribution to the stability of the regime was perhaps laying the foundations of the revolutionary myth, set up a subject position, through a variety of means including representation, that provided a persuasive answer to the question 'who are we?' the answer 'we are Mexican.' Later administrations relied on the symbology of the revolution for hegemony.

During the Cold War: Undecidability

Another key contention I have put forward in this work is that, just as the revolution was a dislocatory experience for people in Mexico, the First and especially the Second World Wars were dislocatory experiences for most of the world. The key moment came, I have argued, after the Second World War, when the United States came to replace Europe as the world hegemonic power and a new discourse on world politics was articulated, a discourse whereby the

privileged term 'the West' came to be opposed to its marked 'the East,' setting the terms between which the Mexican identity would derive its meaning, as an undecidable that would be provisionally 'decided' depending on which sets of frontiers were relevant at a given time. Just as the revolution had been determinant from 'the inside,' the position that became available for 'Mexico' in the broader discourse on world politics, a position within the dominance of 'the West,' was also determinant from 'the outside' as to what meanings the Mexican identity could take on.

The opposition between 'the West' and 'the East,' which naturalised the opposition between 'capitalism' and 'communism' through the displacement of economic terms by geographical terms, depended on 'the West' successfully articulating meanings that became dominant for 'democracy,' 'prosperity' and 'freedom,' all of which were defined against what was the case in 'the East.' 'Democracy' came first because, as the Soviet Union had been an ally during the war against the Nazis, it had been bound in a chain of equivalence with the United States and others in that chain. Wilson had included the Soviet Union in the 'democratic world' when he proclaimed democracy as an aim of the allies in the First World War, and later Stalin declared the Soviet Union had "merged with the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for independence and democratic liberty." (Carr, 1945: 2) With the Nazis gone however 'democracy' ceased to derive its meaning from its opposition to 'fascism' and it was instead defined as the opposite of dictatorship, just what was the case in the Soviet Union's 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' In this way the Soviet Union, where democracy was defined as 'the government of the people,' was severed from its former links with some of the signifiers that used to define what later came to be 'the West,' and democracy continues to be a key signifier, even a master signifier in politics more generally, whose meaning any group contending for power must successfully articulate if it is to become hegemonic.

The second crucial signifier was 'freedom,' the other key signifier of the Cold War which is currently being resurrected, now against the tyranny of 'Islamic Fundamentalism.' At that time, freedom was extended from 'a free society' —that is, a democratic society, not under tyrannical rule— into

‘economic freedom’ defined in turn, again versus ‘the East,’ as a lack of planning, which was construed as ‘artificial,’ as ‘human intervention.’ ‘Freedom’ on the contrary was ‘natural,’ even the result of a Darwinian process of evolution that had rendered the current state of affairs the best one since it was the one that had ‘survived.’ A lot of what today is being understood as ‘uncertainty’ and ‘risk’ was ‘freedom’ during the hegemonic period of the Cold War discourse, which lasted until the beginning of the 1990s.

Finally, ‘prosperity’ was defined not as merely meeting basic needs — food, clothing, shelter and even a few less basic others— with relevant satisfactors, as was the result of planned economies of the Soviet style, but as producing an excess that removes the very idea of necessity since every demand is met, beyond by a matching satisfactor, by a choice of satisfactors. It was claimed it would be necessary to go beyond either the Hegelian or the materialist-based Marxian syntheses and deal with a Batailleian excess to theorise production —or rather, consumption— under capitalism, so to speak. Democracy itself came to be bound into the chain of prosperity, since for there to be democracy in the Western narrative there had to be contending Parties, unlike the elections that took place under single Party regimes that depended on the Soviet Union and in the Soviet Union itself. The mere existence of more than one Party was presumed to imply choice. When the Cold War discourse ceased to be hegemonic, a lot of the former ‘abundance’ began to be constructed as ‘excess’ and ‘waste’ and the human entitlement to limitless use of material resources was replaced by a concern for the environment and ‘sustainable development.’

The simultaneous deployment of all these positive meanings thus constructed ‘the West’ as the opposite of ‘the East,’ and this opposition also had the advantage that it allowed for the projection of the fundamental lack at the heart of every social arrangement, the void around which all discourses are constructed, upon ‘the Other.’ This is why I have argued that the disappearance of the Soviet Union was just as devastating for ‘the West,’ which was so imbricate in its Other, in that it was that which provided its very conditions for existence, that it also ceased to exist *in the way it had existed during the Cold War*. Just what ‘the West’ was outside of the Cold War narrative was open to re-interpretation,

that is, contending narratives began to attempt to appropriate the meaning of 'the West' by re-grafting it into alternative discourses. What it means now depends on in opposition to what it stands in a particular discourse, such as 'the clash of civilisations,' 'the end of history,' 'globalisation as westernisation' etc.¹⁷⁵ I have contended that this became evident not only in the fast-widening rift between the United States and Western Europe, but also in the democratic crises faced by almost all established democracies, in their failure to engage the young, in the rise of the far right, in the growing apathy and disregard towards a set of values that no longer appear as valuable since they are not to be fought for but actually inevitable. All this may of course change as soon as any one of the contending discourses or a newly emerging one becomes as hegemonic as the Cold War was during the latter part of the twentieth century.

Within the discourse of the Cold War sketched above and more fully developed under chapter one of this thesis, I have claimed that the subject position that became available for Mexico was, by geographic necessity and by the cultural and ethnic heritage as articulated by the discourse of the revolution, bound to be within the influence of the West. But because of the nature of the regime that ensued the revolution, because socialism was perceived as a sound alternative for quick development that allowed the elite the control of the country and because the East was the Americans' most important Other, Mexico could also be grafted into a chain of equivalence with 'the East.' The strength of the regime, as I have explained, lay in its resistance to decide the identity either way, keeping both sets of boundaries simultaneously and becoming 'the Other' every time as became necessary. Macro statistics that portray Mexico as 'the World's tenth largest economy,' the gross national product, the fast industrialisation period of the 'Mexican miracle,' the oil boom, etc. constructed a Western Mexico, that is, a Mexico that shared in the meanings of 'West' outlined above. But the — effectively— one Party regime, the deeply unequal distribution of wealth, the external debt, etc. also constructed Mexico as sharing into the meanings of 'the

¹⁷⁵ 'The West' means 'development,' 'post-industrialisation' and 'secularism' when opposed to 'the Rest,' but this dichotomy is not as effective as the 'East/West' dichotomy because, as mentioned before, the stronger an opposition, the deeper the contrast it generates and thus the more meaningfulness for the identities in the positions thus crafted.

East,' as a threat that must be contained. The disappearance of 'the East' not only 'forced' the identity to be 'decided,' by default but also 'drained' all meaning out of the best part of the revolutionary narrative that had until then seemed so compelling.

After the Cold War: the External Challenge

There is broad agreement that it is as of then that the meaning of the Mexican national identity began to be questioned. Whether inferred from the traditional cultural markers employed by nationalist discourses as explained earlier, namely language, religion and ethnicity, or whether inferred from varying patterns of cultural consumption, it became common sense to observe changes in the identity. Although still dominant, Catholicism was said to be in decline while Protestantism and secularism were taking over. Private schools began to teach English to children from a very early age and knowledge of the language became indispensable in an important sector of the labour market. Indigenous minorities came forward with demands for autonomy and put the homogeneity of the ethnic status of the nation into question. They also demanded recognition to their culture which they claimed as their own and not as Mexican and this included their languages. Also because of large-scale migration, mostly to the United States, about a fifth of the population resided beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation and put them under strain.¹⁷⁶ The close links emigrants maintained with their families and the way they involved themselves in the political and economic lives of their communities of origin made them oddly ever-present in their absence, unsettling the articulation between the national territory and the nation. Furthermore, the proverbial proliferation of fast-food restaurants, video outlets and multiplex cinemas also made its appearance. All aspects of popular culture, from music to the dress codes, were said to match the trends of, depending on whose contention it is, 'Americanisation,' 'modernisation' or 'Westernisation,' especially among the middle and upper classes. In any case, whether celebrating a purported newly hybrid —and more 'advanced'— globalised Mexican identity, or

¹⁷⁶ This was exacerbated by the contiguity of the land occupied by this diaspora, and the historical relationship to it.

bemoaning the 'dilution' of the national essence in the powerful solvent of the cardboard empire of consumption, from almost all quarters of society 'we are Mexican' did not really seem to answer the question 'who are we?' that well anymore. While some of the claims made about the identity do not stand up to close scrutiny as demonstrated in this thesis, for instance claims about the overwhelming rise of Protestantism and secularism, it nonetheless began to be unclear who 'we' were.

Traditional Accounts

Traditional accounts explain these transformations allowing for a role for the disappearance of the Soviet Union in different ways. From the Marxist perspective, this would be due to the spread of capitalism worldwide that followed the Soviet collapse, to its imperial stage as described by Lenin. Other accounts which also give a priority to economic variables over political variables but which regard the Liberal world order as benign do not cast it as an empire, and credit those who led the change with choosing sets of policies that would benefit their countries and the world economy as a whole. On the other hand, accounts that leave a large margin for agency in the hands of individuals resort to the particular background of the technocrat elite in Mexico, all of whom held doctorates in economics and/or administration from key American universities, had extensive contacts with their American counterparts and indeed could more accurately be described as belonging to a new cosmopolitan class of international neoliberal elites. These accounts also hold that elites in America too were particularly inclined towards Mexico, drawing attention to the close friendship between Salinas, Zedillo and their circle and the Bush family and Clinton. (Bertrab, 1997: 79; Russell, 1994: 331) Many of those who were Mexican immigrants had become increasingly enfranchised American citizens, gaining relevance as a general 'Hispanic vote' and climbing into positions of power in the US.

The Discursive Account

While I do not dispute that the transformation of the national identity can to some extent be explained by these traditional accounts, I have in this work put forward

an alternative account, an account that relies on the discursive construction of a subject position for 'Mexico' that attempted to articulate it together into a chain of equivalence with 'the United States' in a relationship of supplementarity. This subject position was partly crafted by a younger generation of the former PRI elite, who redefined the boundaries of the political class to exclude most of the traditional Party membership but to include several of the Conservatives, partly crafted by a section of the American elites likely to benefit from energy-related natural resources, labour power and enlarged market size; but it was also crafted by the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union amounted to a dislocation in the discourse on world politics, a dislocation that put an end to the Cold War and allowed for a redefinition of all identities if subjects were to be interpellated persuasively. In particular, theories of international relations that regarded regionalism in the form of competitive trading regions as an alternative to the global order, fashionable in the 1990s and especially so in the United States, provided an ideal subject position for Mexico as a supplement in a broader albeit brief discourse of post-Cold War world politics. The account that I have put forward thus both considers all factors identified as relevant by other accounts, but goes beyond, taking into consideration the role of ideology as well as that of the economic structure and individual agency, and crucially because, if my argument is right, it can also explain why nationalism apparently suddenly became the root of renewed and even bloody conflict in various regions of the world at around this particular time, when boundaries were being re-defined and the pressing question of identity was brought to the forefront. Even in regions where it did not manifest itself exactly under the guise of nationalism, conflict raised by the collapse of discursive boundaries of belonging gave way to the rise of the far right and to the demonisation of 'asylum seekers,' 'refugees' and even 'economic migrants.'¹⁷⁷

The Supplement

¹⁷⁷ More recently, it has been said of Iraq that "the ambitious attempts at re-ordering international politics under globalisation promoted by the Bush doctrine may be curtailed by a force with its roots deep in international history: Third World Nationalism." (Dodge, 2004: 5)

The process whereby it was attempted to make of 'Mexico' a discursive 'supplement' to the United States was framed within the North American Free Trade Agreement and all the social and economic reorganisation it entailed. Long the unmarked term, 'America' has for several years meant in English 'the United States.' To refer to any of the other nations one must qualify 'America': 'Latin' or 'Hispanic.' For 'Mexico' however, a 'North' American status arising from geography was brought to bear into the politics of NAFTA. And while earlier narratives had stressed divergence from the United States, administrations from Salinas onwards have been stressing convergence instead. Apart from the re-composition of the political elite, history books were re-written and blame was re-apportioned. Among the long-enduring grievances, the northern territories lost in 1847 were not lost due the American invasion but to the disunity of Mexicans. The Díaz regime and his outward-looking, modernising approach were thoroughly vindicated, even by means of soap operas.¹⁷⁸ Academia constructed 'North America' as an object of study that included Mexico through the creation of research centres and the funding of research projects dealing with Canada, the United States and Mexico. Education was de-centralised and largely privatised and most of the welfare state dismantled.

Most of the narratives of convergence were woven around the issues which constituted the bilateral agenda, namely drug trafficking, migration and Mexico's external debt. These issues were recast in terms not of antagonism as had been done during the heydays of the PRI but of —unequal but positive— partnership. Apart from extensive lobbying and the professional help of marketing campaigns that cast the image of the President and the country in very favourable terms, representations in the media also changed in content and scope. According to recent research on the American media, they use the experience of trauma or fascination, such as the hostage situation in Iran or the spread of glasnost in the Soviet Union, to create analytical imageries that are later applied to other international phenomena, sometimes wholly unrelated. The 'Iran syndrome' had

¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, an attempt to have a specially-commissioned statue of Díaz installed in the state of Veracruz, whence the ship that had carried him into exile departed, instead of the existing monument to the memory of the sailors who defended the port against an American invasion in 1914, failed. (Taibo, 2002) Since monuments, as institutions, can be regarded as 'solidified' discourses, it is clear the elite now in power is still struggling to become truly hegemonic.

been applied to Mexico during the López Portillo and Miguel de la Madrid years. The country had been constructed as growing increasingly uncontrollable and on the verge of collapse. The Salinas administration however was perceived as an instance of Mexican glasnost. (Capetillo, 2002) But important as they were, representations in academia and the press, read mostly by the elites, were of secondary importance when compared to the broad reach of the representations of the visual-media, such as cinema, discussed in chapter five and summarised below.

Internal Challenges to the Discourse

The Challenge of Indigenous Minorities

Just as some of the Mexican and American elites were, with the help of the media, succeeding in integrating Mexico to the United States by crafting a supplementary subject-position for Mexico, a movement which began as an Indian uprising in the south-eastern state of Chiapas and which grew to become a powerful force for peaceful social change contested the versions that Mexico was quite the country its leaders were seeking to portray or indeed that becoming such a country was at all desirable, for modernising implied a renunciation: we must renounce that which we are in order to become something else. In other words, seeking modernity takes us closer to death. A quest for the national 'authenticity,' on the contrary, defers the moment to stop being. It is true that an identity, in order to be recognisable as such, must be 'repeatable' into a variety of contexts and that each new repetition—or more accurately, iteration—will endow it with new meanings through connotation, thus tradition is "not a tradition that remains the same, but a complex combination of continuities and breaks, similarities and differences: what Gilroy calls a conception of tradition as 'the changing same.'" (Hall, 1995: 208) What I am arguing however is that those discourses which appeal to those necessary changes the identity needs to undergo every time it is performed in order to 'remain the same' through 'a return to the origin' or 'authenticity' are bound to be from the nationalist point of view more effective than those

discourses which appeal to changes through 'modernisation' since they seemingly endeavour to project identities into the future and thus, in a linear fashion, closer to the end. This is, indeed, one reason nationalist discourses can be so persuasive: they appear to convey a transcendental identity more effectively than other similar discourses.

Therefore, the Zapatista appeal was a very convincing one. Through the specific demands of indigenous populations, the Zapatistas emerged as a group contending for power, attempting to legitimise and update the discourse of the revolution, starting with iconic revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata's demands for land and freedom, in order to re-appropriate them as their own. Working by means of chains of equivalence and differentiation, Zapatistas further extended the claims of 'indigenous peoples' to become those of 'women,' 'the disenfranchised,' and finally 'the poor,' thus bringing what had started as a 'minority' to represent 'the majority.' Likewise, 'the government' was equated with 'globalisation,' with 'the United States,' and thus with 'foreigners.' The Zapatistas stood for 'our traditions' and thus were 'authentic,' whereas the government's modernising project appeared by comparison as 'fake.' Traditional accounts of the Zapatista rebellion point out that, if the Salinas team had managed the media effectively, Zapatista leader 'subcomandante Marcos' proved to be an even more effective communicator, deploying in the favour of his cause most of the liberal public opinion around the world. Pro-Zapatista overseas committees included supporting groups in Barcelona, Berlin, Toulouse and London among others. (Leyva, 1998: 48) In a few years Zapatistas were able to mount a serious challenge both to any remaining local power of the PRI and to the emerging Conservative project that still seeks to carry forward the neoliberal discourse despite the hostile context in which it must now bid for credibility.

I have argued however that the methodological framework I have applied to the subject of this research allows further insight into the way the Zapatistas emerged as contenders for power, and into the way that Marcos acquired a socially-privileged position from which to address 'the people' with a narrative very similar to the one the PRI had employed but rendering it far more credible and thus restoring its appeal. I have contended in this work that what seems as the

sudden appearance of indigenous populations, who decided to come forward with their demands for social justice just as Salinas would have Mexico cross the First World threshold, can be understood as the result of the collapse of the 'ethnic' boundaries set by the Cárdenas nationalist discourse which had assigned to 'Indians' the role of ancestors and to what now appear as 'Indians' the role of poor Mexican peasants, who happened to be as Mexican as any mestizo or creole, only living in —rural— poverty. A person who, for a period of sixty or seventy years during which the discourse of the PRI was the main cultural framework by which the population made sense of their social reality, was constructed as 'a poor peasant' began upon the collapse of this discourse to be constructed as 'an Indian' instead.¹⁷⁹ This person's 'objective features' did not change but it is possible to infer where power lies from whether they are 'selected' as relevant and in what way for the entitlement of the person to membership of the group. I have discussed this matter at some length within the main body of the thesis, addressing membership through language as well.

The Challenge of Chicanos

I have argued too that the dislocation of the discourse of the PRI was also evident in the collapse of the ethnic boundaries of the nation not just in the form of Indigenous minorities —which incidentally also posed a territorial challenge, with their early claims for autonomy— but also in the form of Chicanos, American citizens of Mexican ancestry, who were seen as 'neither Mexican nor American' and thus thoroughly despised and rejected. But for a discourse that was trying to create a supplementary subject position for Mexico, Chicanos offered new possibilities for the representation of the national identity. There is a vast literature on Mexican legal and illegal migration to the United States, but for the purposes of this thesis, I have argued that it can be broadly classified, along with other non-academic discourses from the media, as constructing two opposing interpretations of the phenomenon.

¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, no distinctions are made between Chamulas, Lacandonese, Mixtecos etc. at this level of the discourse. 'They' all appear as simply 'Indian.'

The first one constructs illegal immigration as a crime perpetrated against the government and the citizens of the United States. Illegal immigrants violate the law. They are the direct cause of unemployment for Americans. They also consume the money of American tax payers in the form of state benefits. They tend to be uneducated and their way of life forces them into gangs and other criminal activity. Finally, perhaps because of the contiguity of their motherland and the continuous influx of new immigrants Mexican migrants do not really assimilate in the way other immigrants do over generations. Furthermore, they tend to settle almost exclusively in the southwest and their rate of reproduction is five times higher than that of the whites so they pose a serious challenge to the American nation.

The second type of narrative constructs Mexican illegal migration into the United States as the necessary and welcome outcome of globalisation where demand for cheap labour is met with the offer required. Illegal immigrants are not criminals, but merely young, hard working, entrepreneurial people. They are often afraid of being caught and this deters them from applying for benefits. They end up contributing more to the economy than they get from it. While most immigrants may have been unskilled in the past, recent waves of immigration consist of skilled workers with more opportunities for upward social mobility who are further aided by established networks of employers and kin. Finally, although they may keep their culture they partake in the American dream and thus pose no threat. America should rid itself of bigotry and celebrate its multicultural society instead.

I have demonstrated that while of these two accounts the former was for a long time held in the United States and the latter one in Mexico, during the 1990s the second one tended, over all, to be the one subscribed to by epistemic communities in both countries. While this may no longer be the case the Chicano population and the Chicano movement have certainly grown to become a political force that both the Mexican and the American political establishments, especially in the southwest, must engage with if their respective discourses are to succeed. But the Mexican government too has funded projects for the production of Chicano culture and opened up spaces for its circulation. 'Chicanos' are for the

'nationalist' Conservative project what 'Indians' were to the Cárdenas progressive one: a way to lay down an ethnic boundary for 'the nation,' in this case through the policies that remove the territorial requirement for the granting of the nationality and allowed the dual nationality, and which have integrated 'immigrant' representatives into local congresses. The dominant criteria on which the need of a Congressman/woman is now assessed is geographical: every state is entitled to two senators, regardless its size or population. Allowing for two Congressmen for 'immigrants' in the local Congress of Zacatecas thus seems to put the American States where Mexican-Americans inhabit on a par with a Mexican territory.

In short, when the 'revolutionary' nationalist discourse began to collapse, both the ethnic and the territorial boundaries of the nation it had established were challenged. Both 'Indians' and 'Chicanos' are forcing the question 'who is this 'we' in Mexico.' And if 'Indians' posed a threat to the territorial boundaries when they demanded autonomy in the lands of the Mexican southeast, Chicanos posed it by rendering the border to the north fuzzy and unclear.¹⁸⁰ A fussy border is a problematic border, since the play of difference on which identities depend is more difficult to perceive.

The Challenge to and From Religion

As mentioned above, one of the points that most traditional accounts of the transformation of the national identity point to is the decline of Catholicism, supposedly to the benefit of Protestantism and secularism. There are two different aspects under discussion with regards to the role of religion as a 'cultural marker' of the national identity. On the one hand, there is the issue of the Church as a hegemonic group, a distinct group within the ruling elite seeking to interpellate 'the people' as 'the (Mexican) faithful.' On the other hand is the narrative they use itself: not just the Christian set of beliefs, but also the peculiar way in which they are embodied by the syncretism which makes this Catholicism Mexican. I have demonstrated in this work that there are now two competing narratives

¹⁸⁰ While these demands have not been dropped, the definition of 'autonomy' has since been changed.

regarding these two issues. Both of them deploy ‘hard evidence’ and ‘facts’ in the form of statistics as necessary to the role they seek to portray ‘the Church’ in: either as still crucial to the identity or as becoming increasingly irrelevant.

I have argued here that, perhaps because many of the creole elites identified by Anderson as the original architects of the Latin American nations were, in the case of Mexico, priests themselves, the Church has since been at the heart of the political elites, supporting the Conservatives. After a protracted war even the secular Liberal elites realised that the symbols of the Catholic Church conveyed a Mexican identity in a clear and unique way and would enhance the revolutionary nationalism discourse. The Virgin of Guadalupe, in whom goddess ‘Tonantzin’ (meaning ‘our mother’) is fused, is constructed as ‘the mother of Mexicans,’ and if the government had put itself metaphorically into the fatherly position, the Church was also metaphorically in the motherly position, providing above all consolation for the suffering and hope in a way associated with feminine qualities. The government took instead the male qualities as a provider —through the welfare state. Together they both set the boundaries of the extended Mexican family. I have also argued that it is misleading to conceive of ‘the Catholic Church’ as a solid group that remained wholly determined and unified while the hegemony of the PRI collapsed. What happened instead was that, just as the Salinas team redrew the boundaries of the political elite to include some of the Conservatives —regardless the Party— and exclude most of the traditional PRI, so too was some of ‘the Church’ included and excluded. The upper hierarchy sided with the new government, already the conservative, neoliberal elite even if retaining the name of the PRI, while many among the lower clergy joined the Zapatista group that emerged as a challenger. Their respective narratives of the nation reflect the different ways in which they seek to appropriate its meaning: by equating it with ‘the people’ in the case of liberation theologians, and by equating it to the interests of the ruling elite in the case of the factions at the far right.

I have also argued that the apparent benefits the Church derived from having an openly pro-Catholic government in office for the first time since the revolution, despite the substantial changes made to legislation and the further privileges the Church was granted, actually worked against it. This can be

explained by the fact, mentioned once and again in these conclusions, that since identity arises as the result of a play of difference, the more a difference is perceived, the more compelling its narrative will become for those who choose to put themselves in the position of its subjects. Thus if there is a difference perceived between 'the government' against whom there are so many grievances, and 'the Church' that is threatened and even attacked by it, the Church is bound to appear as legitimate and as a nodal point on which to weave other identities that also oppose 'the government.' But if they are perceived as bound in a chain of equivalence, claims that seek to be redressed would also be somehow directed against the Church. This is perhaps one of the reasons that recent surveys seem to point constantly to a discrepancy between the 'hard line' expressed by the Church and the actual opinions and behaviour of most Mexican 'Catholics.' This would also partly explain the sympathy and support commanded by former Bishop of San Cristóbal, Samuel Ruíz, who also relied on what Laclau has termed 'a populist mode of articulation' on the discourse being put forward by the Zapatistas. In the light of this, it can now be contended that Mexican Catholicism can be identified as a 'trace,' as that which, although changed, remains identifiable every time the identity is performed —discursively re-grafted— within a new context for a period of time. There is bound to be some Catholic signifier or other in any narrative construction of the national identity put forward by elites if they are to succeed, to be identified as 'Mexican.'

Representations on Film

For reasons explained at some length in the introduction, having to do with the suitability of cinema for the analysis of national identity, to the widespread circulation of the representations it puts forward and the nature of the cinematic viewing experience, particularly propitious for discursive interpellation, films constituted the empirical evidence for analysis to test the hypotheses in this

thesis.¹⁸¹ There is a section on films at the end of chapter two, where the undecidability of the identity that I argued was the case during the Cold War is evidenced in the way Mexicans were portrayed by Hollywood throughout most of the twentieth century. While most of the time they appeared in genres of 'contested space' that celebrate order and the rule of law versus anarchy, starring as bandits, greasers, illegal immigrants and drug dealers, there were exceptions to this that matched the position Mexico took in the prevailing discourse. (Schatz in Abrams, 2001: 181) One such period was the time around and during the Second World War, when Latin America was nearly the only foreign market for Hollywood films and a 'good neighbour' policy was officially implemented. Later, as Fascism began to rise in Germany, Italy and Japan, Hollywood's close co-operation with the CIA and the State Department meant that 'Others' against whom the national identity would be defined would become Nazis rather than Mexicans or Indians, depicted in a variety of war films and film noir, and projected into paranoid fantasies of persecution in science fiction. As soon as Nazis were defeated, spy films were added to the stock of genres and Communists took their place. After this long absence Mexican characters returned to Hollywood films during the 1980s, when they stood for an ethnic threat to the American culture in the form of illegal aliens, drug traffickers and criminals of all sorts.

In the 1990s however it has been argued that representations became 'more generous,' and this is the topic developed in the first section of chapter five, 'the challenge on film.' (Wood, 2002) Here I propose a threefold explanation for the change, which matches the construction of Mexico as a supplement in other discursive arenas, such as academia and the news. The first reason for the change would be the rise of the Hispanic 'minority' in the US, which has become an important market in its own right, whose tastes must be catered for if films are to be successful in this niche. Apart from their role as consumers, Mexican Americans in the US have now become producers of culture with the capability

¹⁸¹ The debate on what counts as national cinema is beyond the scope of this work since the main focus is on representations of the identity both in Hollywood and in the Mexican production. For theories on national cinema(s) however see Crofts, 2002: 25-51 and Higson, 2002: 52-67.

and willingness to reach beyond the marginalised position of earlier days and into the mainstream. Examples of this are the work of directors Robert Rodríguez (*El Mariachi*: 1992; *Desperado*: 1995; *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*: 2003), Gregory Nava (*Selena*: 1997; *My Family*: 1991), Luis Valdés (*La Bamba*: 1987) and others, as well as actor and activist Edward James Olmos (*Stand and Deliver*, Menéndez: 2000), and actress Elpidia Carrillo. A second explanation is the work of Mexican directors working in Hollywood, notably Alfonso Cuarón, who along with films such as *Harry Potter* and *Great Expectations* has made films on Mexico such as *Sólo con tu Pareja* (1991), analysed in this thesis, and *Y tu Mamá También* (2001), or Alfonso Arau's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1994). Finally, American directors too have recently made films broadly along the same 'more generous' lines, such *Frida* (Taymore: 2002) and *Traffic* (Sodenbergh: 2000), discussed here.

Traffic was chosen because it deals directly with one of the key issues in the bilateral relation, namely that of drug trafficking. Instead of all drugs, corruption and all evil coming from Mexico and suffered by the United States as used to be almost always the rule, in *Traffic* there is an honest policeman that proves key for the Americans to bring about the positive outcome. While critics have made the point that exceptions are there to confirm the rule, what is interesting for the purpose of this thesis is the fact that what makes this policeman a good character is precisely his mode of engagement with the Americans, not as an antagonist, but as a supplement. He is just one man being 'added' to the mighty machinery of the DEA and the American judicial system. But he proves to be an important addition, an addition after which those fighting drug trafficking 'on both sides of the border' seem to be just one more powerful team.¹⁸² Also discussed in this thesis is British director Ken Loach's *Bread and Roses* (2000) because, although not exactly a Hollywood product in many respects, it does contribute to the re-writing of former 'problems' as instances of 'opportunities' and 'partnership,' here as regards the second key issue in the bilateral agenda, that of migration. In *Bread and Roses* the problem to be solved is the exploitation

¹⁸² Apart from *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989), it was *Traffic* that made the reputation for Steven Sodenbergh, put Catherine Z. Jones in a Mexican role for the second time after *The Mask of Zorro* (Campbell, 1998) and won 'Latino' actor Benicio del Toro an Academy Award.

suffered by illegal immigrants who face unfair working conditions in the United States, with a specific focus on women. It is resolved through the organisation of a union and a series of strikes. By the end of the film, Mexican and Central American janitors have obtained their rise and somehow they have also obtained the possibility to gain access to the American dream, which they help to make happen for white Americans. Migration here comes across as a symbiotic relation.

Inasmuch as genres depict shared expectations and tell of what is culturally permissible in society, docudramas during the 1990s made it possible to think of Mexico as supplementary to the United States.

As for Mexico, cinema has been since its invention instrumental to the construction of the national identity. For several years there was a buoyant film industry whose audience grew in size and importance as the country became increasingly urbanised. Producing well over a hundred films a year in its heyday, the film industry generated a number of representations of the country and the identity and a shared general cultural background. In fact, part of its initial success has been attributed to its producing representations that coincided with expectations of 'Mexicannes' abroad. (López, 2000: 427) Indeed, directors such as Fernando de Fuentes and Emilio Fernández could be said to have put on celluloid the very representations that Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros so famously put on their murals, available for a far wider audience. After a very successful and productive period —incidentally known as 'the Golden Age'— which lasted from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, the film industry began to decline.

It is really throughout the 1990s and early 2000s that Mexican films portraying the type of 'cosmopolitan Mexicanity' that suited the discourse of the supplement then being crafted began to be produced and distributed. These films were mainly of two types: first of all, there was a series of erotic comedies depicting Mexico as a developed, industrialised and secular country, pretty much as any country in 'the West,' while on the other hand there was a series of films seeking to undermine the legitimacy of the PRI and to question the meaning for the identity that the regime had constructed. These films were made, distributed and shown amidst the almost total collapse of the national industry that followed the signing of NAFTA, where films were negotiated as industrial as opposed to

cultural products and thus remained unprotected. Only ten films were made at the worst point in 1998. Most cinemas closed down and were replaced by multiplexes in the more affluent neighbourhoods. Attendance fell from 302 million tickets sold per year on average during the late 1980s to only 62 million in 1995. (Mantecón, 2001) The price-liberation that took place meant the audience became skewed, with the upper middle classes being over-represented. Thus cinematic representations of the national identity during this period matched efforts being made in other areas of the cultural field to re-present the identity in new ways, in this case to people likely to embrace such representations. The only positive outcome of NAFTA on the film industry was the fact that some of the very few films made now had access to large distributing corporations, mainly Twentieth Century Fox and Columbia. This has meant that these few films are having a broader reach. Cinema attendance has since the mid 1990s begun to recover. In some cases, such as the films analysed here, Mexican films have been more successful domestically than the competing Hollywood blockbusters, remaining on screen for longer and attracting more viewers.

In this work I have dealt both with the erotic comedies of the 1990s, explaining how they sought to portray Mexico as a member of the post Cold War West, and with films that sought to undermine the regime of the PRI, questioning issues relating to the national identity. The comedies were analysed together since it is as a group that they make sense, while films in the latter category were analysed separately.

Consisting of urban stories of violence and betrayal between 'brother against brother,' centred around a car-crash and the consequences that follow, *Amores Perros* was analysed with regards to the metaphor of the nation as an extended family and the very violent crash between the upper classes and 'the underdog,' since the class struggle naturally strains the national narrative. The film presents very vividly the contrast between the elite of 'modernisers' that emerged from triumphant neoliberalism, and the asphyxiating lack of options and opportunities for the growing poor, their different takes on 'Mexico' and on how to go about with their everyday lives in their respective circumstances. Only the (Zapatista) guerrilla, depicted in the form of an outcast who is in a sense above

the conflict, is vindicated in the film. When hit-man 'El Chivo' spares 'el Negro,' the fighting dog that has killed all his beloved dogs, saying it is not responsible for these deaths, but that it was taught to behave in that ruthless way, it is as if ironically the guerrilla knows that it is only understanding —and possibly forgiveness— and not further violence that can stop the cycle.

So far the best-selling Mexican film in history, *The Crime of Father Amaro* was here analysed with regards to the narrative put forward on the links between religion and national identity and the role of the Church within the ruling elite, not only through the film itself, but also through the debate it sparked on the media and the actions it spawned from activists in civil organisations on the far right. I have argued that although the film was sold as a 'devastating attack on the Catholic Church' only shown by the Conservative government of ostensibly Catholic Vicente Fox as proof of the openness of his administration and also as proof of the degree of democratisation and tolerance achieved by the Mexican civil society, the film is actually polysemic and invites viewers to engage with it in very different ways, likely to vary according to age and gender. Inasmuch as it is critical to the Church it is mostly so in order to exonerate it. Most importantly, Catholicism is on this film presented as bound up with 'Mexicanity,' since the story takes place in a rural rather than an urban setting, and on its bid for authenticity and credibility the film relies on the constant depiction of 'traditions,' thus linking 'real Mexico' and the Catholic religion.¹⁸³ However, it is the Liberation Theologians that the film is most sympathetic to.

Finally, *Amaro's* 'twin film' *Herod's Law* was also analysed, since it uses exactly the same formula, although in a different genre, to mount an attack on the Mexican political system, especially on the PRI, but also dismissing the PAN as mild, ineffective and ultimately hypocritical opposition and the Church as cynical and manipulative. Only the private sector fares well on this film as on all of the others, depicted as honest and hard working, indeed as beyond corruption. Unlike *Amaro* however this film is not really open to negotiating interpretation: 'the system' is to blame and it is beyond repair. 'We' can and must continue to be 'Mexican' but the PRI does not at all equal 'the nation.' This film also attempts to

¹⁸³ Although not necessarily approvingly.

sever the still mythical administration of Lázaro Cárdenas from the PRI, perhaps for the appropriation of forthcoming 'true inheritors of the revolution.'

On balance, it is thus fair to conclude that although cinematic representations of the national identity during the 1990s were crafting a subject position for 'Mexicans' as not antagonistic but supplementary to 'Americans,' representations since 2000 indicate that this subject position was not effectively articulated into a persuasive discourse and is being rejected by a sizeable group of the population. Both those films analysed for this work and many others recently produced seem instead to endorse the narrative being put forward by the Zapatistas. Cosmopolitan high-rise apartment dwellers of the new Millennium and their romantic lives are being replaced by 'guerrillas,' peasants, 'Indians,' students, working class young men and women, etc. and all sorts of 'authentic' characters appear in leading, positive roles while 'traditions' feature in plots. These narratives seem to resonate with the public judging from responses in the box office and the criticism they receive. Particularly significant has been the role of women directors.

I would argue that this failure is owed mainly to two reasons: one, that since it is difference rather than similarity that produces meaning, and since it is the setting of boundaries rather than their removal what actually generates subjectivity, it was not enough to engage in discourses of 'convergence' as long as there was not an external boundary that really put Mexico within North America. The second reason is that, just as the Mexican national identity was dislocated as a result of the dislocation of the discourse that sustained it, so was the case too with the American identity, as I argued above with regards to the meaning of 'the West.'¹⁸⁴ Even as they were trying to identify with it, representations in Mexico continued to reify American Otherness as it was constructed during the times of the PRI, when other discourses were hegemonic both inside Mexico and abroad. Moreover, other sets of oppositions seem to be at

¹⁸⁴ Indeed, research on representations of the American identity in cinema during the 1990s found that national identity emerged "as a central topic of debate in the United States" and the American past became "a contested domain" evident in the release of, among others, *Glory* (Zwick: 1992), *JFK* (Stone: 1991), *Malcolm X* (Lee: 1992) and *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckiz: 1994). (Burgoyne, 1997: 1)

work on the discourse on world politics since September 11th 2001, bringing their own sets of boundaries.

Concluding Remarks

During the 1990s nationalism, whose demise had long been predicted, re-emerged as the source of renewed and entrenched international conflict, and even in many instances when it did not lead to conflict, questions on the meaning of the national identity began to surface. In Mexico, where the regime that had been in place for the best part of the twentieth century had relied on nationalism to remain in power, these questions became very pressing.

Recently, globalisation has been the backdrop against which debates on the transformation of national identities have taken place. That is, these transformations are assumed to be occurring and they are assumed to be the product of 'globalisation,' cast either as "the growing shared awareness of the world as a single place" associated with 'postmodernity' or 'late modernity,' which is in turn said to increasingly tear "space away from place by fostering relations between absent Others," or as "effects of deterritorialised capitalism and neo-Fordism on global cultural flows." (Lechner and Boli, 2000: xvii; Giddens, 1990: 18; Staiger: 2002, 237) Transformations are generally not disputed.¹⁸⁵ But while those at one end of the debate regard globalisation as a natural outcome of the evolution of science and technology and celebrate the transformations as ways to renew the identity without threatening it, as an ongoing process of hybridisation so to speak, that through a pattern of change and repetition manages continuity, at the other end of the debate the transformation is bemoaned as the victory of a cultural imperialism that matches the economic imperialism underpinning globalisation. The transformation is regarded as threatening to some platonic essence that is somehow diluted or lost through the contact of the dominating culture, which almost always is that of the United States. Again, this is particularly pertinent in the case of Mexico, where the threat coming from the

¹⁸⁵ In the case of Mexico, a nation wide survey carried out in 1995 by Enrique Alduncin for the Bank of Mexico seemed to confirm these perceptions. (Alduncin, 1999: 112-158)

United States is perhaps perceived more acutely than in many other places around the world.

The methodology I have applied to construct a theory of the transformation of the Mexican national identity allows one to go beyond the terms within which this debate is traditionally framed, and it is thus more fruitful and useful. Rather than thinking of immutable essences under threat or of mutable essences enhanced through combination, I have argued that thinking instead of boundaries set through practices, of traces of meaning left on signifiers constantly rearticulated on different contexts and of interactions is a more accurate way of conceiving national identities. Theorising in this way permits one to account for a number of issues that in traditional accounts appear as contradictory or incoherent, such as the rise of pressures for separatism at a time of integration and unification, while in other cases it allows to trace the mechanisms whereby power is at work on issues that appeared as mere coincidences, such as the sudden appearance of the Zapatista rebellion, again at a time when Mexico was supposed to be entering 'the First World.' Finally, and perhaps more importantly, theorising in this way switches the focus back from a diffuse 'globalisation', a complex set of impersonal processes, into the hegemonic groups and elites, established as well as emerging, that actually both shape and are the result of those processes, and on the people whose beliefs they seek to command, especially since

"For a long time people assumed that the reserves of belief were limitless. All one had to do was to create islands of rationality in the ocean of incredulity, isolate and secure the fragile conquests made by critical thinking...little by little, [however], belief became polluted like the air and the water...There are now too many things to believe and not enough credibility to go around." (De Certeau, 1984: 178-179)

Discourses on national belonging, warts and all, seem to be among the few stocks whence credibility can still be drawn to make meaning 'in the age of globalisation' which is also increasingly becoming 'the age of scepticism.'

Afterword

As is often the case in International Relations when reporting findings on research carried out spanning a period of four years, it now seems pertinent to bring the thesis up to date by considering the latest developments of the topics discussed.

Writing at a time when the Cold War framework had come to an end but when a new one to replace it had not yet become hegemonic, I put forward the contention that Mexican identity was then undergoing a radical transformation, which involved abandonment of the antagonistic position vis-à-vis the United States for an alternative one of supplementarity.

It seems now evident, however, that a reconfiguration of global power is under way. Literature on the current state of world politics is abundant, and a variety of explanations have been put forward as to the causes and directions of this reconfiguration. From a discourse-analysis perspective, however, and solely concerned with the implications for national identities, the reconfiguration can be described as being mainly an attempt to recast the 'bifurcated World' that is always at the heart of International Relations discourses, whether consisting of "the civilised and barbarian, the rich and poor, the controllers and consumers of knowledge...the stable and the chaotic, the liberal democratic against the authoritarian" etc. into a very concrete opposition between 'the United States plus Israel' and 'Islamic Fundamentalism.' (O'Hagan and Fry, 2000: 250) As noted on chapter three, this opposition is rooted on compelling narratives of religion and belonging and it allows for the projection of one's 'sore spots' on the Other, as well as for blame for the fundamental lack inherent in society to be conveniently laid at their door. Thus this opposition can render a polarised political field not dissimilar to the one that prevailed during the Cold War. A first outcome of the inclusion of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' in the key meaning-making opposition of the almost-dominant discourse has been a profound crisis, described even as "the end of the West", a fact variously deplored or hailed by academics and policy makers on both sides of the Atlantic. (Garton-Ash, 2004; Marquand, 2004; Gordon, 2004; Halper and Clarke, 2004)

This power reconfiguration has also had consequences for Mexican identity. At first it seemed that both the Bush and Fox administrations and the elites more generally would continue supporting the integrationist project, seeking to institutionalise practices that started during the late 1980s and capitalising on the majorities that already were in favour in both countries. But soon after George W. Bush took over, a number of developments caused the supplementarity narrative to be severely strained. First there were the events of September 11th 2001, which cast negotiations on immigration, on which success of the whole enterprise so crucially depended, under a different light than had been the case during the Salinas and Zedillo administrations. Then and more importantly it was the invasion of Iraq, which the Mexican government failed to endorse while in the Security Council, and which public opinion strongly and overwhelmingly opposed, that pretty much revived the traditional antagonistic position. Those sectors that had opposed the integrationist project, notably the Mexican intelligentsia and a variety of interest groups in the United States as discussed in chapter three, have become increasingly vocal.

In this context, earlier antagonistic narratives are being resurrected. Among them, Samuel P. Huntington's most recent work, dealing with Mexican migration to the United States, subscribes the myth of the unilateral benefit outlined in chapter three and goes beyond, casting Mexican immigrants and even Mexican Americans as "the single most immediate and most serious" threat to American identity. (Huntington, 2004: 32) Echoing those who deplore America's 'cultural imperialism' all over the world, Huntington deplores the loss of the white Anglo-protestant essence he maintains is at the core of the US identity, an essence that had acted as a powerful solvent, so to speak, able to dissolve all traces of 'foreignness' in Europeans but which is left powerless to cope with "the persistent strength of [Mexican] communal bonds" and the general features of Mexican migration. (Huntington quoting Janowitz, 2004: 39)

In brief, the whole of Huntington's argument can be conceived as part of a battle over the definition of the true America. In Huntington's argument it is its being founded by British settlers and the culture thereof that proves the defining feature. Had this not been the case "it would not be the United States. It would be

Quebec, Mexico or Brazil.”(Huntington, 2004: 32) For other Americans, however, notably for those of Mexican ancestry, what makes America American is not its past but its present of diversity. Australia and New Zealand as well as Anglophone Canada are also largely the outcome of British settlement yet these countries are not America either. The core of American identity should be conceived in terms of Spanish language and Catholicism at least as much as it is conceived as English language and Protestantism, they maintain, especially since, as put by Luis Valdés, they did not come to the US, but the US came to them. (Gorodezky, 1993: 143) To Huntington “there is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society” and Mexican Americans will “share into that dream...only if they dream it in English.” (Huntington, 2004: 45) Not so, say Mexican Americans. What makes the American dream American at this point in the US history is precisely the fact that it is also ‘dreamable’ in Spanish, and it has been and remains so dreamed in the Southwest and beyond. More than merely being there for them to share, the dream is also theirs in their own right. Even if it were to become a subtitled dream, it would be no less American. These two narratives and other positions in between will surely hotly contend to prevail in the coming years.

As this research work comes to an end, it only remains to be said that despite the resistance that the ‘narrative of supplementarity’ is encountering lately, especially among those who deplore the transformation of American identity it attempts to bring about, the conclusions reached here are nonetheless valid. Contemporary international relations can be understood as partly the outcome of seeking to construct persuasive narratives that will tell us who we are, and that will make sense within the scope of the territorial boundaries of the national states we presently inhabit —as the timely publication of Huntington’s book only too well illustrates. Just as the period of the post Cold War was the framework in which he sought this answer looking for differences to the Other ‘outside’, in a “clash of civilisations,” in the post September 11th world he seeks the same answer ‘inside.’ (Huntington, 1993) Be it as it may, in the US as well as Mexico and beyond, the meaning of national identities continues to be shaped by discourses on world politics at least as much as by domestic factors, and at the

same time the actual construction of those identities continue to be a key driving force behind the interactions among national states that actually take place.

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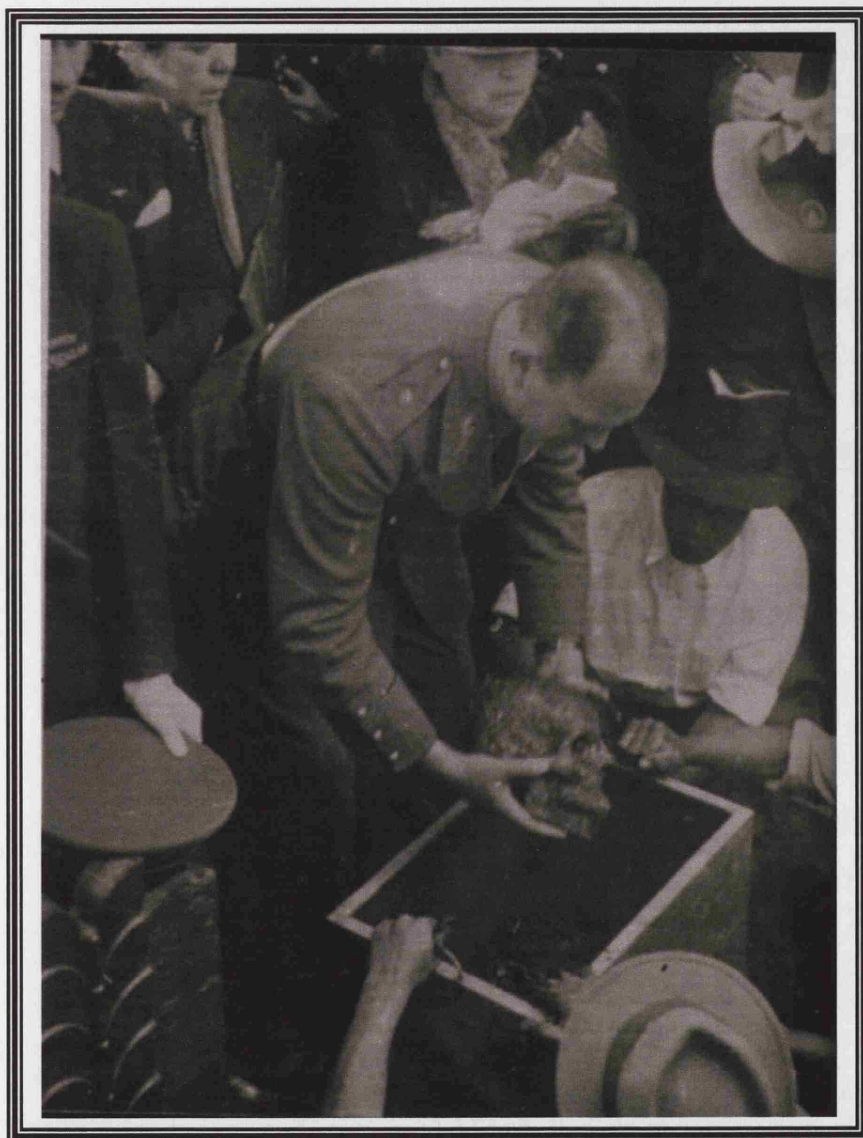
<i>Ustedes los Ricos</i> (Rodríguez, 1948)	76
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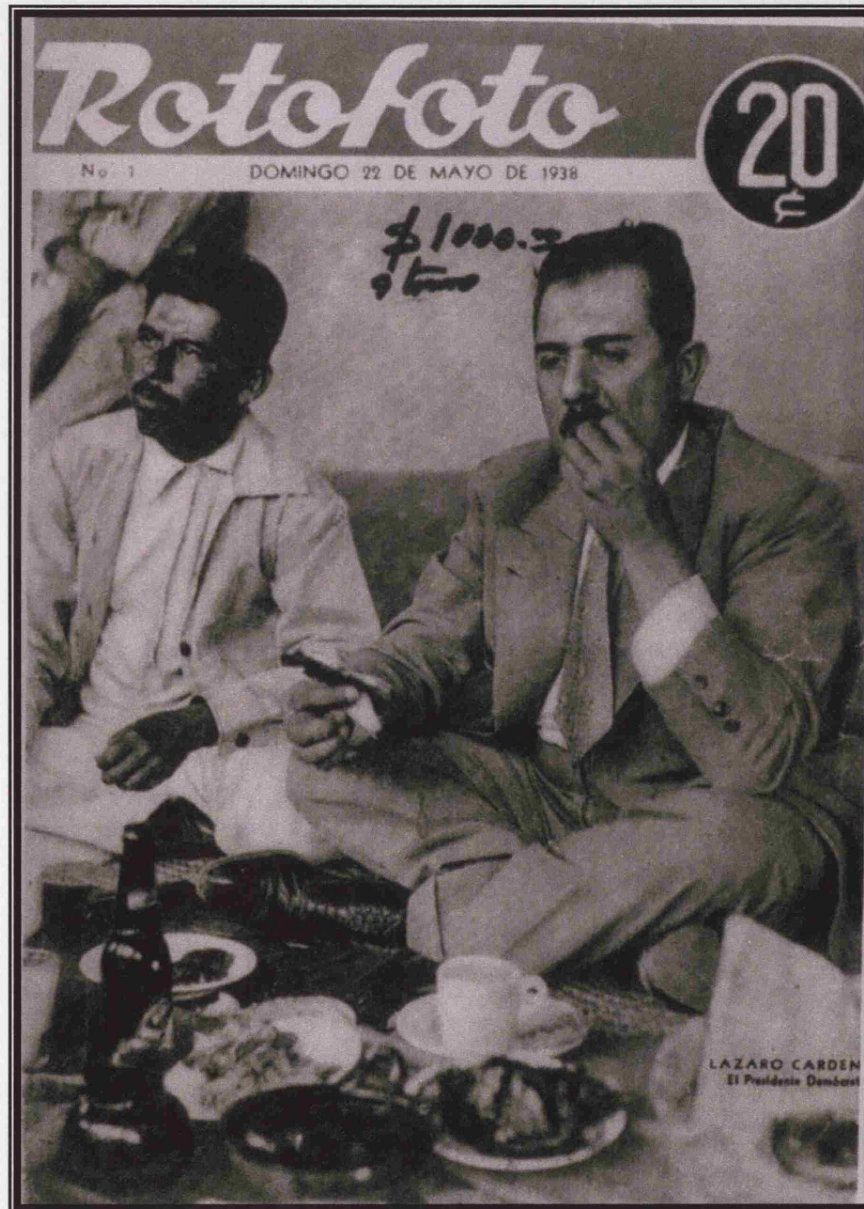
<i>Zoot Suit</i> (Valdéz, 1984).....	156
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Addendum

Photograph 1



Photograph 2



Yes, it can be done!



By Malaquías Montoya

Reclamation

By Jessica Roa

A history was denied me
My grandmother's tongue ripped out of my mouth
I was too young to know how to grieve the loss properly
The wound healed
In the shape of my Americanness
"Work hard and you'll succeed" I heard
And so I did
My 22nd year the truth was revealed to me
"White man is on top"
"And you? Sorry honey, you're somewhere near the bottom"
Anger
Anger turned my insides into a seething crimson
The death of my ignorance shook me hard and
Choked me out of my complacency
I have fallen many times since the first breaths of truth were inhaled
But I always come back to standing
And now
A language has been found
The language of the coloniser twisted
And shape-shifted
To resist
To empower
Their words, now mine, woven into a
Tempestuous cloth that's wrapped protectively
Around my shoulders
Their words, now mine, used to reclaim my history
To reclaim what was taken from me
And to make the promise
To speak the words
That this, is only the beginning.