

**Entertaining Education: Teaching National History in Mexican State-Sponsored
Comic Books and *Telenovelas*, 1963 to 1996**

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Advised by Jeffrey M. Pilcher and Patrick J. McNamara

September 2013

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generosity and support of many individuals. Above all, I am deeply grateful to Jeffrey Pilcher and Anne Rubenstein, who have both been generous with their insight, time, and support. Anne's inexhaustible enthusiasm and grasp of Mexican history inspired the course of this research project, and Jeffrey's sharp insight and willingness to ask me tough questions have made this dissertation stronger. I would also like to thank Patrick McNamara, who served as my co-advisor at the University of Minnesota; my work and time in Minnesota were enriched by his sound advice and readiness to discuss Mexican history. I have also had the pleasure of learning from Sarah Chambers; as a student in her classes, her teaching assistant, and editorial assistant for *Gender & History*, I have gained a profound respect for her as a scholar, teacher, and person. David Sheinin sparked my interest in Latin American history at Trent University, and my dissertation committee members – Jeffrey, Anne, Patrick, Sarah, and Joanna O'Connell – have continued to support my work and greatly influence my ideas and approaches. Ultimately, my academic path was inspired by these incredible teachers.

I am indebted to a number of institutions and agencies whose financial support made my research possible. Funding was generously provided by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program, the University of Minnesota and the Department of History, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations, and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México's Instituto

de Investigaciones Históricas. As a fellow at the later two institutions, I benefitted from the guidance of Ariel Rodríguez Kuri at Colegio de México and Fernando Betancourt at the UNAM.

While living in Mexico City, many people generously offered their time to meet with me to discuss the nature of historical work in Mexico, including Guillermo Zermeño, Alvaro Vazquez Mantécon, Gabriela Cano, and Ricardo Perez Montfort. I am also extremely grateful to those individuals who allowed me to interview them, including telenovela producer Carlos Romero, scriptwriter Tere Medina, comic book scholar Irene Herner, and historian Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach. Bookstore owners and countless taxi drivers also kindly shared their memories of the popular culture projects discussed here. Several archivists made the long hours of digging more enjoyable, particularly Raymundo and Erika at the AGN, Roberto at the SEP, Angel at Clío, and the entire staff (but especially Marío) at the Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada. Lastly, I am forever grateful to Mauricio and Alcira for making me part of their family, indulging my desire to talk about Mexican history, and reminding me to enjoy the Mexican present.

At Minnesota I gained not only academic training, but a family in Elizabeth Zaroni and Johanna Leinonen. I cannot thank them enough for providing daily emotional and intellectual support. Justin Biel, Kevin Mummey, Emily Bruce, Elizabeth Venditto, and Nate Holdren have also provided insightful feedback on my work, and writing support and encouragement. From afar, my parents, brother, grandmother and extended family have provided emotional support even when they were unclear why I was still in school. Finally, my partner Trent deserves a prize for his willingness to accompany me

on research trips and even brave the archives, his keen editorial eye, and most importantly, his love and unwavering support.

Dedication

To my grandmother, my mother, and Trent, for their loving support.

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Introduction

In 1965 President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz summoned producers Ernesto Alonso and Miguel Alemán Velasco of Televisa, the nation's largest media conglomerate, to his office to express his displeasure with a telenovela (soap opera) airing at the time. He demanded that they produce another series with a different political message to rectify the damage inadvertently caused by their narrative. After they complied, the president invited them back to the National Palace, along with this new series' best-known actors, to congratulate and thank them for their extraordinary work. More than two decades later, in 1988, Televisa abruptly pulled another telenovela from the air because it coincided with protests over a presidential election that was believed to be fraudulent. How is it that telenovelas command such attention from the nation's highest political offices? The answer partly lies in the extent to which history matters in Mexico. It was the historical nature of these telenovelas that provoked such strident reactions from presidents, bureaucrats, historians, and audiences. History lies at the very heart of Mexican identity, and this privileged position has meant that the narratives selected and the ways in which these tales have been recounted have been politically charged.

This dissertation examines the political nature of history and popular culture in late-twentieth-century Mexico and asks, how did the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) seek to employ history as a way to help manage political changes underway in the 1980s and 1990s? To answer this question I examine the narratives conveyed by historically themed comic books, produced by the Secretariat of Public

Education (SEP), and historical telenovelas, produced by Televisa in cooperation with various state ministries. In addition to the comic books and telenovelas, I employed archival documents, newspapers, television guides, and interviews to put the case studies in historical and cultural context. “Entertaining Education: Teaching National History in Mexican State-Sponsored Comic Books and Telenovelas, 1963 to 1996,” covers a period of enormous turmoil, beginning in 1963, with the production of the first historically themed telenovela, and ending with the last in 1996.

Historians of modern Mexico have often made reference to an “official history” employed by the ruling party in order to bolster its own political legitimacy and to forge a shared national identity. In this latter task, the PRI effectively fashioned a post-Revolutionary Mexican identity, in part by drawing from and harnessing local popular cultures from diverse regions and nationalizing them. They also sanitized and revised the history of the Revolution of 1910, from which the government derived its political legitimacy. In doing so, it erased the complexity and treachery of conflicts between figures such as Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Francisco “Pancho” Villa, and Emiliano Zapata, instead subsuming them – albeit unevenly – into a national pantheon of heroes.¹ This revolutionary cast formed part of the origin myth of the PRI, and their struggles were portrayed as an expression of democratic achievement and social welfare. Critics argued that revolutionary ideals like fair elections, agrarian reform, and social welfare were little more than rhetorical strategies wielded by the PRI, along with

¹ For more on the uneven incorporation of Revolutionary heroes, see Ilene O’Malley, *The Myth of Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

repressive measures such as cooptation, coercion, corruption, and force, in order to hold power from 1929 until the end of the twentieth century.

Those early and middle years – particularly from the outbreak of the Revolution in 1910 through the 1950s – have been extensively studied by historians. What is less understood are the final decades of the PRI's reign, particularly those final two decades. Although the 1980s and 1990s have only recently been taken up by historians, among scholars who do work on the period a consensus has emerged that Mexico underwent a significant transition in its economic, political, and social institutions starting in the 1980s.² This transition was driven largely by a turn to neoliberal economic policies that called for opening national markets, privatizing parastatal industries, and abolishing even rudimentary social welfare programs such as food subsidies for the poor, all of which ran counter to the PRI's traditional revolutionary rhetoric.

Given the centrality of history to Mexican identity, this dissertation asks how the PRI employed history as a way to mitigate the political consequences of the changes underway in the 1980s and 1990s, which alienated large numbers of voters, and spelt the eventual collapse of the PRI power. It asks, furthermore, did neoliberalism alter the political nature of history, and if so, how? I conclude that the PRI, along with the support of Televisa, employed history as a unifying discourse of national identity in order to boost their political legitimacy and profits, but ultimately this use of the past was unable

² Stephen H. Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Wil G. Pansters, ed., *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1997); Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989*, trans. Luis Alberto Fierro (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

to mitigate the fracturing that occurred in the late twentieth century as a result of their transition from corporatism to neoliberalism.

Political Context: A Time of Crisis?

While there may be debates about what constitutes a “crisis,” scholars of the history and politics of late-twentieth century agree that Mexico underwent a period of upheaval starting in the 1980s.³ According to anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz, the term “crisis” was used so widely after the economic collapse in 1982 that “this whole era together with its concomitant situations, practices, and sentiments, became known as *la crisis*.”⁴ Signs of strain were evident earlier, following the Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968, wherein the Mexican army killed hundreds of peaceful student demonstrators. Falling international oil prices and the chronic overvaluation of the peso spurred the government of José López Portillo to devalue the peso three times during 1982, and subsequently to nationalize Mexico’s banking system. Economically, the decade was the worst Mexico had experienced since 1929; for example, between 1983 and 1988, the value of workers’ real wages fell between 40 and 50 percent.⁵ Reflecting on the devastation of the 1982 crisis, Mexican author Carlos Fuentes observed:

I think Mexican nationalism...suffered deterioration as a result of the disappointment with the oil abatement. As a result of the '82 crisis, there was a

³ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*; Mariane Braig, “Continuity and Change in Mexican Political Culture: The Case of PRONASOL”; Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Revolution*.

⁴ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, “Times of Crisis: Historicity, Sacrifice, and the Spectacle of Debacle in Mexico City,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 131.

⁵ *Ibid.* Of course, these economic conditions of crisis were not limited to Mexico; nations throughout Latin American and Africa experienced similar crises.

jolt, because the identity of oil and nationalism beginning with [Lázaro] Cárdenas was very strong, and since we were not able to administer the oil wealth and we fell into a terrible crisis like the one in '82 from which we have not recovered, the idea of nationalism suffered a very, very serious deterioration.⁶

Neoliberal economic policies intended to mitigate the crisis angered small and mid-sized business owners who shifted their support to the right-of-center Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), and the corresponding austerity measures alienated unionized urban and industrial workers, although existing left-of-center parties such as the Mexican Communist Party did not present a viable political alternative to the PRI.

Then, on September 19, 1985, an earthquake shook the capital, devastating the city's infrastructure, killing some 8,000 people, and leaving 250,000 homeless. The destruction to some parts of Mexico City, particularly the historical center, was profound and gave rise to a social movement fuelled by middle-class discontent.⁷ The ruling party itself underwent massive internal fracturing, when its leftist contingent separated and formed a new party in 1987. The presidential election of Carlos Salinas de Gortari the following year was widely viewed as one of the most fraudulent in the party's history.

These crises were compounded by the transition to neoliberal economic policies, which abruptly repudiated the PRI's decades of revolutionary promises. Consequently, when Salinas signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), an armed indigenous organization, responded by declaring war on what it claimed was an illegitimate government. This "perfect storm"

⁶ Fuentes in Carrie C. Chorba, *Mexico, From Mestizo to Multicultural* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), 23. Translation by Chorba.

⁷ Louise E. Walker, "Economic Fault Lines and Middle-Class Fears: Tlatelolco, Mexico City, 1985," in *Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America*, ed. Jürgen Buchenau and Lyman Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

produced an opening in the political spectrum that spelled the demise of the PRI's authoritarian rule.⁸

Sources

A study of the changes and continuities in the political currency of history in Mexico could take many forms. Exactly because the past is perpetually present in contemporary Mexico, it is manifest in myriad official capacities: museums, textbooks, historical celebrations, street and building names, subway stations, portraits of iconic Mexican leaders, political rhetoric, and the like. Nevertheless, historical references are not only the purview of government officials. As Mary Kay Vaughan has argued of the Ministry of Education's literacy campaigns in the 1930s, the most enduring legacy of the state's cultural endeavors was the creation of a mutual language of consent and dissent.⁹ I would argue that history was a fundamental component of this language, and as such, diverse interests have harnessed its political potential; the private sector, for example, has seized it to signal their status as upstanding corporate citizens of the nation, and citizens' groups, such as the barrio associations that formed after the 1985 earthquake and the EZLN, have referenced it to demand services or rights from the state. As a result, references to Mexican history are omnipresent – walking down the street one might encounter corporate billboards that reference the heroes of independence, a tiny taco shop

⁸ "Contesting Mexico," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 30, no. 4 (January 1997): 13.

⁹ Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

named after Pancho Villa, a mural celebrating Benito Juárez, and graffiti depicting Emiliano Zapata.

In order to delimit a reasonable field of analysis, I have chosen to focus on historical forms of popular culture – particularly telenovelas and comic books – because they held the promise of greater accessibility to audiences than textbooks or museums and because I am interested in state and private sector interactions. My case studies include two series of comic books, *México: historia de un pueblo* (Mexico: history of a people, 1980) and *Episodios Mexicanos* (Mexican episodes, 1981) and nine historical telenovelas (see figure 1).

Title	Year	Theme
<i>Vida de Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz</i>	1963	Biography of Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz
<i>Carlota y Maximiliano</i>	1965	French Intervention
<i>La tormenta</i>	1967	French Intervention to Revolution
<i>Los caudillos</i>	1968	Struggle for independence
<i>La constitución</i>	1969	Drafting of 1917 Constitution
<i>El carruaje</i>	1970	Juárez
<i>Senda de Gloria</i>	1987	The Revolution
<i>El vuelo del águila</i>	1994	Biography of Porfirio Díaz
<i>La antorcha encendida</i>	1996	Struggle for independence

Figure 1
List of Mexican Historical Telenovelas

These case studies can be regarded as examples of historical entertainment-education, or “edutainment.” Entertainment-education is defined as “the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable

attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior.”¹⁰ Entertainment-education advocates view it as a communication strategy with the potential to generate behavioral and societal change. Initially the strategy was employed mainly for health-related campaigns in the countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia in the form of radio or television soap operas.¹¹

The basic idea for entertainment-education was developed by Mexican television producer Miguel Sabido. He was the person that Televisa executive Miguel Alemán Velasco sought out to rectify the debacle over *Carlota y Maximiliano*'s representation of Benito Juárez, which had prompted the uncomfortable meeting in the presidential palace. The success of the resulting series, *La tormenta*, proved to Sabido (and others) that “soap operas did not have to be ‘tear-jerkers’ and superficial,” and he went on to make eleven additional “entertainment-education” telenovelas (see figure 2).¹² The first four of the genre were historical telenovelas, and the remaining eight dealt with social issues such as literacy, family planning, women’s rights, and street children.

¹⁰ Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, “The Status of Entertainment-Education Worldwide,” in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, ed. Arvind Singhal et al. (Mahwah N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² Sabido in *Ibid.*

Title	Year	Theme
<i>La tormenta</i>	1967	French invasion to Revolution
<i>Los caudillos</i>	1968	Struggle for independence
<i>La constitución</i>	1969	Principles underlying drafting of 1917 Constitution
<i>El carruaje</i>	1970	Juárez
<i>Ven conmigo</i>	1975-6	Adult education
<i>Acompáñame</i>	1977-8	Family planning
<i>Vamos juntos</i>	1979-80	Responsible parenthood
<i>El combate</i>	1980	Adult education and literacy
<i>Caminemos</i>	1980-1	Sexual responsibility among teenagers
<i>Nosotras las mujeres</i>	1981	Status of women
<i>Por amor</i>	1981-2	Family planning
<i>Los hijos de nadie</i>	1997	Street children

Figure 2
“Miguel Sabido’s Entertainment-Education Soap Operas Broadcast in Mexico”¹³

Sabido’s interest in educational entertainment was particularly inspired by the incredible success, both didactic and commercial, of *Simplemente Maria*, a telenovela about a young housemaid named Maria who falls in love with her literacy teacher. The original was Argentine, but it was the Peruvian version, which aired from 1969 to 1971, that was the first huge success and spawned copies in other countries like Mexico. The series was not only an enormous commercial hit, but it exceeded didactic expectations as well: enrolment in sewing and literacy classes rose sharply in each of the countries where the series was broadcast.¹⁴

Between 1970 and 1974, Sabido worked with his sister, a teacher and television producer at Televisa, to establish a formula for educational telenovelas. The resulting

¹³ The table appears in *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁴ A. Singhal, R. Obregon, and E. M. Rogers, “Reconstructing the Story of *Simplemente Maria*, the Most Popular Telenovela in Latin America of All Time,” *International Communication Gazette* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 12, doi:10.1177/001654929505400101.

methodology is known as the “Sabido method” and calls for characters who represent positive, negative, and transitional role models and are rewarded and punished accordingly, demonstrating to viewers the consequences of their behavioral choices. Sabido’s vision was supported from the highest levels within Televisa. Following criticism from the president of Mexico for the high percentage of programming imported from the United States and broadcast on Televisa, Emilio Azcarraga cut thirty-five of its shows and turned to Sabido to help reorganize the network’s programming to be more socially responsible.¹⁵

Sabido’s first didactic series after the four historical telenovelas was *Ven conmigo*, which he cowrote with Celia Alcantara, author of *Simplemente Maria*. The series aired from 1975 to 1976. In order to take advantage of the existing infrastructure for adult education, Sabido designed *Ven conmigo* to support the Secretariat of Public Education’s efforts to emphasize the value of adult education, self-teaching, and altruism. Each episode ended with a thirty-second epilogue read by actress Marga Lopez that summarized the educational objectives of the episode and related it to the daily lives of viewers.¹⁶ Televisa debuted the next didactic series, *Acompáñame*, when the state launched a birth-control program in the mid-1970s.¹⁷ It was the first family planning television serial drama in the world. The series effectively encouraged the predominantly Catholic viewers to engage in family planning, and it was successful: it generated a 33

¹⁵ David O. Poindexter, “A History of Entertainment-Education, 1958-2000,” in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, ed. Arvind Singhal et al. (Mahwah N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 51–2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁷ William A Orme, *A Culture of Collusion: An Inside Look at the Mexican Press* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1997), 61.

percent increase in the adoption of family planning methods at government health clinics.¹⁸

Sabido's work received international support; David O. Poindexter, president of Population Communications International; the British Lord Caradon, Chair of their advisory council; several United States senators; the Director-General of the BBC, and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association wrote letters to Televisa President Emilio Azcárraga encouraging him to broadcast another edutainment telenovela. The pressure was effective and Azcárraga authorized the creation of another series, eventually entitled *Vamos juntos*, which dealt with adolescent sexuality.¹⁹

Today entertainment-education is a world-wide phenomenon that has endless manifestations, such as educational computer games and didactic magazines, which are enormously popular today, though often intended for children. They claim to offer "acceptable leisure-time pursuit," targeting parents' desire to give their children an educational advantage, and they promise fun for the child.²⁰ The edutainment products examined here were not created solely for children. The comics were used as didactic tools in schools, but their primary audiences were adults; the hope was that the schoolchildren would bring them home to their parents to read and discuss them together. The historical telenovelas frequently aired between 6:30 and 8:00 p.m., so they likely would have been viewed by children, but again, this was not their target audience.

¹⁸ Poindexter, "A History of Entertainment-Education, 1958-2000," 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ David Buckingham and Margaret Scanlon, "Selling Learning: Towards a Political Economy of Edutainment Media," *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 45.

Telenovelas

Those unfamiliar with the popularity of telenovelas might wonder how dramatic tales of forbidden, scorned, and unrequited love can generate such debate. In Mexico, and across Latin America, telenovelas enjoy enormous popularity; in Mexico estimates of audiences range from sixty to eighty percent of the population.²¹ They are watched by the young and old, men and women, and across the classes, though the elite are not always willing to admit it.

The historical telenovelas examined here aired on Televisa, Mexico's largest media conglomerate, between 1963 and 1996. Several of the telenovelas were co-sponsored by various state ministries including the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS), the National Lottery, and the Ministry of National Defense. Like popular domestic telenovelas (the industry term for regular telenovelas), the most successful series were packaged as collectibles, first in VHS and then DVD, and sold at large department stores and, later in pirated form, by street vendors.

The foundational formula for telenovelas – both historical and conventional – is melodrama. At their most basic level, melodramas are moral narratives that pivot around struggles between good and evil on all levels, from individuals to society at large.²² In the end, happy endings prevail over tragedies and the dominant order is restored. Melodrama provided a framework for morality in which exaggeration and hyperbole

²¹ Adriana Estill, "The Mexican Telenovela and Its Foundational Fictions," in *Latin American Literature and Mass Media*, ed. Paz Soldán Edmundo and Debra A. Castillo (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 179.

²² Alison Greene, "'Cablevision(nation) in Rural Yucatán: Performing Modernity and Mexicanidad in the Early 1990s,'" in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 415–451.

constructed binary concepts of good and bad, light and dark, salvation and damnation. Moral lessons, in this way, were made simple and digestible.²³ These moral lessons are particularly productive for use in edutainment and structurally make it simple to insert characters for identification by audiences, so they can learn new social behaviors without detracting from ratings.²⁴

Comic books

Comic books are also incredibly popular in Mexico, in part because they are cheap and accessible to semi-literate readers. They became ubiquitous in the 1940s, and remained widely popular at least until the 1970s and 1980s. In those early decades, many people learned to read just so that they could read comic books.²⁵ While comic book audiences (and quality) have declined since their “Golden Era” in the 1940s and 1950s, audience estimates remain high. According to a report produced by the Secretariat of Public Education in 1977, thirty-six million Mexicans read comic books.²⁶ Given this link between literacy and comics since the 1930s, it is, perhaps, not surprising that the SEP would embrace comic books as they faced a continuing literacy crisis, albeit several decades later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I focus specifically on two historically

²³ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), ix.

²⁴ Miguel Sabido, “The Origins of Entertainment-Education,” in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, ed. Arvind Singhal et al. (Mahwah N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 64.

²⁵ Armando Bartra, “The Seduction of the Innocents: The First Tumultuous Moments of Mass Literacy in Postrevolutionary Mexico,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert Michael Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 301–2.

²⁶ AHSEP, 9213/18 Letter and report from Patricia Van Rhijn to Roger Diaz de Cossío, 30 de agosto de 1979. p. 9, diagram #5.

themed series: *Episodios mexicanos* and *México: historia de un pueblo*. The two series, published between 1980 and 1982, combine fact and fiction to narrate significant political events and periods in Mexican history, including the Spanish conquests, the colonial era, the Wars of Independence, and the Mexican Revolution. *México: historia de un pueblo*, coordinated by acclaimed Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, launched in August 1980 with print runs of between 50,000 and 100,000. Volumes were available for purchase at supermarkets and sidewalk stands for a cost of sixty pesos.²⁷ *Episodios mexicanos* first hit newsstands at the end of August in 1981, this time at a considerably lower price of three pesos. Historian Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach coordinated an interdisciplinary team in the production of sixty-eight volumes of *Episodios mexicanos*. Teachers used the comic books as didactic tools in schools, but they were primarily designed as public history products that would appeal to young and old readers alike.

Culture Industries and the State

Mexico has a history of rich and diverse popular culture forms – from artesanías (folk art), food, music, puppetry, theatre, wrestling, and comic books to radio and television programming. According to historian Mary Kay Vaughan, “no other state in the Western Hemisphere invested as much in the creation of a national culture as the

²⁷ Paul Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 320. Marketing in supermarkets was noted by Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach in an interview by author, Mexico City, Mexico, July 20, 2005.

Mexican central government.”²⁸ Not surprisingly, there is a robust field of inquiry devoted to the study of these cultural forms, particularly those dating from the early to mid-twentieth century. These cultural historians have demonstrated the fundamental role that the PRI’s cultural projects played in its political success and ability to maintain authority for over seventy years. Indeed, Anne Rubenstein, historian of Mexican mass media and popular culture, argues

The comparative calm that has prevailed is not an artifact of a completely repressive police state, but the achievement of a government that has more or less controlled the course of events in Mexico, while still allowing an adequate space for dissent and maintaining enough flexibility to respond, at times, to those voices. In large part, the success of the Mexican state is attributable to its cultural politics.”²⁹

State cultural policies and politics employ cultural expression to legitimate the system.³⁰ Nevertheless, across the works of Mexican cultural history it is evident that the state’s interests are not uniform – they are complex and even contradictory. Though the state was not a homogenous entity, it sought to portray itself as one.³¹ The state intervened into and engaged with the cultural industries in order to consolidate national unity through the creation of a unified national culture. Nevertheless, national culture was not simply a “top-down hegemonic construct imposed on the masses from above.”³²

²⁸ Mary Kay Vaughan, “Transnational Processes and the Rise and Fall of the Mexican State: Notes from the Past,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 471.

²⁹ Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 4.

³⁰ Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 10.

³¹ Carlos Monsivais, “Notas sobre cultura popular en Mexico,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 5.1 Culture in the Age of Mass Media (Winter, 1978), 98.

³² Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, New edition (Routledge, 2005), 12.

Historians have found in Gramsci's concept of hegemony a corrective to structural analyses which collapsed the state into a monolithic and static system of unilateral domination, recognized little decision-making power or agency for the "ruled," and regarded culture as little more than epiphenomenal. In Mexico, for example, the state has exerted a measure of control through legislation, censorship commissions, sponsorship programs, advertising, discourse, and the ownership and control of production resources. Nevertheless, an examination of popular cultural forms, from music, film, fashion, food, theatre, sports and dance to television, radio and print material, illustrates that "Mexicans used all these cultural forms (as well as arguments about culture) to fight for power or just for survival, to define themselves and others, to resist categorization."³³

Scholars such as Eric Zolov, Anne Rubenstein, and Joy Elizabeth Hayes have examined the ways in which the state sought to contain morally questionable content and pressures from media owners and artists and conservative Catholic groups that demanded censorship. The state created laws and legislation, including a twenty-five percent native content regulation that would be enforced with a 5,000 peso fine. Enforcement of these laws was not uniform and lacked judicial authority. Furthermore, the state faced the political influence of media owners, such as the Azcárraga family or the Mexican Association of Commercial Radio Broadcasting Stations (AMER), which became such a powerful lobby for the industry that by 1939, radio was virtually left to private interests "as long as these broadcasters were willing to preserve the political hegemony of the

³³ Anne Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era," eds. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, *The Oxford History of Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 639.

Mexican state.³⁴ What emerges from this scholarly literature is a portrait of state regulatory bodies as simply a containment measure, but as Rubenstein asserts, they were nonetheless important. The interaction of the state, the media industry and critics in these commissions functioned to maintain the political and economic status quo.³⁵ It is evident from these scholars that the legislation influenced public discourse and encouraged self-censorship within the media industry.³⁶

Mexico's film industry provides an instructive comparison that demonstrates the state's involvement in the culture industries in an attempt to construct a shared national identity. Perhaps because it was immediately apparent that film was an effective tool for winning the hearts and minds of the nation, the Mexican film industry was closely linked to the state from its inception, as were the radio and television industries.³⁷ In the 1920s, under pressure from filmmakers and local investors, the state imposed protectionist legislation in order to support the domestic industry, which had difficulty competing with the vast resources of the US film industry. These protectionist measures, however, did not tip the scales of economic viability until the presidency of Cárdenas in the 1930s. He implemented further protectionist policies that included tax exemptions for domestic film production, and loans for the establishment of film studies, and the creation of Financidora de Películas, a state organization that sought private financing for films. The state's role in the now thriving industry was not limited to fostering favorable

³⁴ Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 78.

³⁵ Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*, 109.

³⁶ Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 60-61.

³⁷ Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century," 647.

economic conditions; it also sponsored and commissioned films, particularly those that were educational. The SEP, for example, sponsored *Redes* (1935), the tale of a village of poor fishermen on strike against a greedy. The film provided a social critique of exploitation whilst fostering *mexicanidad* and countering the aesthetics of Hollywood. In 1939 the Comisión Nacional de Irrigación sponsored *Sendas del destino*, a melodramatic film about the challenges encountered with the construction of the Angostura dam in Sonora.³⁸

Cárdenas also provided significant financing for studios and even bailed Cinematografía Latinoamericana out from bankruptcy.³⁹ The studio collaborated with director Fernando de Fuentes on the state-funded *¡Vamos con Pancho Villa!* (Let's Go with Pancho Villa!, 1936). This historically themed super-production was the most expensive Mexican movie of its time, costing 1 million pesos (US \$200,000).⁴⁰ It was also an epic failure at the box office, and afterwards the Cárdenas administration took a less direct approach to supporting the domestic film industry.

The film industry reached its Golden Age during the postrevolutionary state's national campaign to forge an essential "mexicanidad." In the 1940s, the creation of large studios in Mexico City, one of which founded by Emilio Azcárraga Vidarreuta (Churubusco), fostered a boom in film production. Even though this Golden Age was over by the 1950s, "State capital thus supported the private investment of certain

³⁸ Joanne Hershfield, "Screening the Nation," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 263–2689.

³⁹ Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century," 651–2.

⁴⁰ Tomás Pérez Turrent, "The Studios," in *Mexican Cinema*, ed. Paulo Antonio Paranagua, trans. Ana M. López, London (British Film Institute, 1996), 136.

producers dedicated to the quick commercialization of churros (‘quickies’ named after the doughy sweetmeat, a breakfast staple,” effectively maintaining a “mafia” of directors, actors, technical workers.⁴¹ In the 1970s, in order to regain support after the bloody student massacre, culture and the arts became a pivotal element in Echeverría’s populist project.⁴² Indeed, “In no other presidential regime did the movie industry in general and certain filmmakers in particular receive more interest and financial support...”⁴³ Three production companies, a film school, and the Cineteca Nacional were established.⁴⁴ The result according to Mexican film scholar, Emilio García Riera “Never before had so many well-prepared directors gained access to the cinema industry or enjoyed more freedom in realizing a cinema of advanced ideas.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately, powerful state productions prompted private producers to retreat from competition, and as a result two major studios (Churubusco and América) were turned over to the state.⁴⁶ This state infrastructure was dismantled by Margarita López Portillo during her tenure as Director of the Dirección General de Radio, Televisión, y Cinematografía, which was established to coordinate the state’s interests in mass media, thus reversing the flow of production from the state to private investors, including Televisa.⁴⁷

⁴¹ John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 130.

⁴² Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 19.

⁴³ David R. Maciel and Joanne Hershfield, “Cinema and the State in Contemporary Mexico, 1976-1994,” in *Mexico’s Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 201.

⁴⁴ These included Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica (CONACINE), Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica de Trabajadores de Estado I (CONCITE I), Corporación Nacional Cinematográfica de Trabajadores de Estado II (CONCITE II). The film school was Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica.

⁴⁵ “Nunca antes habían accedido tantos y tan bien preparados directores a la industria cinematográfica ni se había disfrutado de mayor libertad en la realización de un cine de ideas avanzadas.” Emilio García Riera, *Breve historia del cine mexicano: primer siglo, 1897-1997*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Ediciones Mapa/IMCINE, 1998), 278.

⁴⁶ King, *Magical Reels*, 137.

⁴⁷ Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 20–1; King, *Magical Reels*, 140.

In addition to film, other popular forms of mass media such as comic books and soap operas offered the state various means to fashion a common Mexican identity and to reinscribe an “official” history of Mexico that legitimated PRI power. My dissertation draws on this field’s concern with the relationship between the culture industries, popular culture and political power, extending it, to examine how the PRI heightened its interest in popular culture as its grasp on power faltered. The case studies at the center of my study also illustrate the changing relationship between the state and the culture industries that accompanied the neoliberal turn. A common feature of neoliberal reform is the shifting of funding for cultural projects from the public to the private sector. Though this process was certainly carried out in Mexico, my case studies demonstrate how this process was uneven and not always linear, perhaps because of the integral role of the state's cultural projects to its legitimacy and because of its close ties to the private culture industries.

The SEP produced and published both comic books series, despite the advice of comic book scholar Irene Herner who advised the SEP to produce their series as additions to already existing commercial serials. They were produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, amidst an economic boom during the presidency of Jose Lopez Portillo, and the final issues were published in 1981, just before the 1982 oil crash. The historical telenovelas were not restricted to periods of economic prosperity, likely because they were not entirely government produced. The most direct government involvement in the series was IMSS's sponsorship of *La Tormenta* in 1967, *El Carruaje* in 1972, and *Senda de Gloria* in 1988. Mexican media criticized IMSS for their support of a lavish television

series in the wake of the 1985 earthquake - a period in which the IMSS was already under attack for its inadequate response to the tragedy. Though the Ministry of National Defense provided support for the series, their contribution was more in-kind, in the form of consulting expertise, access to filming in historic sites, and the use of uniforms and props.

As neoliberal restructuring intensified under Salinas, and even as the final productions became increasingly extravagant and costly, the state did not increase its funding to the historical telenovelas. Instead, the private sector responded: first in 1993, when Televisa established a dedicated unit to oversee the production of historical telenovelas, and then with the creation of Clío, Mexico's most lucrative historical publishing enterprise, founded by Enrique Krauze, who coordinated the historical team for the three Televisa super-productions.

Dissertation Overview

Three main themes run throughout the dissertation and illuminate vital features of cultural politics in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century. First, the dissertation examines the interplay between historiography and the politics of historically themed entertainment. In other words, it asks how rival interpretations of the past were incorporated into these edutainment projects, if at all, and how politics influenced these historical interpretations. These debates frequently reveal shifts in "official" history and tensions between official history and academic history. This helps us to think about the

production of historiography in a more nuanced fashion, and to see how authority was disputed between professional and amateur historians such as the producers of historically themed telenovelas. Mexican historian Adolfo Gilly defines official history as “that which state institutions or their ideologues produce. A State is, by definition, a form of domination; the *why* of that history is the justification and extension of that domination.”⁴⁸ Each of the chapters focuses on historical depictions of different and significant periods in Mexico’s past, according to the theme of the case studies examined in that chapter.

The primary focus of analysis in chapter one is the myth of Juárez as evidenced in *La tormenta* and *Carlota y Maximiliano*. The chapter places the two series in the context of the creation of the myth and the diverse ways it has been evoked by political groups, particularly by the ruling party in the twentieth century. In this chapter, the historiographical discussion centers primarily on official renderings of the myth. The centrality of the myth of Juárez to the ruling party’s legitimacy helps to explain why it was ruling party bureaucrats, and even the president himself, who weighed in on *Carlota y Maximiliano*’s representation of history.

The historiographical discussion in Chapter two compares representations of the Spanish conquest in the historically themed comic books, *México: historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios mexicanos*. Created and published within two years by the same department of the SEP, the two series present Spaniards and indigenous Mexicans in

⁴⁸ “la que elaboran las instituciones del Estado o sus ideólogos. Siendo todo Estado, también por definición, una forma de dominación el *para que* de esa historia es la justificación y la prolongación de esa dominación.” Adolfo Gilly, “La historia como crítica o como discurso del poder,” in *Historia: ¿para qué?*, ed. Carlos Pereyra (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1980), 204–5.

distinctly different ways, particularly as they turn on the controversial question of the relationship between the conquistador Cortés and his indigenous mistress and translator, Malinche. These divergences are read through the training and ideological positioning of the series two coordinators, London-trained professional historian Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach and leftist activist and writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, for debate over the historical narrative turned on the question of historical professionalism. Their interpretations are placed within the context of *dependismo*, an economic theory that viewed Latin American's export orientation and struggle for economic progress as a product of Spanish colonialism. Dependency theory influenced historical interpretations of the conquest during the 1970s and 1980s, when the series were produced. Debate over the historical narratives of *México: historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios mexicanos* turned on the question of historical professionalism.

Chapter three examines *Senda de gloria* and *El vuelo del águila*, about the Revolution and the Porfiriato, respectively. Changing academic interpretations of both periods are compared with the ruling party's official historical narratives, which posited the Revolution as a populist uprising in opposition to the tyranny of Porfirio Díaz. Most Mexicans were familiar with the official narrative, through history lessons and textbooks and public history projects. As a result, when the official narrative was abruptly altered in a 1988 rebroadcast, audiences were angered. An attempt to renovate the historical reputation of Díaz, at the height of neoliberal reform policies including NAFTA, also prompted outcry. This time, it was both audiences and scholars who generated the controversy.

La antorcha is the case study explored in Chapter four, and is the only blockbuster series that did not engender controversy. The series focuses on the Independence period, and particularly the gendered and racialized construction of honor and legitimacy. Legitimacy is also used as a lens for understanding the economic, political, and cultural changes afoot in the period, including an official shift from mestizaje to multiculturalism, neoliberal reform policies and measures, and a democratic opening.

As a second theme, the dissertation charts Televisa and the PRI's edutainment learning curving, their progress in learning how to narrate Mexican history in a way that satisfied multiple interests, generating support for the ruling party, capturing the interest of audiences, and withstanding the scrutiny of professional scholars. In this endeavor they sought a careful balance between fact and fiction. The genre began with a compelling love story, and this was often carried by and complemented by drama generated by fictitious families. Chapters one, three, and four examine the three most successful historical telenovelas to employ this strategy: *La tormenta*, *Senda de gloria*, and *La antorcha encendida*. Demonstrating the close personal relationships of historical figures worked to humanize them and create audience sympathy, as evidenced by the unintentional consequences of *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *El vuelo del aguila*, discussed in chapters one and three, respectively. The lackluster reception of *Los caudillos*, *La constitución*, and *El carruaje* (chapter one), reinforced the lesson that following the formula was not guarantee that the production would be a hit.

The dissertation demonstrates not only the continuing political nature of historical narratives in Mexico, but also argues that their impact could not always be anticipated, or at least they were not anticipated uniformly at the end of the twentieth century. As chapter three details, Televisa's experience with the *Senda de gloria* rebroadcast, in particular, demonstrated that even successful series could be marred by the political context of the period in which it aired. Consumed in different political contexts, such as the election fraud of 1988, the didactic repetition of appeals to the past highlighted the PRI's departure from revolutionary ideals instead of linking their legitimacy to it.

Chapter two extends the edutainment project beyond telenovelas to comic books. When the SEP chose to publish comic books as a way to encourage literacy, the habit of reading and knowledge about national history, it also faced a learning curve. Though they fretted over whether to employ comics as an educational medium or if publishing them would tarnish the ministry's reputation, there is no indication that this occurred. Like the historical telenovelas, the comic books also employed fictional characters to thread together important periods and events in Mexican history. This chapter examines the use of fictional characters to humanize opposing sides in the Spanish conquest. In contrast to Televisa, the SEP was more successful at striking the balance between fact and fiction. But that does not mean that the medium was unproblematic. SEP's first misstep, with *México: historia de un pueblo*, was producing a more expensive and less accessible product than could meet their original objectives. They rectified this problem with the second series, *Episodios mexicanos*, printing on cheaper paper stock and using color only

on the covers. Though it was far less steep than one Televisa and IMSS faced in making the historical telenovelas, SEP also had many lessons to learn in producing edutainment.

As a third basic theme, the dissertation examines the relationship between the public and private cultural sectors, through an analysis of state ministries – SEP, IMSS, National Defense, National Lottery – and the private sector, particularly Televisa. In the second chapter, for example, the SEP decided to forgo co-production with commercial comic book publishers, and instead, produced its own, while using artistic talent from the comic book industry. The decision was, in part, influenced by their derogatory view of the comic book genre, which commercial publishers were blamed for, although they nevertheless contributed indirectly to SEP comics. The first chapter details the development of the television industry, Televisa's rise to power, and their close relationship with the ruling party. In the case of the historical telenovelas, it was IMSS that had the closest link to Televisa. This relationship is further developed in chapter three, when IMSS and Televisa partnered to produce *Senda de gloria*. Nevertheless, the chapter also witnesses the state withdrawal from producing further historical telenovelas during the neoliberal transition. By the 1990s, as revealed in chapter four, the economic landscape had changed such that Televisa also withdrew from the production of historical telenovelas altogether.

The public/private nexus of the PRI and Televisa produced historically themed popular culture projects in order to generate both profit and political legitimacy, though they struggled to achieve both objectives. Ultimately they did achieve the balance, but economic changes in the 1990s created conditions that made further projects untenable.

For Televisa, these economic changes were the result of increased competition in the television industry, internal financial concerns, and depleted financial sponsorship from the government. For the ruling party, the expenditure no longer generated legitimacy as a link to the nation's past, but symbolized the waste of a party that had maintained its power through corporatism. In the second half of the twentieth century, the ruling party employed history as unifying narrative – discursively and in incorporating intellectuals into the state project. Though the PRI and Televisa attempted to use the past to generate political legitimacy, ultimately it was unable to mitigate the fracturing that occurred in the late twentieth century as a result of their transition from corporatism to neoliberalism.

Chapter One

A Steep Learning Curve: Representations of Juárez and the French Intervention in Historical Telenovelas, 1965 to 1972

Introduction

At 7 p.m. on January 21, 1965, television viewers tuned in to witness the highly anticipated opening episode of *Carlota y Maximiliano*, Mexico's second historical telenovela.⁴⁹ Each Monday through Friday evening, from 7 to 7:30 p.m., the series went on to win the hearts of audiences with a melodramatic tale about the short reign of Maximilian of Hapsburg and Carlota, Princess of Belgium, as Emperor and Empress of Mexico during the French intervention in the 1860s. Advertisements called on viewers to watch as an act of national pride, while newspapers lauded it as one of the most ambitious productions undertaken, with an inflated budget to match.⁵⁰ Following the failure of the first historical telenovela about Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz to gain a popular audience, *Carlota y Maximiliano*'s producers and writers were careful to ensure that its plot was melodramatic enough to keep audiences tuned in and entertained. Margarita López Portillo, novelist, sister of future President José López Portillo (1976-1982), and herself the Director of the Dirección General de Radio, Televisión, y Cinematografía (RTC) during her brother's *sexenio*, collaborated on the script with Guadalupe Dueñas,

⁴⁹ *Carlota y Maximiliano*, directed by Ernesto Alonso (Mexico City: Telesistema Mexicano, 1965). Clips viewed at Clío TV, Video Archive. The first historical telenovela was a biography of Sor Juana that aired in 1963. The series is not the subject of sustained analysis here because, even compared to the others of its genre, there are no primary sources available that indicate how it was received, or what its producers intended. Furthermore, I could not access any copies of the series and was only able to view very short clips at the Clío archive. This was compounded by an absence of plot summaries published in newspapers or *Tele Guía*.

⁵⁰ "Maximiliano y Carlota por TV," *El Nacional*, February 17, 1965, p. 5; "Filman en Chapultepec: Maximiliano y Carlota," *El Nacional*, January 18, 1965, p. 5; "A la TV, una Ambiciosa Historia," *El Nacional*, January 8, 1965, p. 5.

author of the novel upon which the telenovela was based. Despite López Portillo's political connections, *Carlota y Maximiliano* was far from overtly didactic or demonstrative of official history. However, this does not mean it was beyond controversy. On the contrary, the series emphasized the romantic, and ultimately tragic, relationship of the young imperial couple, and transformed the erstwhile national hero Benito Juárez into the villain who separated the lovers forever by ordering Maximilian's execution. The melodrama turned out to be deeply popular with Mexican audiences, but it generated fierce protests from politicians, from professional historians, and curiously, from labor unions, although just how a soap opera might affect the standard of living of Mexican workers is another question entirely.⁵¹ President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz summoned producers Ernesto Alonso and Miguel Alemán Velasco to express his personal displeasure with the negative portrayal of Juárez.

Given the infancy of the historical telenovela genre, I would argue that the creators of *Carlota y Maximiliano* viewed telenovelas as a medium with massive popularity that could reinforce dominant narratives, and they simply did not foresee the controversy that erupted when it hit the airwaves. The subsequent historical telenovela, *La tormenta*, this time a government co-production, aired two years later and attempted to recuperate the tarnished image of Juárez.⁵² Within Telesistema, Alemán was actively involved in its creation and coordinated with Ricardo García Sainz of the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS). Both men, along with all the series' collaborators,

⁵¹ Luis Reyes de la Maza, *Mexico sentimental: crónica de la telenovela* (Mexico City: Clío, 1999), 45.

⁵² *La tormenta*, directed by Ernesto Alonso and Raúl Araiza (Mexico City: Telesistema Mexicano, 1967). Clips viewed on VHS at Clío TV, Video Archive.

were likely relieved when *La tormenta* did not engender the same backlash as *Carlota y Maximiliano* and instead was celebrated as a triumph of Mexican television.

This chapter uses early historical telenovelas to set the stage for the three basic themes of the dissertation. First, it examines the historiographical politics of popular culture in modern Mexico by tracing the political currency of Juárez, from the time of his death to his evocation by the PRI in the 1960s, in order to contextualize the representations of Juárez in *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta*. The chapter also illustrates the different manners in which professional and amateur historians, in this case, television producers, conceptualized and validated historical knowledge. Second, it traces the learning curve Televisa (at this juncture still Telesistema Mexicano S.A.) faced in balancing education with entertainment in the new historical telenovela genre. As it shows, even if a series struck the right balance (according to audiences, bureaucrats, and politicians), there was no guarantee of immunity from controversies or flops. Finally, the chapter identifies the public-private nexus in late-twentieth-century Mexico by examining the institutional and political histories of the major players, namely Televisa and the Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social, in order to establish the close, and often personal, relationship forged between the ruling party and Televisa, from the very inception of television broadcasting. Moreover, by examining the broader “edutainment” genre, pioneered by Televisa producer Miguel Sabido, this chapter further situates the historical telenovelas within the broader context of the social uses for television in Mexico, explored, in part, by pressure from the state to curb questionable foreign programming. Using the two television series as case studies, this chapter argues that

national history remained politically charged, both in the political uses of Juárez and in politicians' – even the president's – concern over the representation of history in Mexico in the 1960s and 1970s.

Building a Television Monopoly: The Creation of Televisa

“Mexican broadcast television’s ownership structure is among the most concentrated private-sector systems in the world.”⁵³ This concentration has granted broadcast media owners, and Televisa in particular, the opportunity to determine the diversity of cultural programming. Even before the first television licenses were granted, radio magnate Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta was instrumental in demonstrating the economic potential of television by advertising different products on a closed circuit television system set up by engineer González Camarena in Mexico City’s most elegant shopping centers and in the Cadena de Oro cinemas, which he also owned.⁵⁴ Between 1949 and 1952 President Miguel Alemán Valdés (father of future Televisa vice-president Alemán Velasco) granted television broadcasting concessions (similar to a license) to three families.⁵⁵ Given Azcárraga Vidaurreta’s “cultural capital” as a radio magnate, and his petition for the concession four years earlier, it is notable that he was not the first to

⁵³ Sallie Hughes, “The Media in Mexico: From Authoritarian Institution to Hybrid System,” in *The Media in Latin America*, ed. Jairo Lugo, Berkshire (Open University Press, 2008), 138.

⁵⁴ Fernando Mejía Barquera, “50 años de television commercial en México (1934-1984) cronología,” in *Televisa: el quinto poder*, ed. Raúl Trejo Delarbre, Fernando Mejía Barquera, and et. al, 2nd Ed. (Mexico City: Claves Latinoamericanas, 1987), 22; Fernando Mejía Barquera, *La industria de la radio y la televisión y la política del estado mexicano: 1920-1960* (Mexico City: Fundación Manuel Buendía, 1989), 137.

⁵⁵ Phyllis Slocum, “Television News: Spain, Mexico, Colombia and the United States,” in *The Handbook of Spanish Language Media*, ed. Alan B. Albarran (New York: Routledge, 2009), 224.

receive one. Instead, it was granted to Rómulo O’Farrill Silva, an automobile, radio, and newspaper entrepreneur and close friend of the president.⁵⁶ O’Farrill’s relationship with the president was so close that many speculated he was serving as a front for the president.⁵⁷ In a show of the close ties between O’Farrill and Alemán, and a reflection of the close relationship between the PRI and television for years to come, the nation’s first broadcast carried Alemán’s fourth presidential address onto the airwaves on September 1, 1950.⁵⁸ With that address, available for public viewing on eight screens set up in public spaces, Mexico became the first Latin American nation and the sixth in the world to broadcast television.⁵⁹ Alemán granted the second concession to the engineer and entrepreneur González Camarena in 1950. Only in 1952 did Azcárraga Vidaurreta receive the third and final concession.

By 1955, the owners of the three original stations had realized that the market could not yet support three different commercial stations, so on March 26 of that year they merged to form Telesistema Mexicano, S.A., a new company that would oversee the administration and operations of the three stations. The broadcasting concessions remained in the names of the original three families in order to skirt Article 28 of the constitution, which prohibited the formation of monopolies. Azcárraga defended the new company against charges that it was, indeed, a monopoly, stating:

Telesistema Mexicano, S.A., was born as a means of defense of three companies that were losing many millions of pesos. All programs will originate from

⁵⁶ Hughes, “The Media in Mexico: From Authoritarian Institution to Hybrid System,” 132.

⁵⁷ Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, *El Tigre: Emilio Azcárraga y su imperio Televisa* (México: Grijalbo, 2000), 128.

⁵⁸ Barquera, *La industria de la radio y la televisión y la política del estado mexicano*, 158.

⁵⁹ Celeste Gonzalez de Bustamante, “*Muy Buenas Noches*”: *Mexico, Television, and the Cold War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 1–4.

Televisión, which will become a great television hub. Within a year, television will be the first entertainment industry in the country, the same as advertising; it will be more important than cinema.⁶⁰

Azcárraga's defense reads as more a promise of economic success for his own company, rather than addressing how it might benefit the nation. His new business partner, Rómulo O'Farril, articulated more specifically the broader benefits of the merger:

The fusion of interests into Telesistema Mexicano, S.A., allows for the extension of television into rural areas because now we can go on increasing our scale to cover the national territory through relay stations for basic channels, 2 and 4, which previously could not have happened if we had to compete with two channels in each area;...the high cost of television would not sustain this service from an economic and commercial standpoint.⁶¹

O'Farrill, González Camarena, and Azcárraga Vidaurreta retained the licenses to their three stations, but in practice, Telesistema Mexicano operated as a monopoly. The family of then-late Mexican President Alemán Valdés later bought out González's portion of the company.

In the 1960s the government passed legislation that further entrenched its close ties to the television industry. The law imposed a 25 percent tax on earnings from television, but Telesistema (eventually Televisa) was permitted to pay half its taxes with airtime. As a result, government advertisements became a common feature of Televisa broadcasting. The same law also ensured that the president, through the Minister of the

⁶⁰ "Telesistema Mexicano, S.A., ha nacido como un medio de defensa de tres empresas que estaban perdiendo muchos millones de pesos. Todos los programas se originarán desde Televisión, que se convertirá en la gran central de televisión. Dentro de un año, la televisión será la primera industria de espectáculos del país, lo mismo que de la publicidad; tendrá mayor importancia que la cinematografía." Emilio Azcárraga, *Boletín Radiofónico* 62, March 31, 1955 in Fernando Mejía Barquera, "50 años de televisión comercial en México (1934-1984) cronología," 25.

⁶¹ La fusión de intereses dentro de Telesistema Mexicano, S.A., permite la extensión de la televisión a la provincial, pues ahora sí podemos ir cubriendo en escala creciente el territorio nacional mediante estaciones repetidoras de los canales básicos, 2 y 4, cosa que antes no podía ocurrir si tuviésemos que concurrir con dos canales en cada zona, pues al alto costo de la televisión no permitiría sostener este servicio desde un punto de vista económico y comercial. *Novedades*, May 19, 1955, p. 19.

Interior, would serve as watchdog to ensure that television promoted Mexican culture and values, and it also stipulated that the same ministry would produce educational, cultural, and social programs that the commercial stations were to broadcast free of charge. These measures were, in part, an attempt to limit the flow of US programming.⁶² It was at this time that Miguel Alemán Velasco, executive vice president of Televisa, began seeking ways to use television to serve public interests and generate social change, without sacrificing commercial interests. The historical telenovelas under investigation here are one of the products of that effort.

Not long after Azcárraga Vidaurreta died in 1973, his son Emilio Azcárraga Milmo took the reins, added a fourth channel to the company, and merged Telesistema Mexicano with Televisión Independiente de México to become Televisión Vía Satélite, S.A., or Televisa. Under the leadership of Azcárraga Milmo, whose ruthless business acumen earned him the nickname *el tigre*, Televisa maintained a near monopoly on the television industry until 1993, when Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) bundled several state-owned stations and put them up for auction.⁶³ Ricardo Salinas Priego, retail entrepreneur and business partner of the brother of President Salinas, won the bid and created Televisa's primary rival, TV Azteca.⁶⁴

The PRI maintained close ties with the television industry from its very inception. The ties were so close that Televisa has been referred to as the "Ministry of Culture."⁶⁵ The Azcárraga family's control of mass media has afforded them the ability to shape

⁶² Gonzalez de Bustamante, "*Muy Buenas Noches*", 15–16.

⁶³ Phyllis Slocum, "Television News: Spain, Mexico, Colombia and the United States," 224.

⁶⁴ See chapter four for more on the privatization of state-owned television in 1993.

⁶⁵ William A Orme, *A Culture of Collusion*, 60, 65.

Mexican popular culture and identity. For example, Azcárraga Vidarrueta added trumpets to mariachi bands in the 1930s so that the music would sound livelier on radio broadcasts; now they are distinctive feature of the genre. According to historian Celeste Gonzalez de Bustamante, “No legitimate scholar would dispute the fact that close political ties between television executives and the party help to explain the long-standing rule of the PRI... .”⁶⁶ Scholars such as Fátima Fernández Christlieb have characterized the relationship as symbiotic.⁶⁷ Government regulations provided favorable conditions for the development of the industry and Televisa’s success, and Televisa in turn supplied airtime for government programming and pro-PRI newscasting.

Though their interests are often aligned, Mexican sociologist and media expert Raúl Trejo Delarbre has noted “the government and Televisa have an unwritten agreement to work together. But it isn’t a total identification. There are some frictions.”⁶⁸ Nor is the relationship static, asserts Gonzalez de Bustamante. In 1967, for example, Díaz Ordaz granted a television broadcasting concession to a company owned primarily by the Garza Sada family, of the financially powerful Monterrey Group. It did not survive, though; within six years it was part of the merger that formed Televisa. And while Azcárraga Milmo had once declared himself a “soldier of the PRI,” by the late 1990s he became critical of the party.⁶⁹

The reach of television is remarkable, particularly given persistent poverty. 1968 marked an important year for television access, with the development of the National

⁶⁶ Gonzalez de Bustamante, “*Muy Buenas Noches*”, xxii.

⁶⁷ Fátima Fernández Christlieb, *Los Medios de difusión masiva en México* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos, 1982).

⁶⁸ Raúl Trejo Delarbre in Orme, *A Culture of Collusion*, 66.

⁶⁹ Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 325, 418.

Network of Telecommunications in time for the Olympic Games. According to media scholar Sallie Hughes, broadcast television is the most accessible form of mass media: “about 76 per cent of Mexicans in the three poorest market segments have access to broadcast television.” Television is followed by FM radio, which 43 percent of the poor have access to, mostly on public transportation.⁷⁰ As a result, television programming has served as a unifying experience: “Farmers in remote mountain villages gather around the community television to watch the same soap operas, comedies and variety shows viewed in the living rooms of downtown Mexico City.”⁷¹

One of the most instructive ways of problematizing overly simplistic characterizations of the state-Televisa relationship, as well as of challenging the notion of the state as a monolith, is to highlight the varied motivations and backgrounds of the individuals engaged in these relationships. Several individuals were influential in the roster of historical telenovelas that debuted after the first couple of flops; these include Televisa executive Miguel Alemán Velasco, producer and “edutainment” innovator Miguel Sabido, and Ricardo García Sainz, the IMSS representative – and later director – who collaborated with Televisa. To begin with Miguel Alemán Velasco, clearly he was motivated at one level by a desire to educate the public. Based on a survey on the history of Mexico that his team conducted in the Zócalo, Mexico City’s central square, Alemán Velasco considered the public “exceptionally misinformed.”⁷² He was also influenced by David O. Selznick, best known for producing *Gone with the Wind*; Selznick advised

⁷⁰ Hughes, “The Media in Mexico: From Authoritarian Institution to Hybrid System,” 136.

⁷¹ Orme, *A Culture of Collusion*, 61.

⁷² Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 130.

him to develop a fictitious love story as central to a historical drama, mindful of important historical forces.⁷³

These television and government executives – including Margarita López Portillo – drew on a wealth of scholarly and popular works on Juárez to create their telenovelic representation. They could look to the production and reception of the Juárez myth – for political purposes by the PRI, as represented in film in Mexico and Hollywood, and a vast historiography of works by scholars. Indeed, the myth of Juárez was contested by professional academics, popular writers, and people of all backgrounds and political persuasions. All of these sources were available to the creators of *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta*.

The French Intervention and the Myth of Juárez

On October 31, 1861, representatives of Spain, France, and Great Britain signed the Convention of London, agreeing to a joint occupation of the Mexican coasts in order to collect their debt. France used this as an opportunity to expand their empire. Spain and Great Britain pulled out, but France remained and pushed toward Mexico City, thinking that victory would be easy. The French were defeated at Puebla in a victory that is now celebrated on Cinco de Mayo. A year later, the French returned, fortified with more troops, and this time the French took Puebla. Benito Juárez was forced to flee Mexico City as the French moved toward the capital. Appointed Emperor and Empress of Mexico by Napoleon, Maximiliano and Carlota arrived on the Mexican shores at the

⁷³ Ibid.

end of May 1864.⁷⁴ Their short reign ended in June of 1867, with the execution of Maximiliano.

Juárez's steadfast decision to proceed with the execution of Maximiliano, despite international pleas for his amnesty, positioned Juárez as the nation's defender against foreign invasion, and contributed to his status as a secular saint, particularly in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, it is not surprising that Juárez is the second most popular subject of the historical telenovelas, behind the Revolution and its antecedents and ahead of the wars of independence.⁷⁵

The myth of Juárez obscures the reality that in life, many Mexicans did not support Juárez's actions or what he represented. The liberals, of whom Juárez was a prominent leader, advocated limiting the powers of the Catholic Church and the military, the separation of church and state, and the primacy of private property. For twenty years two polarized camps, the liberals and the conservatives, battled for control of the nation and the ability to define its future course. In 1855 and 1856, the laws of Juárez and Lerdo respectively abolished religious and military privilege and corporate landholdings, which affected both the Catholic Church and indigenous communities. These aims provoked the ire of peasants, Catholics, and conservatives (often overlapping groups), and prompted a violent civil war between 1858 and 1861. It was this conflict that prompted conservatives to reach out to Napoleon III, which eventually led to the installation of Maximiliano and Carlota as Emperor and Empress of Mexico. Liberal forces, in turn,

⁷⁴ Archduke Maximilian of Hapsburg and Princess Charlotte of Belgium will be referred to by their Spanish equivalents as used in the telenovela, Maximiliano and Carlota, respectively.

⁷⁵ Again, I have excluded *Sor Juana* because of the lack of documentation about its production or even a copy of the series.

celebrated Juárez for defeating the Conservative party and foreign rule.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, even liberals were critical of some of his subsequent actions: his support for the McLane-Ocampo Treaty with the United States, which ceded transit rights across Tehuantepec and from the Rio Grande to California; his lengthy term as president (1858–1872), a result of extending his term and successive reelection; and his attempts to extend the powers of the executive branch. These decisions challenged the image of Juárez as a defender of the nation, its Constitution of 1857, and democracy more generally.⁷⁷ In death (1872), however, this critique was glossed over beginning with his funeral, where even his critics declared him “the savior of the republic.”⁷⁸ Fifteen years after his death, Porfirio Díaz, who had once led an uprising against Juárez, sought to emphasize the link between Juárez and himself by dedicating the first major commemoration of the former president, thus inaugurating a new era of official mythmaking marked by monuments, statues, and tributes. As had occurred around his funeral, the myth of Juárez was harnessed by opposing forces. Those in support of Díaz downplayed his opposition to Juárez, stressing, instead, continuity between the two leaders. Those opposed to Díaz overlooked Juárez’s call for a strengthened executive and his lengthy term as president, which laid foundations for Díaz’s lengthy rule, instead emphasizing Juárez’s earlier political career as defender of the nation, liberalism, republicanism, and the Constitution of 1857. They invoked Juárez to protest foreign investment and lax anticlerical laws.

⁷⁶ Charles A. Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 13.

⁷⁷ See for example, Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 248–256; Patrick J. McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra: Juárez, Díaz, and the People of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, 1855-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico*, 24.

The apotheosis of Juárez intensified with the centennial celebration of Juárez's birth, in 1906. According to the historian Charles Weeks, it was at this point, compounded by the centennial of independence four years later, that the myth of Juárez acquired cult-like status. Throughout Mexico "Juárez came to life in the oratory, parades, pantomimes, and other spectacles of the celebration."⁷⁹ Though it was approved in 1873, the Hemiciclo, a national monument to Juárez, was not completed until 1910. Beyond these celebrations, a rash of public works projects – schools, streets, buildings, even a potable water system – dedicated to Juárez ensured that his name was enshrined in the Mexican past and present in a more permanent manner. As revolutionary fervor swelled, Juárez was increasingly employed by opposition forces, and Díaz's narrative of being an heir to Juárez was repudiated. Antireelectionist clubs carried Juárez's name, and revolutionary leaders such as Francisco Madero, Emiliano Zapata, and Venustiano Carranza invoked Juárez to legitimize their claims on the nature and course of the Revolution of 1910.⁸⁰ Incorporating Juárez into the trajectory of the Revolution by situating him as a precursor was not only the project of political leaders: artists and writers also played a role. The muralists of the 1920s, for example, illustrated a national historical narrative that created a lineage starting with the Aztec Emperor Cuauhtémoc, then the independence leaders Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos, and Vicente Guerrero, then the early republican liberal politician Valentín Gómez Farías, then Juárez, culminating in the heroes of the Revolution.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43, 47.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 71–85.

Even though many of these murals were sponsored by the government, in the 1920s and 1930s high-ranking officials rarely attended ceremonies marking Juárez's birth and death, as they had in previous decades. Weeks suggests this "official neglect" is likely the result of attempts to cultivate a new Sonoran dynasty consisting of presidents who held office in the 1920s – Adolfo de la Huerta, Álvaro Obregon, and Plutarco Elías Calles – at the expense of Juárez. The period saw not only indifference, but also stringent critique: education minister Narciso Bassols and anthropologist Manuel Gamio accused Juárez of disloyalty to his fellow indigenous Mexicans.⁸¹ This is not to suggest, however, that official channels had abandoned the myth of Juárez; in the 1930s textbooks and government-controlled newspapers continued to integrate him into the myth of the Revolution. Cárdenas' expropriation of oil in 1938 also prompted comparison with Juárez's defeat of the French intervention, as did the Mexican government's defense of the Cuban Revolution and its Chamizal dispute with the United States in the 1960s.

A massive demonstration in 1953, sponsored by labor groups, which denounced the Miguel Alemán government and called for support for the new Adolfo Ruíz Cortines administration, was notable for its size and the extent to which government and labor groups invoked Juárez as an official symbol of continuity and support for the interests of Mexicans. The next major official celebration of Juárez was in 1972, declared the "Year of Juárez" to commemorate the centennial of his death.

In death, and in the hands of the PRI, Juárez "became all things to all people, and thus there arose the historical myth, the Juárez that was only in part history and the other part wish fulfillment, the man who represented or did not represent all that was good, or

⁸¹ Ibid., 103.

all that was bad, in all of Mexico.”⁸² For many conservatives Juárez represented one of the heights of antireligious zeal in the nation’s history. As the ruling party governments after the 1940s embraced conservative economic policies, they increasingly employed history – particularly the myths of Juárez and the Revolution – to promote national consolidation and political support. The Juárez myth became a “mutual language for consent and dissent,” as Vaughan argues for the revolutionary rhetoric of the 1930s.⁸³ Non-state actors, individuals and groups also seized upon the political currency of the myth and used it to make claims on the government. In the 1920s artists and painters joined in the mythologizing of Juárez; for example, each of the three Mexican “great” muralists, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, featured Juárez in their pieces, positioning him as a paragon of honor and justice to comment on the corruption of revolutionaries.⁸⁴

The political utility of Juárez and Mexicans’ widespread identification with him was compounded by an ongoing fascination with Maximiliano and Carlota, in both Mexico and abroad, since the French intervention. In 1934, the Mexican film *Juárez y Maximiliano*, planned as the nation’s first superproduction, debuted to great fanfare in Mexico City’s most important theater, the newly completed Palacio de Bellas Artes. The film’s romantic treatment of the imperial couple was also criticized for exalting

⁸² Ibid., 135.

⁸³ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 191.

⁸⁴ One of the most fascinating examples is Orozco’s mural “Juárez and the Fall of the Empire,” noted in Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico*, 94. For further discussion on the use of Juárez by the three most famous muralists, see Desmond Rochfort’s *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, esp. 88, 91, 162, 186, 198.

Maximiliano and portraying Juárez as cruel.⁸⁵ In 1939 Warner Brothers released *Juárez* as an instrument of the Good Neighbor policy.⁸⁶ A short analysis of the film demonstrates the challenges of striking the right balance in representing the two historical sides of the French Intervention: Benito Juárez and Maximiliano and Carlota.

As is true of most historical pieces, *Juárez* offers greater insight into the concerns of its producers and viewing public in 1939, than into the historical events of the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ *Juárez* was a thinly veiled treatise on the dangers of fascism. The dramatic film pitted Benito Juárez against the royal interlopers and imperialists Maximiliano and Carlota. Perhaps surprisingly, the film sets aside tensions over the 1938 expropriation of oil in Mexico, in order to draw a parallel between the totalitarianism of the Nazis' contemporaneous reign and Maximiliano's second empire. As a reflection of the significance of political context, when the film was aired in 1963 references to Western European imperialism were removed, which eliminated the justification for Maximiliano's execution. The director opposed the cut; "He thought the picture especially timely for the 1960s when guerrillas in Vietnam were putting up such heroic resistance against another great, imperialistic army."⁸⁸

As was the case with *Carlota y Maximiliano*, the characterization of the imperial couple proved challenging for *Juárez's* screenwriter, so studio executives assigned other writers to shift the narrative so that audiences would identify with Juárez and not the

⁸⁵ Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano; época sonora.*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: México Ediciones Era, 1969), 43.

⁸⁶ Seth Fein, "Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 171.

⁸⁷ John Huston, Aeneas MacKenzie, and Wolfgang Reinhardt, *Juárez [Screenplay]*, introduction by Paul Vanderwood (1939; Madison: Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, 1983).

⁸⁸ Huston et al., *Juárez [Screenplay]*, 41.

royal couple. The result was a didactic piece that aimed to teach audiences the difference between democracy and totalitarianism. Nevertheless, producers continued to worry about audience interpretation: “On one hand we have Maximilian developing a fairly practical case for benevolent monarchy. His benevolence seems to outweigh the tenacity of Juárez who talks about his zeal for theoretical democracy. On the other hand we have a factual demonstration of both forms of government existing today. England is a benevolent monarchy and America is a flourishing democracy. Consider the impact of the Maximilian and Juárez contentions on our audience. The script accentuates the virtues of monarchy.”⁸⁹ This is evident in *Carlota y Maximiliano* as well; Juárez’s emotions are resolutely invested in justice, and these pale in comparison with the emotional love story.

The film did garner criticism throughout Latin America and the United States. In fact, US diplomats monitored its reception throughout Latin America, where it was viewed with disinterest as a Hollywood production with little connection to international relations. In Mexico, the response was even more critical; it was viewed as “denigrating” and a “perversion of Mexican history.”⁹⁰ Mexicans, suspicious about foreigners playing their national heroes, criticized the film for glorifying Maximiliano at the expense of Juárez and viewed the portrayal of Juárez’s deep admiration for Lincoln as an example of Yankee self-absorption. Furthermore, there was speculation that Warner Brothers had plagiarized *Juárez y Maximiliano*. In the United States there were also criticisms of the film’s treatment of Juárez versus Maximiliano. The *New York Times* commented: “Juárez

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁰ Fein, “Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema,” 171.

is clearly the hero of history, Maximilian is the hero of the picture.”⁹¹ This is an apt characterization of *Carlota and Maximiliano* as well.

Carlota y Maximiliano, 1965

What caused such a drastic response to the simple love story of *Carlota y Maximiliano*? The answer lies in the series’ melodramatic form. Recall from the discussion of melodrama in the introduction that an antagonist typically prevents the union of two lovers, which usually only occurs at the end of the telenovela. In *Carlota y Maximiliano*, the young emperor and empress played the lovers, while Benito Juárez is cast as the villain. In response, Licenciado Mario Moya Palencia, from the censorship division of the Ministry of the Interior demanded that the script be changed to ameliorate Juárez’s image, but it was too late and audiences already knew the ending: despite national and international pleas for amnesty, Juárez refused to commute Maximiliano’s sentence and ultimately had him executed. Instead of cancelling the rest of the broadcast, Telesistema opted to cut off the series twenty-nine chapters early: at chapter fifty-one of a planned eighty.⁹²

Even with the curtailed plot, the story of a Mexican president defeating foreign occupation had been rewritten as a tale of extraordinary love terminated by a cold and uncompassionate Juárez. A telenovela intended to emphasize the merits of Juárez backfired when the melodramatic narrative wove a tale of romantic love between Carlota

⁹¹ Huston et al., *Juárez [Screenplay]*, 35.

⁹² Reyes de la Maza, *Mexico Sentimental*, 45.

and Maximiliano and humanized them by revealing their faults and weaknesses. Telenovela scholar Thomas Tufte asserts that these stories are “based largely on an emotional relation with their audiences.”⁹³ Fausto Zeron-Medina, historical consultant on the final three historical telenovelas, recalled the power of humanizing the imperial couple: “Mexicans identify with tragic figures in love. I remember people telling me that as the figures of Maximiliano and Carlota grew in stature, Juárez became smaller...They ended up looking like victims, deceived with some ambition but not a lot. They began looking like people. People empathized with them.”⁹⁴ The humanizing effects of melodrama hold both intentional and unintentional consequences for the reception of political and historical lessons. In the case of *Carlota y Maximiliano*, this potential instability permitted an alternate version of the dominant historical narratives, wherein Juárez shifted from hero to villain. The melodramatic form of *Carlota y Maximiliano* drew audiences in to a tale of heightened romantic love in such a way that they saw the couple, not as foreign intruders, but as a fallible pair in love.

The narrative arc of *Carlota and Maximiliano* is structured around this tragic love story. The telenovela begins not in Mexico, but in Belgium where Carlota has just married Maximiliano. The virtues of Carlota’s new husband are gleefully extolled by Carlota’s female confidantes. Her father, the King of Belgium, praises the union of Maximiliano and Carlota as unique for the period:

“You’ve married a prince, the choice of your heart . . . this is not always possible, don’t forget. Marriages of the court are rarely alliances of love . . . too often

⁹³ Thomas Tufte, *Living with the Rubbish Queen: Telenovelas, Culture, and Modernity in Brazil* (Luton, UK: University of Luton Press, 2000), 225.

⁹⁴ Fausto Zeron-Medina in Quinones, Sam, *True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Chalino, and the Bronx* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 59.

required and conveniences. . . where the heart doesn't matter. This time, to my satisfaction and happiness as a father and king, luck has been generous to pair you with the Archduke Maximiliano. . . ”

Carlota and Maximiliano's union is one of romantic love, rather than simply of political alliance.

This ideal of romantic love is an important component of a telenovela and is essential for its success: the central love story invites viewers to identify and get involved with the characters.⁹⁵ The fiction of romantic love in *Carlota y Maximiliano* obscures the reality of the couple's tense relationship. Maximiliano's many extramarital affairs with prostitutes caused Carlota to fear he would infect her with the syphilis he had contracted. By the time the couple arrived in Mexico, they had maintained separate sleeping quarters for four years.

The telenovela selectively highlights the couple's faults in order to humanize the characters and promote audience identification. For example, Maximiliano is initially hesitant to take the post of emperor in Mexico, but is encouraged by an ambitious Carlota. Eventually Maximiliano succumbs to Carlota's pleas and sacrifices his claim to the Austrian throne. This decision is portrayed as tortuous, and even later in the telenovela, Maximiliano attempts to get this contract overturned. He only agrees to take the position of emperor if the Mexican people approve. Mexican conservative monarchists stage a farcical plebiscite, and Maximiliano accepts the throne. This deception continues when the royal couple arrives in Mexico, and their chilly reception is explained as an attempt to quarantine residents to prevent the spread of disease.

⁹⁵ Fien Adriaens, "The Glocalised Telenovela as a Space for Possible Identifications for Diaspora Girls in Northern Belgium?" *Observatorio Journal* 4, no. 4 (2010): 6-7.



Figure 3
The imperial couple as they appeared in *Carlota y Maximiliano*, 1963

By suggesting that Maximiliano was duped by his inferiors, he is portrayed as more gullible than starved for power. As the series progressed, this weakness shifts, taking the form of compassion and honor.

Maximiliano demonstrates his faith in his adoptive country when he agrees to finance French troops in their battle for control of Mexico. Maximiliano is shown planning an attack on Juaristas at Querétaro, but this treachery is tempered with his presentation as a man of honor who wishes to win the battle as a soldier. Juárez, in contrast, has a more distant relationship with his troops; he is more often seen

strategizing and commanding his men, rather than fighting with them. With rapidly dwindling coffers, Maximiliano offers to sell his fine china to earn the money to feed his troops. He expresses his readiness for any sacrifice for Mexico and declares it his responsibility as a sovereign.

Maximiliano is concerned not only about the battles with Juaristas, but also about the welfare of Carlota. In battle, his separation from Carlota is a sacrifice in itself: she is ill and Maximiliano wishes to be with her but will not abandon his troops. Later, as he begins to understand the consequences of his attempt to rule Mexico, Maximiliano is repentant not only to the people of Mexico, but also to Carlota. He wonders what will become of her and fears that his sins will lead her to insanity or death.

By highlighting Maximiliano's embrace of liberalism, the telenovela sets him up to be compared to Benito Juárez, Mexico's most famous liberal reformer. Prior to his journey, in conversation with his brother, Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph, Maximiliano is critical of monarchical powers who believe they are not responsible to the people. His brother warns him about the dangers of such idealistic notions. Maximiliano's response is that he is simply talking about a question of humanity and justice.

Maximiliano's remorse is juxtaposed to Juárez's resolve. "Our cause is just" becomes Juárez's mantra.⁹⁶ When Juárez sentences Maximiliano to execution, international delegates appeal to Juárez to overturn the decision. They plea on behalf of their governments for Maximiliano's liberty, reminding Juárez that he is a prince and that his dignity ought to be spared. Juárez responds that there are no princes in Mexico. The wife of one of Maximiliano's generals, who is to be executed as well, brings her three

⁹⁶ "Nuestra causa es justa"

small children to appeal to Juárez's emotions. Seated in front of an image of Hidalgo, Juárez remains steadfast in his decision because of the important message it will send: "I am not killing the man, I am killing the idea."⁹⁷ The world must see that intervention into Mexican affairs is fatal.

Carlota y Maximiliano presents an impassive Juárez. No mention is made of the fact that Juárez favoured a conciliatory approach to reunifying the nation after the War of the Reform and granted a broad amnesty to former enemies. Juárez's focus may not have been on killing the man, but the series certainly presents Maximiliano as just that: a man. As he faces his mortality in the final hours before his execution, a sympathetic priest comes to hear his final confession. Though the priest reminds him that God is his only judge, Maximiliano does not abdicate responsibility. He admits his mistake was criminal because he did not respect the liberty and independence of the Mexican people. Maximiliano writes three final letters seeking forgiveness: one to the Pope, the second to Carlota, and the final one to Juárez. In the latter he wishes his adoptive country well and expresses his hope that it will find its way to peace, tranquility and a strong foundation.

As the execution draws nearer, the scenes become increasingly tense. The young soldier charged with marching the prisoners to the execution begs forgiveness for his participation.⁹⁸ When the three prisoners are lined up, Maximiliano humbly gives his position in the middle, understood as the place of honor, to his general. Finally, he gifts the soldiers about to shoot him a bag of gold coins. As he is shot, he tears open his jacket

⁹⁷ "No mato el hombre, mato el idea"

⁹⁸ Note the Christian imagery; Christ also forgave his executioners.

and screams “¡Viva Mexico!” In these exaggerated scenes Maximiliano becomes a martyr, eclipsing Benito Juárez in his devotion to the patria.

The series does not end with the execution of Maximiliano. Carlota receives the news of Maximiliano’s execution while in Rome, where she has fled to petition the Pope to intercept the execution orders. When Carlota is notified of Maximiliano’s death, she insists on hearing the details of his final moments of life. A messenger reassures her that he died with the utmost dignity and valour of a prince. Carlota weeps, crying out to God to put her at peace, to permit her to join Maximiliano in eternity. As if a cruel punishment, Carlota is denied the relief of death and survives her beloved by sixty years. In a clever twist, the heartbreak of losing Maximiliano is what propels her into insanity. Historians have speculated that syphilis was the real cause of her mental illness.

The slow pace of the final scenes mimic the agonizingly slow deterioration of Carlota as a weakened heart deteriorates her mental and physical health. She lives out her final years, old and decrepit, increasingly retreating into her memories of Maximiliano, in the shadows of her castle, guarded by soldiers who have orders to pass only in silence and to refrain from song in her presence. The series finally ends when Carlota’s heart gives out and she dies. The final image rests on Carlota tucked into bed, finally at peace and presumably reunited with Maximiliano.⁹⁹

Carlota y Maximiliano's title hints at the foundational role Carlota plays in the series. The original title, as it appears on a video recording of the series, lists Carlota first. Nevertheless, the series is most often erroneously referred to as *Maximiliano y*

⁹⁹ I viewed the final scenes of *Carlota y Maximiliano* at Clío’s video archive. I suspect that what I viewed was not the finale that aired, but the originally intended conclusion.

Carlota, which suggests there was an assumption that Maximiliano would precede Carlota.¹⁰⁰ Without access to planning documents, it is difficult to definitively state the reason for the primacy of Carlota. I would propose three explanations: first, the title reflects the series' emphasis on Carlota's ambition and her influence on Maximiliano, and second, the title is suggestive of the increasing visibility of women's rights in Mexico in the 1960s. Finally, the series producers were targeting the large numbers of women who viewed telenovelas. None of these are mutually exclusive.

Perhaps what is most interesting about *Carlota y Maximiliano* is the potency of the response it generated and the fact that Televisa did not anticipate it. The blunder was not considered trivial, even by high-level Televisa executives and government officials. That Margarita López Portillo, sister of the future President, had co-written the telenovela was particularly embarrassing. In retrospect, her blunder was reflective of her tenure as director of RTC. *Proceso*, a left-of-center weekly newsmagazine, later described it as the most shameful years of the film industry in Mexico because she ran the department according to her own whim. "She favored foreigners, the filmmakers were persecuted and imprisoned, she spent exorbitant sums and her negligence destroyed the Cineteca National."¹⁰¹ Licenciado Mario Moya Palencia from the censorship division, another

¹⁰⁰ See for example Reyes de la Maza, *Mexico sentimental*; Maria de los Angeles Rodriguez Cadena, "Contemporary Hi(stories) of Mexico: Fictional Re-Creation of Collective Past on Television," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 49–55.

¹⁰¹"Se privilegió a los extranjeros, se persiguió a los realizadores y se les encarceló, se gastaron sumas exorbitantes y se destruyó por negligencia la Cineteca Nacional." "Margarita López Portillo y el sexenio negro del cine," *Proceso*, May 14, 2006.

<http://hemeroteca.proceso.com.mx/?page_id=278958&a51dc26366d99bb5fa29cea4747565fec=95853&rl=wh>. A documentary film, entitled "Los rollos prohibidos," by Gibrán Bazán has since argued that the fire was not the fault of López Portillo, but instead was an effort to destroy film of the student massacre on October 2, 1968. Alejandro Madrigal, "Revela documental causas sobre el incendio en la Cineteca," *Milenio*, March 3, 2012. <<http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/impreso/9130642>>.

department of the Ministry of the Interior, stepped in to resolve the *Maximiliano y Carlota* debacle, demanding that the script be changed to ameliorate Juárez's image, but it was too late.

Miguel Alemán Velasco, then vice president of Telesistemas, got involved and contacted producer Miguel Sabido to write another telenovela that would emphasize Juárez's legacy and recuperate his image. Sabido termed this a "government non-official protest."¹⁰² In spite of the damaging political effects of *Carlota y Maximiliano*, it proved that audiences had an appetite for historical telenovelas. Whether they could both be used pedagogically and be economically effective remained to be seen.

La tormenta, 1967: Recuperating Juárez with a Successful Narrative Strategy

Stung by official criticism and determined to rehabilitate his reputation, Miguel Alemán Velasco spared no expense in putting together a "wonder team" to create *La tormenta*. Miguel Sabido and Eduardo Lizalde wrote the script, Raúl Araiza directed it, and Ernesto Alonso produced it. A team of historians were also contracted to investigate the historical aspects of the plot.¹⁰³ *La tormenta* was planned to debut on July 15, 1967, the anniversary of the proclamation of Juárez. The series aired from 6:40 to 7:10 p.m. Monday to Friday, from July to November 1967, which coincided with festivities commemorating the triumph of the Republic and the promulgation of the 1917 Constitution. Together the accomplished team of producers, writers, and actors struck

¹⁰² Rodríguez Cadena, "Contemporary Hi(stories) of Mexico," 52.

¹⁰³ Fernández and Paxman, *El Tigre*, 130.

the necessary balance between political message, pedagogy, and audience interest: the series was an enormous success. A reported 26 million Mexicans viewed the series, a record at more than half the population at the time.¹⁰⁴

Audiences, journalists, Telesistema executives, and even former critics declared *La tormenta* a success. Jacabo Zabłudovsky, Mexico's best-known news anchorman at the time, stated that it was with series like *La tormenta* that television reached its fullest mission; it was able to "inform, educate and entertain."¹⁰⁵ Viewer and fan Alejandrina Avila wrote to *Teleguía* to express her gratitude to the creators of *La tormenta*; the series made her proud to be Mexican, and she believed that the series could rival the best in the world.¹⁰⁶ *Tele Guía* columnist Vicente Vila declared that "yes, *La tormenta* had a stormy (tormentoso) effect as a telenovela."¹⁰⁷

Even respected historian Daniel Cosío Villegas retracted an earlier critique of the use of telenovelas to teach history, calling *La tormenta* "democratic television that makes the people aware of each other, through historical evolution."¹⁰⁸ The hype continued even seven months after the broadcast had concluded, when the series' producers and best-known actors were invited to visit the president in the National Palace. There he congratulated and thanked them for their extraordinary work. In particular the president emphasized their representation of Juárez:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 132.

¹⁰⁵ Jacabo Zabłudovsky, *Tele Guía*, July 20 – 26, 1967, 47.

¹⁰⁶ "Todos conocemos su internacionalmente famoso apotegma, pero muchos nada más eso sabía de él no conocían otros muchos de sus rasgos de carácter, e inclusive el lado profundamente humano y tierno de aquel hombre de bronce que no tenía la menor duda sobre su conucia como funcionario y su decision de defender a México, cosas ambas en que jamás vaciló." Alejandrina Avila, "El Orgullo de ser Mexicana," *Tele Guía*, October 12-18, 1967, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Vicente Vila, "Telecolor," *Tele Guía*, July 20 – 26, 1967, 51.

¹⁰⁸ "una television democrática que haga que el pueblo tome conciencia de sí, a través de la evolución histórica." Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 132.

We all know his internationally famous apothegm, but many simply knew nothing more of him; they do not know many of his traits of character, and even the deeply human and tender side of this man of bronze, who had no doubt his conduct as an officer and his decision to defend Mexico, both of which he never wavered.¹⁰⁹

More than one critic believed the series would awaken aspirations of liberty in revolution, not only in Mexico but in Central and South America as well.¹¹⁰ The series was, indeed, successful outside of Mexico: it was broadcast in Ecuador with such overwhelming success that it was rebroadcast. Javier Alvarado, president of Ecuador's most important television network, which aired the series, commented that he believed there was no greater form for teaching history and promoting civics than with productions like *La tormenta*.¹¹¹ He also expressed the hope that other countries would imitate Televisa's efforts and create their own historical telenovelas. In Ecuador, he announced, they would be doing historically inspired scenes, but they could not afford a production like *La tormenta* with almost one hundred episodes.

At home, the series earned six "Calendario Azteca de Oro" awards granted by the Mexican Association of Journalists of Radio and Television (AMPRyT) including Best Telenovela of 1967 and was deemed the most important work made in Mexican television.¹¹² The series was not even confined to the small screen: a film version was also created for an estimated 8 million pesos and was to be financed by IMSS and the

¹⁰⁹ "Los de 'La tormenta' Visitaron a Díaz Ordaz," *El Nacional*, June 20, 1968, 7.

¹¹⁰ See for example Guillermo Carnero Hoke, "Obra de incendio: *La tormenta*," *Impacto*, 36.

¹¹¹ "Por Segunda Ocasión Transmiten en Ecuador la Telenovela '*La tormenta*,'" *El Nacional*, January 29, 1969, np.

¹¹² "Seis 'Calendario Azteca de Oro' para la Serie de Televisión '*La tormenta*,'" *El Nacional*, January 26, 1968, 6; Vicente Vila, "Telecolor," *Tele Guía*, nd or np; Ramon Inclán and Vicente Vila, "Telecolor," *Tele Guía*, July 20 – 26, 1967, 63.

Banco Nacional Cinemato, the latter an organization founded by Miguel Alemán Velasco.¹¹³

While both *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta* employed the same melodramatic formula, enticing viewers with romance and pitting good against evil, ultimately, one was a political disaster and the other an incredible success. How and why did the government and Televisa consider *La tormenta* an overwhelming victory in its efforts to redeem Juárez? *Carlota y Maximiliano* demonstrated that even when a telenovela was an audience success, it could still be a potent political tool. In its edutainment learning curve Televisa had learned that audiences demanded a degree of fidelity to the form; they required enough melodrama to keep them entertained. At the same time, historical content mattered as well. This section examines the characterization of *La tormenta* in order to understand how the writers and creators of *La tormenta* rectified the political damage of *Carlota y Maximiliano* and narrated the same period in Mexican history, whilst maintaining audience interest. *La tormenta* does not counter *Carlota y Maximiliano*'s intimate and humanizing account of the two royals with a counter-portrait of Juárez and his wife Margarita. Instead, the main characters and central love stories are anchored by fictitious characters.

With *La tormenta*, the writers did not take any chances that the audience would identify with the love story of Maximiliano and Carlota. In fact, the young royals are almost entirely absent; they do enter the plot until episode twenty-eight, when they arrive at the shores of Veracruz. There are no personal interactions that would give them a voice in the series. There is little mention of them again until Maximiliano is captured

¹¹³ “‘*La tormenta*’ Costará 8 Millones de Pesos,” *El Nacional*, March 23, 1968, 8.

and threatened with execution. A clear characterization of the royals emerges from comments from other characters: Maximiliano as weak and Carlota as ambitious, which effectively places the blame on Carlota.

This characterization of Maximiliano and Carlota is not unique to *La tormenta*; it circulated during their lifetimes and has endured over the decades, along with speculation about the sexual nature of their union. One of the conservative characters reasons that as the daughter of the King of Belgium, Carlota was born into a world of prestige, surrounded by people, largely men, of great power. Gabriel, one of the primary fictitious characters, a liberal, counters the significance of her royal heritage by arguing that the country's problems cannot be solved with the French perfumes of an "empress of cardboard," thereby painting the monarchy as a farce, one ill equipped to solve the real and challenging problems facing Mexico.¹¹⁴ Carlota's thirst for power is underscored again when she adamantly refuses to permit Maximiliano to consider abdicating when Napoleon III announces he will withdraw his troops from Mexico. It is her ambition that compels her to journey to Europe to plead with Napoleon III to overturn his decision, and when her pleas are repeatedly denied, she refuses to renounce her title because of her ambition. Though there is no mention of her descent into madness, viewers who also watched *Carlota y Maximiliano*, or were familiar with their history, would already have been aware of this fact. By framing the scant characterization of Carlota as one of pure ambition, *La tormenta* indirectly suggests that it was the cause of her insanity as well.

Maximiliano's character is also established through the dialogue and comments of other characters. A conversation between a wealthy upper-class woman, Doña Ana, and

¹¹⁴ María Luz Perea, *La tormenta [adaptation]*, 3rd ed. (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1968), 89.

her liberal-sympathizing daughter, Lidia, reflect these characterizations, though from different political positions. The mother laments, “Poor Little Max; he can not have a head for everything.”¹¹⁵ Lidia mocks her own class position and their complicity in re-establishing a monarchy in Mexico, again shifting the blame away from Maximiliano: “Poor Maximiliano!” she quips, “Believing in people like you is how he came to Mexico, this crazy business that can only cost him his life.”¹¹⁶ Regardless of the characters’ views of Maximiliano, the court-martial declares him guilty and sentences him to death. Even in his condemnation of Maximiliano’s actions, Juárez refers to him as “poor” (pobre): “This poor prince has come to serve as instrument of the worst crimes committed against the Mexican people. He has ruthlessly destroyed our men, aided by French bayonets; has trampled on every principle of our political organization.”¹¹⁷ *La tormenta* casts Carlota as a political opportunist, in comparison to “poor Max.”

In contrast to *Carlota y Maximiliano*’s careful examination of the moments between Maximiliano’s sentence and his execution, *La tormenta* simply states that on June 19, 1867 on the Cerro de la Campanas, Maximiliano, along with conservative generals Miguel Miramón, and Tomás Mejía were executed. Gabriel hears the shots and raises his head gently and mutters, “This is the sad epilogue of the imperial Mexican dream and it is over forever.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ “El pobrecito de Max no puede tener cabeza para todo.”

¹¹⁶ “Por creer en personas como ustedes vino a México a esta empresa de locos que sólo puede costarle la vida.”

¹¹⁷ “Este pobre príncipe ha venido a servir de instrumento a los peores crímenes cometidos contra el pueblo mexicano. Ha destruido sin piedad a nuestros hombres, apoyado por las bayonetas francesas; ha pisoteado todos los principios de nuestra organización política.” *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

In an attempt to recuperate the image of Juárez in *Carlota y Maximiliano* – as an impassive xenophobe – the writers and producers of *La tormenta* made some strategic changes in the focus of the new series: as we have seen above, they shifted the focus away from the emperor and empress, and even away from the conservatives. Instead, the narrative converges on the Liberals; the series starts with Juárez as interim president in Guadalajara, immediately after Ignacio Comonfort has abandoned the presidency. It is not long before Juárez and his cabinet ministers are taken prisoner by conservatives. Compare these scenes of political strife to the lavish setting of the Belgian castle in which Carlota has just wed Maximiliano. *La tormenta* immediately sets Juárez, and the liberals, up as the underdogs.

Of course, Juárez was not only disadvantaged in relation to the French; as a Zapotec, orphaned at a young age, he did not learn Spanish until he was twelve. Surprisingly, *La tormenta* dedicates little airtime to narrating Juárez's extraordinary social ascent, but it is not entirely absent. In conversation with Gabriel, Juárez graciously thanks him for his service to the liberal cause and asks him to become one of his officers.



Figure 4
Juárez with Gabriel Paredes in *La tormenta*, 1967¹¹⁹

Gabriel is astounded and humble, questioning if he is capable of fulfilling the position when he has just started learning to read. Juárez encourages him, reminding Gabriel that he spoke only Zapotec when he started to learn to read Spanish. When Gabriel laments that he is just a “poor ignorant Indian,” Juárez takes his hands and reminds him that they are both indigenous, and they are not inferior. Instead, he

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 31.

encourages Gabriel to say, “I Gabriel, I am an Indian, and I am free.”¹²⁰ These scenes reveal a tender and caring Juárez and set up didactic opportunities. For example, Juárez reminds Gabriel that education for all is enshrined in the very constitution that they are fighting to defend. When Gabriel continues learning to read, it is the constitution that he learns to read, thereby creating opportunities for explanations of different articles of the constitution.

Brief scenes featuring Juárez as a family man also underscore his humanity. While there are no romantic scenes between Juárez and Margarita, their enduring love for one another is evident and presented as more realistic than the privileged emperor and empress. In a reversal of *Carlota y Maximiliano*’s characterization of Juárez as the force that comes between the true love of the young royals, it is Maximiliano and Carlota that come between Juárez and Margarita and their children, particularly with the death of one of their sons while fleeing Chihuahua. This tragedy and the subsequent death of Margarita reveal a tenderness and humanity lacking in the Juárez of the first series. When Margarita dies, Juárez is surrounded by his family, friends, and political allies. Still, those closest to him view him as strong and cold, and are surprised to see him so emotionally distraught, crying alone in their empty bedroom. He reveals a sentimentality that he would not reveal in the National Palace, but “in that moment he was nothing more than a man shaken by misfortune.”¹²¹

Though *La tormenta* strategically asserts Juárez’s humanity through struggle, tenderness, and moments of weakness, his principles never waiver. Even when his own

¹²⁰ “pobre indio ignorante”; “yo Gabriel, soy indio y soy libre, y soy libre.” Ibid., 27.

¹²¹ “En ese momento no fue más que un hombre sacudido por el infortunio.” Ibid., 106.

life is in danger, he sends his family abroad, but he is unwilling to abandon Mexico. Even in the face of staggering losses to the conservatives and the French, Juárez's convictions remain steadfast: "We will triumph in any way, and to conquer we must be, first of all, assured we will succeed, have the absolute conviction of the reasons why we are fighting!"¹²² The effect is convincing: though they are the underdogs, they will win because they are morally correct. That moral stance, maintained through defeat and hardship, urges the audience to identify with Juárez's decision to have Maximilian executed. After all, it is not simply about the life of Maximiliano, as Juárez reminds the audience; if Mexico does not punish this atrocious crime, its democracy and liberty will be under constant threat.¹²³ Nor is the telenovela simply about Juárez; though in reality Juárez outlived Maximiliano by five years, in *La tormenta* the only mention of Juárez after the execution is in relation to his wife's death, and then his own, in 1872.

The recasting of Juárez, Maximiliano, and Carlota are effective strategies of *La tormenta*'s success – as both entertainment and education – but the most important narrative choice was to anchor the series with fictitious characters. By using fictional Juaristas as the main protagonists, the writers had more creative license and were able to sustain a narrative thread across an expansive time period. Furthermore, Televisa's writers and producers had learned a collective lesson from the *Carlota y Maximiliano* debacle: love stories are fundamental to the audience's identification with and interest in a telenovela.

¹²² "¡Vamos a triunfar de todas maneras, y para vencer hay que tener, antes que todo, la seguridad de que se va a triunfar, tener la convicción absoluta de las razones por las que se lucha!" Ibid., 72.

¹²³ Ibid., 101.

La tormenta's protagonist is Gabriel Paredes, an illiterate man who joins the Juaristas without fully understanding the Republican cause. Lorenza, a former school teacher and passionate and committed liberal and Juarista, agrees to teach Gabriel to read, and in doing so the two fall in love. Their conversations and lessons provide didactic opportunities in the series' early scenes: Gabriel's education is the audience's education, from the importance of literacy to the tenets of liberalism and the articles of the constitution. Gabriel's humble beginnings encouraged viewers to identify with him. By episode fifteen (of ninety-one) Gabriel has learned to read and has advanced his rank in the liberal army. He fights honorably and contributes to victory over French troops in the Battle of Puebla, later celebrated as Cinco de Mayo. Nevertheless, he is seriously wounded in the fighting and is assumed dead. His injury underscores the enormous human cost of the French intervention; even in a remarkable victory for the disadvantaged side, the casualties on both sides were great. Gabriel's extended recovery and assumed death also propel the narrative forward, explaining why he is separated from Lorenza. Gabriel eventually recovers, scales the ranks, and develops a personal relationship with Juárez, accompanying him in his retreat from the French. Played by acclaimed Mexican actor Ignacio Lopez Tarso, the acting and characterization of Gabriel was so successful that some viewers were unaware that he was a fictional character; fans sent thousands of letters to Televisa asking why no streets, plazas, or statues had been dedicated to Gabriel Paredes.¹²⁴

As a trusted officer, Juárez sends him to the capital on an important secret mission, and once there, Gabriel encounters young liberals who have become

¹²⁴ Reyes de la Maza, *Mexico sentimental*, 48.

disillusioned and convinced that Juárez has abandoned them. In this exchange, Gabriel transitions from student to teacher, assuring the young Juaristas that Juárez had never abandoned the cause or left the country, that he would continue fighting until his death to expel the French.¹²⁵ While in Mexico City, Gabriel encounters Lorenza. They resume their relationship, but they are quickly torn apart by the circumstances of battle. Gabriel is willing to leave his position with Juárez, to give up on his convictions to live peacefully with Lorenza. Once again in the role of teacher, Lorenza reminds him of the significance of the freedoms they are defending; even if it must be fought at the cost of their relationship. In a well-worn trope, she chooses love of patria over her love for Gabriel.

Without Lorenza as his moral compass, Gabriel changes drastically. He marries another woman, Lidia, a fascinating character who is a liberal woman from an upper-class family. Together they have three children, Lorenza, Gabriel, and Cecilia, whose names mirror the personalities, interests and convictions of their namesakes (Cecilia represents her mother, Lidia). Twenty years pass and Gabriel has scaled the ranks and now possesses considerable power, but it has corrupted him and turned him into a despot on his hacienda. He will no longer speak of his origins and often expresses the prejudices of the upper class; he accuses his workers of being lazy and fraudulent, and it is his daughter, Lorenza, who attempts to comfort and educate the workers.

¹²⁵ Perea, *La tormenta [adaptation]*, 88–89.



Figure 5
Gabriel Paredes with his wife, Lidia, when he has long forgotten
his humble beginnings. *La tormenta*, 1967

By this point, Díaz has been in power for almost fifteen years. When he initially gained power, Gabriel did not support him and found him suspicious, but when the narrative jumps forward twenty years, Gabriel has become inculcated in the regime.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ In this regard, his character echoes the title character in *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, which Carlos Fuentes penned in 1962, just five years before *La tormenta*. Like Paredes, Cruz is a former soldier (albeit a Revolutionary soldier) who ascends from poverty to wealth, and both characters demonstrate the corrupting

Gabriel will not allow his children or employees to criticize the government; his authoritarian behaviour and support for the government alienate him from his family, particularly his children Lorenza and Gabriel, who are not blind to “the misery, the assassinations, the repression, and the injustice” of the period.¹²⁷

When Gabriel is reunited with his Lorenza, his former lover, she immediately notices he has changed and comments that he has abandoned the ideals of Juárez. His response is “Others are weak,” thereby apotheosizing Juárez and excusing his own decisions and those of Díaz.¹²⁸

By casting Emiliano Zapata as one of Gabriel’s peons, *La tormenta* creates a narrative thread that carries the plot to the Revolution.¹²⁹ This link, along with character dialog, establishes a historical continuity between Juárez and the Revolution, wherein the latter is a restoration of the ideals of the former. Gabriel’s son changes his name to avoid connection to his father and joins Madero in his opposition to Díaz. Gabriel Sr. remains unconvinced by the revolutionary fervor and considers accompanying Díaz when he flees to Europe. Believing that his son was killed by Huertistas, he hears his voice pleading, “My flag, papa. The banner of Madero, the Juarista ideal seconded by Madero, by Carranza, by Zapata. Revolutionaries as you were in your time . . . as was Juárez.”¹³⁰ When the ghosts of his son, Juárez, and Madero visit him to remind him that he is not alone in the fight, he returns to battle but this time in defense of the Revolution. His

influence of power. Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962).

¹²⁷ Perea, *La tormenta [adaptation]*, 138.

¹²⁸ “Los demás son débiles.” *Ibid.*, 115.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 141–3.

¹³⁰ “Mi bandera, papa. El pendón del maderismo, del ideal juarista secundado por Madero, por Carranza, por Zapata. Revolucionarios como lo fuiste en tu memento...como lo fue el mismo Juárez.” *Ibid.*, 213.

support for the revolutionary cause reunites him with his family, to the extent that he urges his son (shot, but not dead) to return to Querétaro to be at Carranza's side for the constitutional vote. Shortly after Gabriel dies, the Constitution of 1917 is passed, putting to rest a long stormy period in the nation's history.

Public-Private Collaboration: Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social (IMSS)

Miguel Sabido was not the only new collaborator on *La tormenta*. The Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social (IMSS), the government agency responsible for providing health care to public sector employees, also signed on to coproduce the new series with Telesistema Mexicano, Televisa's predecessor. Initially, the SEP was to collaborate with Telesistema, but when the SEP representative delivered a draft of the first episode, Sabido and Lizalde were horrified by the dry script.¹³¹ The Televisa/IMSS collaboration was the first of four, including *Los caudillos* in 1968, *El carruaje* in 1972, and *Senda de gloria* in 1987. There is no budget information available to indicate what the *La tormenta* collaboration cost IMSS. A newspaper article in *Impacto*, a Mexico City daily, suggested that IMSS fully funded *La tormenta*,¹³² but it is more likely that IMSS's contribution was close to \$6 million, which is what they paid for *Los Caudillos* the following year.¹³³

¹³¹ Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 131.

¹³² "La Ampryt Entrego en Lucida ceremonia sus codiciados trofeos 'calendario azteca de oro 1967'" *Impacto*, February 28, 1968, p. 55.

¹³³ AHIMSS - Inv. 103 2-5-1 2233, Programas de radio y television 1968, Telesistema Mexicano," Presupuesto para tranmitir el programa en Video Tape 'Los caudillos' en las siguientes Televisoras," 912.5/1.

How did a government health care agency, charged with both primary care and educating their members about the prevention of accidents and workplace illness, explain spending the current equivalent of US\$500,000 to produce a soap opera?¹³⁴ The answer is twofold. First, Mexican social security was a legacy of the Revolution, a fulfillment of Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution, which guaranteed the rights of workers. According to IMSS, it granted benefits unknown to previous generations,¹³⁵ and as a result the agency was invested in educating Mexicans about their history. Even though IMSS provided coverage only to public sector employees, it claimed that “The classes protected by Mexican social security must demonstrate every day a greater sense of responsibility; to strengthen in all aspects their contribution to public and private life, aware that it will strengthen the country in all aspects...”¹³⁶ In addition to their historical investment, IMSS also astutely understood that one of the most effective ways to reach the public in a direct and persuasive manner was through television programming.¹³⁷ An article in *Impacto*, a Mexico City daily, suggests that audiences may have concurred, as it described the series as “a plausible effort of the Mexican Institute of Social Security to bring the country not just a simple melodramatic story, but a highly educational show that was also

¹³⁴ AHIMSS - Inv. 1208 1-3-45 103, Programas de Radio y Television 1967, Subdireccion medica, Departamento de riesgos profesionales e invalidez – July 1, 1967; The exchange rate for all of 1968 was 0.012500 to 1, MXP/USD (see <<http://fxtop.com/en/historical-exchange-rates.php?A=1&C1=USD&C2=MXN&DD1=01&MM1=01&YYYY1=1968&B=1&P=&I=1&DD2=01&MM2=01&YYYY2=1969&btnOK=Go>>). For the inflation rate to January 21, 2013, see <<http://www.usinflationcalculator.com>>.

¹³⁵ AHIMSS - Inv. 1208 1-3-45 103, Programas de Radio y Television 1967, Letter and document from Max Aub to Sr. Lic. Ricardo García Sáenz [sic], Subdir. Administrativo del IMSS, July 4, 1967.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ AHIMSS - Inv. 1208 1-3-45 103, “Aspectos doctrinarios de los spots para la television,” (La tormenta) no date.

entertaining.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, IMSS developed a robust cultural program that eventually included a theatre program, a soccer team, and radio and television programming. For example, IMSS also collaborated with the public television channel IMEVISION and the Archivo Histórico Toscano to produce a documentary series featuring previously unedited and aired material from Salvador Toscano, a pioneer in documentary cinematography in Mexico and Latin America; the series comprised fourteen chapters that focused on the most significant subjects of the Revolution.¹³⁹

Each of *La tormenta*'s ninety episodes was scheduled to include three commercial breaks, each of which would feature public service announcements from IMSS. These spots focused on two major themes: the benefits of IMSS and more general advice on nutrition, preventative medicine, and ways to avoid accidents. A planning document demonstrates that IMSS was concerned about the danger of over-emphasizing the benefits of its services because it only covered 18 percent of the population, and might provoke frustration from those not covered; thus, the recommendation was to keep the message universal.¹⁴⁰ The series of advertisements for IMSS that aired during commercial breaks offer insight into what IMSS hoped to gain from a partnership with Telesistema Mexicano. The spots suggest that IMSS viewed the advertising during the broadcast with didactic potential, not only the telenovela itself. In the series of ads that aired during *La tormenta* there are at least five different spots featured, including an address from President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in which he asserts the singularity of

¹³⁸ “Un esfuerzo plausible del Instituto Mexicano del Seguridad Social para llevar al país no un simple relato folletinesco, sino un espectáculo altamente educativo que además divierte.” “‘La tormenta’ es el espectáculo educativo que además divierte,” *Impacto*, November 22, 1967, 43.

¹³⁹ Comisión de Comunicación Social, nd, AHIMSS 003 6-8-7 15707.

¹⁴⁰ AHIMSS - Inv. 1208 1-3-45 103, July 3, 1967.

Mexican identity (“no hay dos Méxicos”) and declares that the values cherished most by the people of Mexico are equality, justice, and liberty.

The other spots are more directly linked to themes of health. One asks, “Do you know what the greatest wealth of a country is?”¹⁴¹ The response, according to IMSS, is the health of the nation’s citizens, which enriches individuals, their families, and the country as a whole. Another advertisement ties this national treasure to individual responsibility, imploring viewers, “If you love Mexico, take care of your health,” because being healthy allows you to have a productive work life that contributes to the nation’s productivity and success. A third commercial also emphasizes the importance of productivity by extolling the significance of one’s hands for an active and productive life, reminding viewers with visual images and voice over, “we use them for eating, writing, working, and caressing our children.” Another focuses on “the faces of Mexico,” healthy, clean, smiling, and vital faces, to encourage viewers to mind their health for the good of the nation. In each of these commercials, IMSS urged viewers to take care of their bodies and general health for the good of the nation.¹⁴²

In addition to viewing civic education as part of its purview, it is possible that a personal connection also solidified IMSS’s interest in co-producing historical telenovelas. At their highest levels, each of the four co-productions were overseen by Miguel Alemán Velasco, then vice president of Telesistemas Mexicano, and Ricardo García Sainz, IMSS General Administrative Subdirector from January 1966 to December 1976, and Director

¹⁴² *La tormenta*, tape 3584, Clío TV, Video Archive.

General from December 1982 to January 1991.¹⁴³ Furthermore, an amicable letter from Alemán Velasco to Ricardo García Sainz suggests that the two had a personal relationship. “Muy estimado Ricardo,” opens Alemán Velasco, after which he notifies “Ricardo” that he is currently returning from filming for *Los caudillos* in Guanajuato. More interesting is his desire to communicate two historical discoveries “sensacionales.” First, a statue of Allende (see figure 6) that had stood in the main plaza of San Miguel de Allende for twenty-five years was, in fact, Iturbide.

Alemán Velasco sounds even more enthusiastic about his second find: he and his team located a copy of Allende’s original baptism certificate, which dates Allende’s birth in 1769, not in 1779 as historians and the National Archives (AGN) had previously believed. Alemán Velasco believed the discovery to be so significant that he plans to inform the president and the Secretary of Government. Along with the letter, Alemán Velasco included a copy of Allende’s baptism certificate, a list of historical works that include the erroneous date of birth, photographs of the statue believed to be Allende, and photographs from the filming of *Los caudillos*. Concluded with a familiar salutation, “Como siempre, recibe un cordial y afectuoso saludo,” the letter suggests not only a warm relationship between Alemán Velasco and Ricardo García Sainz, but also a shared love of Mexican history.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, this illustrates that the producers saw themselves as practicing historians, not just popularizing history, or transmitting knowledge created by professional historians to a broad audience, but also contributing to the production of that knowledge. The different ways in which Alemán Velasco, García Sainz, and also the

¹⁴³ Roderic A. Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935-1993*, 3rd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 271.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

wider public envisioned the knowledge of history would in turn influence the reception of historical telenovelas.



Figure 6
Photograph of unidentified men examining statue believed to be Allende, but later determined to be Iturbide. Included with letter from Alemán Velasco to Ricardo García Sainz, July 1968.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ AHIMSS – Inv. 103 2-5-1 2233, Programas de radio y televisión 1968. Lic. Miguel Alemán Velasco to Sr. Lic. García Sáinz, July 25, 1968.

Edutainment Downturn

Even though Telesistemas struck a successful balance between entertainment and education with *La tormenta*, it was not as fortunate with its next three historical telenoveas, *Los caudillos* (1968), *La constitución* (1970), and *El carruaje* (1972).¹⁴⁶ Debuting early in 1968, *Los caudillos* examined Mexico's battles for independence from Spain. The series featured several stars including Ofelia Guilmáin (who later appears in *La antorcha encendida*, also about independence), Silvia Pinal, and Enrique Lizalde. Though the series started with audience interest, it was not able to maintain it, certainly not to the same degree as its predecessor. Unfortunately, *Los caudillos* and its successor *La constitución* are the two historical telenovelas that are the most difficult as subjects of study; copies of the series are not available, so they have not been studied by scholars, nor do substantive newspaper articles appear to have been written about them. *Tele guía* (Television Guide) columns provide a glimpse of audience reaction to *Los caudillos*, but its provenience as a Televisa publication makes it a suspect source. Interestingly, the two columns on *Los caudillos* that appear in *Tele guía* are both critical of the series. The first complains that the fictional characters Jimenez Lisandro (Enrique Lizalde) and Jimena (Silvia Pinal) were frivolous diversion from the series' historical focus on the independence period.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ *Los caudillos*, directed by Ernesto Alonso (Mexico City: Telesistema Mexicano, 1965); *La constitución*, directed by Ernesto Alonso (Mexico City: Telesistema Mexicano, 1970); and *El carruaje*, directed by Ernesto Alonso (Mexico City: Telesistema Mexicano, 1972). Viewed in clips on VHS at Clío TV, Video Archive.

¹⁴⁷ "Menos efecto," *Tele Guía*, September 6-11, 1968, p.45.

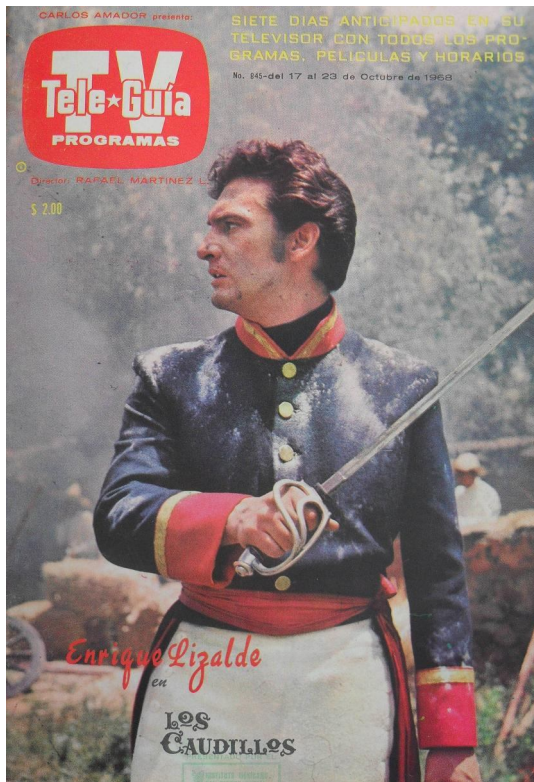


Figure 7
Enrique Lizalde as fictional character Jiménez Lisandro in *Los caudillos*,
1968 cover of *Tele guía*¹⁴⁸

Another column notes the challenges of the genre, commends several of the actors, but also points out several problems, including costuming, holes in the continuity, lack of rehearsing by two or three of the co-stars, little understanding of characters by certain actors, and “inexcusable anachronisms.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, issues that professional historians might consider as relatively unimportant, such as the minutia of costumes or the characterization of actors, were considered vital to the historical authenticity by many critics as well as by large segments of the audience.

¹⁴⁸ *Tele Guía*, October 17-23, 1968, cover.

¹⁴⁹ “Con la mayor intencion,” *Tele Guía*, September 19-25, 1968, p.63.

According to journalists Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, *Los caudillos* was successful, just not to the same extent as *La tormenta*, and it was mired by political context. It debuted amidst a swelling student movement, which a couple months later culminated in the student massacre at Tlatelolco. Fernández and Paxman speculate that Aléman Velasco and his team were likely under pressure from the government to ensure that *La constitución* would carry a strong message of national unity.¹⁵⁰ The Revolution was an ideal theme, for it had served as a unifying narrative for decades. As its title suggests, *La constitución* examines the historical circumstances of the drafting and promulgation of the Constitution of 1917. Writer Sabido framed the narrative around the tale of Guadalupe Arredondo, a woman widowed when Porfirio Díaz's troops slaughtered the Yaqui village in which she lives. When Guadalupe regains consciousness after the incident, she sets off to fight for revolutionary ideals and to see the passing of a new constitution.

Producer Ernesto Alonso was able to secure his friend and film star, María Félix, to play the lead role, in what was her debut on the small screen. She earned US\$28,000, almost 10 percent of the entire budget. Ultimately the financial cost was too great, as the series was not popular among audiences because of its didacticism. According to telenovela critic Luis Reyes de la Maza, the series recreated too many constitutional sessions in Querétaro, leaving the “audience bored to death” so that “few followed until

¹⁵⁰ Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 133.



Figure 8
María Félix as Guadalupe Arredondo taking up arms
against Porfiran troops in *La constitución*, 1970

the end.”¹⁵¹ Noted Mexican historian Daniel Cosío Villegas was also critical of the series, stating that it lacked social or educational value.¹⁵²

The next telenovela was even more didactic. *El carruaje* premiered in 1972 to celebrate the “Year of Juárez,” which commemorated the centennial of Juárez’s death. It was the first series in color and featured José Carlos Ruiz, who had played Juárez to great acclaim in *La tormenta*. The stern expression on both Benito and Margarita’s faces in Figure 9 captures the serious sentiment of the series. The gravest problem was that the script lacked a compelling fictional narrative, making the series more of a historical

¹⁵¹ Reyes de la Maza, *Mexico sentimental*, 51.

¹⁵² Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 133.

dramatization than a melodramatic telenovela. Even though Telesistema had produced a successful blockbuster about Juárez just five years earlier, evidently its learning curve was not over, and it still had much to learn.



Figure 9
Margarita Maza de Juárez and Benito Juárez looking quite stern and serious
in *El carruaje* (1972)

Conclusion

By the time that Televisa broadcast *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta* in the mid-1960s, the PRI had been invoking Juárez for political gain for several decades, which explains some of their dismay at the tarnished image of Juárez that *Carlota y Maximiliano* cultivated. Unfortunately, there are few remaining sources that permit

access to the ways in which audience members made sense of this new portrayal of Juárez. The degree to which public dissent was published is a concern; *Teleguía* was owned and published by Televisa, so it is unlikely that they would permit stridently negative comments to be published in the same pages that advertised the series. However, we do know that Televisa and PRI government officials were convinced enough about its potentially damaging effects to order another telenovela be made. The result was the first of several series co-produced by IMSS, a union of public and private interests.

In addition to a dearth of audience voices, Televisa has been unwilling to allow researchers access to their archives with only a few exceptions, so we cannot know what feedback they received directly from the audience, nor can we confirm the political intentions of the team of collaborators that worked on *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta*. Nevertheless, attention to other political uses of Juárez in the mid-1960s provides an indication of the potential for political readings of these two historical telenovelas.

Historical dramas are as much about the period in which they are created as they are a window into the past. As we have seen in *Juárez*, Benito Juárez has been employed in anti-imperial critiques, which were also salient in the mid-1960s. According to Weeks, government use of the myth of Juárez as a way to promote support for Mexico's foreign policy coalesced in the 1960s, when Mexico embraced stances independent of the United States. Mexico, for example, refused to denounce the Revolution in Cuba, despite intense pressure from the US. The Mexican government emphasized the principles of nonintervention and self-determination, which Juárez championed, to generate support

for their divergent stance on Cuba. The US's attempted manipulation of the Organization of American States (OAS) to root out subversive movements provoked the suspicion about US motives amongst Latin American nations. They were concerned about signing the Declaration of Caracas, because they feared its ambiguity would enable the US to sanction intervention in Latin America. Mexico's abstention from the vote was supported at home and linked to the values of Juárez and the nationalization of oil. Juárez was also extensively invoked during the Chamizal dispute, a conflict over a small piece of land on the border between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The riverbed shifted from its location when it was surveyed and the border was set in 1852. On July 18, 1963, President Adolfo López Mateos faced television cameras before a large portrait of Juárez to announce that he had successfully negotiated the return of the lost land (only 147 hectares). The portrait underscored a link between Lopez Mateos and Juárez; both had defended the territorial integrity of Mexico.¹⁵³

There is no indication from archival sources to suggest that Mexican audiences made these connections between Juárez, Mexico's foreign policy, and the historical telenovelas. More so than this political context, audiences would have likely understood *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta* as a popular product of Latin America's largest media conglomerate. With the help of Miguel Sabido and his edutainment formula, Telesistema finally struck the right balance with *La tormenta*. Nevertheless, it was not the end of the learning curve; the subsequent historical telenovelas – *Los caudillos*, *La constitución*, and *El carruaje* – were flops.

¹⁵³ Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico*, 108–110.

These early historical telenovelas set a number of important precedents. First, they demonstrated concern for the genre's political ramifications and the problem of historical veracity. Moreover, the latter was an issue not just of interpretations set by the professional historians, but even more so the accuracy of details. In this way, Televisa producers considered themselves to be carrying out a vital process of discovering and diffusing national history.

Chapter Two

Rival Historiographical Interpretations: Comic Books, Literacy and State–Intellectual Relations in the Late 1970s and Early 1980s

Introduction

NOTICE:

EPISODIOS MEXICANOS is a series based on the work of historians and social researchers who are specialists on each theme. For dramatic necessity, fictitious characters appear that represent, nevertheless, possible actions and attitudes of the time period.¹⁵⁴

This opening statement appears on the inside cover of volumes of *Episodios mexicanos*, a historically themed comic book produced by the Ministry of Education in the early 1980s. The authors clearly felt ambivalent about using fictitious characters to convey the nation’s history in a text prepared according to the professional standards of historians and social researchers. Nevertheless, in this endeavor, as Televisa earlier discovered with *La tormenta*, fictional characters were effective in threading together significant political events and periods in Mexican history, from the Spanish conquest to the Revolution of 1910. In the words of Scott McCloud, cartooning is “amplification through simplification,”¹⁵⁵ and the SEP produced not one but two cartoon histories seeking to amplify a connection between the ruling party and a glorious, common Mexican past. However, in the process of simplifying complex historical interpretations

¹⁵⁴ Inside cover of *Episodios mexicanos*.

ADVERTENCIA:

EPISODIOS MEXICANOS es una serie basada en el trabajo de historiadores e investigadores sociales especialistas en cada tema. Por necesidad dramática aparecen personajes ficticios que representan, sin embargo hechos y actitudes posibles en su época.

¹⁵⁵ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 30.

to comic storyboards, ministry officials found themselves caught up in political and bureaucratic struggles that would shape Mexico's future. The following chapter examines *Episodios mexicanos* and *México: historia de un pueblo*, both produced between 1980 and 1982, employing the two series as case studies to understand state efforts to craft an official historical narrative.¹⁵⁶ As outlined in the introduction, this dissertation seeks to problematize the notion of a singular official narrative, and study of these comic books and their coordinators reminds us that the state is composed of individuals, often with different and competing interests. In particular, it examines the relationship between intellectuals and the state by providing insight into two particular intellectuals contracted by a single government ministry.

Readers unfamiliar with the popularity of comic books in Mexico might wonder why the Ministry of Education undertook such a project in the first place. Mexico is one of the world's largest producers and consumers of comic books, with thirty-six million readers according to a 1977 SEP report. The SEP estimated the value of comic books distributed in Mexico that same year to be worth three hundred million pesos.¹⁵⁷ This popularity was in part economic: comics are far more affordable and accessible than traditional books. They are not sold in specialty stores, but rather on street-corner newsstands, where their sales frequently exceed those of newspapers and magazines. Moreover, their audiences are not what many might expect: they are not the sole purview

¹⁵⁶ Secretaría de Educación Pública - Dirección General de Publicaciones y Bibliotecas, *Episodios mexicanos*, 68 vols. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1981) and Secretaría de Educación Pública - Dirección General de Publicaciones y Bibliotecas, *México: historia de un pueblo*, 20 vols. (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen and Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1980-1982).

¹⁵⁷ AHSEP-SCR, 9211/1, Serie: Sría Particular 1979 p. 17; AHSEP, 9213/18 Letter and report from Patricia Van Rhijn to Roger Diaz de Cossío, 30 de agosto de 1979. p. 9, diagram #5.

of young males. As a cheap form of entertainment, they offered the advantages of a visual and textual format accessible to the nation's vast semi-literate population. This was particularly important because the SEP had identified a literacy problem in the 1970s that formed part of a larger failure of the revolutionary government to ensure the well-being of the Mexican people.

Given the massive popularity of comic books in Mexico, it is not surprising that the SEP borrowed the format to create a relatively inexpensive and accessible product that would encourage both literacy and a shared sense of Mexican identity. Despite its view that comic books represented a form of "subliterature," the SEP set aside concerns over the lowbrow reputation of the genre in an attempt to take advantage of its potentially large audiences. Teachers used these SEP comic books as didactic tools in schools, but they were primarily designed for a wider market as public history products that would appeal to young and old readers alike.

The first of the two series, *México: historia de un pueblo*, was coordinated by acclaimed Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II and launched in August 1980 with print runs of between 50,000 and 100,000. Volumes were available for purchase at supermarkets and sidewalk stands for sixty pesos.¹⁵⁸ *Episodios mexicanos* first hit newsstands at the end of August in 1981, this time at a considerably lower price of three pesos. Historian Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach coordinated an interdisciplinary team in the production of sixty-eight volumes of *Episodios mexicanos*. The two coordinators illustrate a tension that runs through many of the public history projects discussed in this

¹⁵⁸ Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government*, 320; Marketing in supermarkets was noted by Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach in an interview by author, Mexico City, Mexico, 20 July 2005.

dissertation, namely the tension between amateur and professional historians. In chapter one, Miguel Alemán Velasco and Ricardo García Sainz played the role of amateur historians, while chapters three and four examine the popular culture works of professional historians such as Enrique Krauze and Fausto Zeron Medina. This chapter's analysis of the two comic book coordinators, Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, likewise contributes to this discussion of relationships between amateur and professional historians.

This chapter seeks to understand the two series, *México: historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios mexicanos*, within the context of the historical relationship between the state and the culture industries in the postrevolutionary period by comparing the visual representations of each series, examining their respective coordinators, and through a close reading of their narrative interpretations of the Spanish conquest. The first section demonstrates that the SEP's literacy campaigns – during the early and mid-twentieth century and then again in the late 1970s – sought not only to teach Mexicans to read and write, but were part of a broader campaign to establish a unifying national culture that could be harnessed for political stability and legitimacy for the ruling party. In this context the SEP's recognition of a persistent literacy crisis in late 1970s signaled a political failing of rural development and social mobility, as well as an educational one. A comparative analysis of *México: historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios mexicanos*, in the second section, reveals that the two projects were quite different, even though they were produced by the same government ministry in the span of less than two years. It demonstrates that the coordinators narrated Mexican history according to their own

political and professional perspectives. As a result, the series' historical narratives are more reflective of their coordinators than of any government-sanctioned narrative, thereby revealing that the state's attempt to craft a singular official history was not viable in practice.

SEP, Literacy, and the Crisis of Revolutionary Legitimacy

The Secretaría de Education Publica, created in 1921, was at the center of attempts to build legitimacy for the revolutionary state, both by creating opportunities for social mobility for the masses that had been excluded from Porfirian modernization and by helping to forge a unified national culture. From its inception, the SEP was concerned with “educating” rebellious rural peasants. Its challenge was to transform these *campesinos* into part of a modern productive nation, and it viewed literacy as a fundamental part of that project. In the 1920s and 1930s there was an attempt to construct an education system that expressed the values of the Revolution, though it was not always clear what those values were.¹⁵⁹ By the 1970s, it was evident that the SEP's education campaigns had fallen far short of the goal of achieving universal literacy, and this failing was part of a broader failure of rural development and Mexican populism. This section charts the major contours of the SEP's campaigns, since it is within this context that their decision to publish comic books must be understood. Furthermore, it

¹⁵⁹ Francisco Arce Gurza, “En busca de una educación revolucionaria: 1924-1934,” in *Ensayos sobre historia de la educación en México*, ed. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez et al. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1981), 174–5.

offers insight into a public sector cultural project, a counterpoint to the later historical telenovelas that were funded entirely by Televisa.¹⁶⁰

In the early 1920s, under its first director José Vasconcelos, the SEP launched its *misiones culturales* (cultural missions). The initial objective of the *misiones culturales* was to bring education to the nation's rural areas. Teachers were dispatched to the rural reaches of Mexico in three major literacy campaigns between 1922 and 1944. Corps of energetic, often urban, teachers spread out across the country to teach literacy, as well as to foment a national culture. Intellectuals from both urban and rural centers rallied in support of the campaigns.¹⁶¹ Alongside classes on reading and writing, teachers extolled the importance of hygiene, modified traditional *corridos* to sing the praises of the Revolution, and played a significant role in the organizing of patriotic and civic festivals.¹⁶² Also during the 1920s, José Vasconcelos commissioned a series of murals that were instrumental in linking radical politics, peasants, workers, and the indigenous past to the postrevolutionary state in the visual imagination of the Mexican public.¹⁶³

In the 1930s, the tenor of the literacy campaigns shifted with the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), which was widely considered the most radical postrevolutionary government, and education was no exception. He altered Article 3 of

¹⁶⁰ See chapters 3 and 4 for discussions of *El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*, both of which were funded solely by Televisa.

¹⁶¹ Mary Kay Vaughan, "Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 157.

¹⁶² Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 5; Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 134.

¹⁶³ See for example Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*; Desmond Rochfort, "The Sickle, the Serpent, and the Soil: History, Revolution, Nationhood, and Modernity in the Murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 43-57.

the 1917 constitution to mandate socialist education. In response, teachers shifted their rhetoric to the project of igniting class consciousness, forming unions and mobilizing for agrarian reform, while maintaining their focus on formal and non-formal education that was highly nationalistic.¹⁶⁴ Within the socialist educational paradigm, workers and peasants were the protagonists of the Revolution and of Mexican history more broadly. Thus, the new curriculum demanded a rewriting of Mexican history.¹⁶⁵ Informal education played a role in this endeavor, alongside formal schooling. Informal campaigns included itinerant puppet troupes that performed in communities across the nation, teaching both children and adults about the merits of revolutionary ideals like work, hygiene, literacy, and cooperation.¹⁶⁶ The SEP further extended its social influence into Mexican homes across the country by broadcasting educational programs focused on literacy, adult learning, and Mexican culture on radio and television.¹⁶⁷

Evaluating the success of the SEP's education campaigns is a challenge, particularly since government statistics are often inconsistent or unreliable. According to government census records, the SEP campaigns were incredibly successful: starting in 1930, the literacy rate was about 33 percent, and it climbed each successive decade, so that by 1970 it was about 76 percent. Statistics from the National Bank of Mexico's

¹⁶⁴ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Engracia Loyo, "Popular Reactions to the Educational Reforms of Cardenismo," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994), 247–260.

¹⁶⁵ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 5; Vaughan, "Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s," 158–9.

¹⁶⁶ For more information, see Elena Jackson Albarrán, "Comino Vence Al Diablo and Other Terrifying Episodes: Teatro Guiñol's Itinerant Puppet Theater in 1930s Mexico," *The Americas* 67, no. 3 (2011): 355–374.

¹⁶⁷ Joy Elizabeth Hayes, "National Imaginings on the Air: Radio in Mexico, 1920-1950," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Duke University Press Books, 2006), 249; Hayes, *Radio Nation*.

Department of Social Studies indicates that across all age groups (from 10 years old and up) the rate of illiteracy declined steadily between the 1960s and the 1980s (see figure 10).

	1960	1970	1980
10-14	28.4 %	15.4%	6.1%
15-19	25.9%	15.0%	5.6%
20-24	28.0%	18.0%	7.6%
25-29	31.2%	22.3%	10.1%
30-34	33.3%	23.8%	12.7%
35-39		27.8%	16.9%
40-44	38.0%	37.3%	19.3%
45-49		--	22.3%
50-54	44.9%	--	24.4%
55-59		--	25.6%
60-64	52.0%	--	30.1%
65 and up		--	37.4%

Figure 10
Illiterate Population by Age Group, 1960, 1970, and 1980¹⁶⁸

What these numbers obscure is the persistent lack of access to grade school and the reality of high rates of semi-literacy. In 1970, less than 10 percent of the population had studied in high school or beyond.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, meaningful literacy was more often caused by greater access to public schools, rather than literacy campaigns. So even though the SEP expanded considerably between the 1920s and 1940s, literacy rates did not necessarily keep pace with this growth. For example, in her study of educational campaigns in Puebla and Sonora, Mary Kay Vaughan found that youth literacy outside

¹⁶⁸ Data derived from Banamex, Departamento de estudios sociales, México Social: Noventa Indicadores Seleccionados, 1980. Bank of Mexico, 360 (72) B213.

¹⁶⁹ Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*, 14–15.

the capital of Puebla declined from 41 to 32 percent for boys and 32 to 30 percent for girls during this same period. The region outside the capital of Sonora also saw declining literacy rates: from 70 to 65 percent for boys and 72 to 71 percent for girls.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the SEP's literacy campaigns were not entirely failures. At least two significant contributions were the nationalization of popular culture and the creation of an appetite for reading. The campaigns successfully linked literacy to the Revolution and to the nation, making reading a modern, revolutionary, and nationalist act.¹⁷¹ Reading engaged Mexicans, as a functional and modern skill, but also as a dimension of cultural literacy that would open readers to a shared world of Mexican identity. The transformation of comic books into a cultural phenomenon of the masses was made possible by the scores of new readers. Many people learned to read just so that they could read comic books.¹⁷²

The SEP's rural educational campaigns were part of a rural development program that also sought to forge a clientelistic relationship between the state and campesinos.¹⁷³ Another cornerstone of this relationship was the Constitution of 1917, which promised sweeping agrarian reforms that would grant land to those who had been dispossessed, protect communal holdings (*ejidos*), and impede the concentration of large private estates. Nevertheless, in practice a few rich and powerful families controlled vast tracts of land, even if they did not legally own them. As a result, by 1970 capitalist

¹⁷⁰ Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 48.

¹⁷¹ Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*, 15.

¹⁷² Bartra, "The Seduction of the Innocents: The First Tumultuous Moments of Mass Literacy in Postrevolutionary Mexico," 301–2.

¹⁷³ Dolores Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012), 94–101.

agribusiness comprised just 1 percent of agrarian producers but they legally owned close to 20 percent of the nation's arable land, and an even larger share of the most productive, irrigated fields, and this did not include the substantial portion of land they controlled illegally.¹⁷⁴ Despite the decades of prosperity around midcentury, a period known as the "Mexican miracle," the growth of large commercial estates did not employ significant numbers of agricultural workers and instead displaced peasants through the commercialization of *ejidal* lands and decelerated land reform. A population explosion between 1950 and 1970 put further pressure on the available land, generating massive migration to urban centers and high unemployment rates.¹⁷⁵ The pressure of these failures of rural development culminated in significant unrest and peasant mobilization in the 1970s. Then-president Luis Echeverría responded to this crisis with programs and policies that sought to increase rural production and capitalize the peasant sectors. Nevertheless, Echeverría's populist solution was met with widespread protest and land revolts.

In this context of unfulfilled rural development and Mexican populism, the failure of the SEP's educational campaigns, particularly to significantly alter the lived experiences of rural Mexicans, was profound. The illiteracy rate was 50 percent higher in the countryside than among their urban dwellers, and as a result rural migrants were not

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 97–9.

¹⁷⁵ It was during this period that Mexico shifted from a predominantly rural society to an urban. In 1960, the population was 60 percent rural, in 1970 it was 40 percent rural, in 1990 it was 29 percent, and by 2000 the population was 25 percent rural. Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000*, 99 n.13.

as competitive in the limited labor market in urban centers.¹⁷⁶ In 1979, Director of the Department of Culture and Recreation (SCR) Roger Díaz de Cossío reported to Education Minister Fernando Solana that the literacy campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s had not achieved the level of reading proficiency that had been championed. In 1980 there were twenty seven million Mexicans who had not finished secondary school, of whom nine to twelve million had not attended primary school, sixteen million that were illiterate, and one million who did not speak Spanish.¹⁷⁷ The SEP also recognized that the problem of illiteracy was further complicated by the lack of opportunities for the literate to exercise their skills of reading and writing, and as a result, literacy deteriorated and many Mexicans fell into the category of functional illiteracy.¹⁷⁸

A Comic Book Cure

SEP officials viewed the literacy crisis as a broader cultural deficiency linked to the dramatic shortage of books, libraries, and bookstores. Furthermore, they noted that the culture of reading books was limited to the middle and upper classes, likely due to the high cost of books, which made them economically inaccessible to the majority of

¹⁷⁶ In 1960, literacy rates among rural populations was 74 versus 26 percent among their urban counterparts, and in 1970 the rates shifted to 61 percent in rural and 39 in urban populations. Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000*, 99, 100 n. 14.

¹⁷⁷ In 1979, Roger Díaz de Cossío reported to Education Minister Fernando Solana that the literacy campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s had not achieved the level of reading proficiency that had been previously championed. AHSEP, 9213/8 UNESCO Report – Interview with Roger Díaz de Cossío, p.4. Again, the geography of literacy favored urban areas: In 1978 and 1980, the average number of illiterate Mexicans, aged fifteen and older, was 25.8 million. The number of rural dwelling illiterate Mexicans was 60.8 percent of 25.8 million Mexicans. J. Wilkie, et al, eds., *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, 38 vols. (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1962-2002), 19:118, 20:122.

¹⁷⁸ AHSEP, 9190/26, report sent May 17, 1979, from Max Molina Fuente to Francisco Serrano, “Marco de Referencia: El Concepto de Educacion Permanente,” p.1; 9211/1 Letter from Javier Barros to Miguel Limon, November 16, 1979, p.5.

Mexicans.¹⁷⁹ In 1979, the SEP declared the promotion of reading to be one of its seven basic mandates.¹⁸⁰ SEP Minister Fernando Solana promised that the resulting initiatives would be accessible, and not simply targeted to the intellectual elite. While many believed the government ought to publish literary greats such as the works of Virgil or Plato's Dialogues, as had Vasconcelos in the 1920s, the classics would never achieve mass success in a country accustomed to the comic book.¹⁸¹ Within the SEP, the unit charged with the promotion of reading was the Department of Publications and Libraries (DGPB). The DGPB sought to correct the deficiencies of the publishing industry by undertaking new publications at affordable prices (no more than the cost of one hour of teachers' pay, 40 or 50 pesos); by creating reading rooms, libraries, *tianguises culturales*, and efficient bookstores; and by supporting teachers and library staff.¹⁸²

Citing the publishing industry's lack of consistent, educational, and quality products, the SEP effectively shifted some of the blame for illiteracy and the lack of reading habits onto publishing companies, even though the publishing industry suffered from a lack of government protection from intense competition by Spanish, Argentine, and later, US publishers.¹⁸³ This antagonism contrasts markedly with the ruling party's support and concessions for other culture industries, such as television (Televisa) and early film. To the SEP, the source of the publishing industry's problems was its

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Other objectives included: the protection and preservation of cultural heritage; the promotion of educational, artistic, anthropological, and historical research; cultural activities and recreation; physical education; and the development of sports. SEP DAHR, 9213/18 Publicaciones y Bibliotecas, 1979-1980, p.2.

¹⁸¹ "Mejor Reparto de los Bienes Culturales," *El Informador* (Guanajuato), 20 June 1980, 3 (A).

¹⁸² AHSEP-DGPB, exp. 9213/8, "Presupuesto, Programas y Metas 1978-1982," August 1978.

¹⁸³ AHSEP-SCR, exp. 9211/1, Serie: Sría Particular 1979, p. 15; Roderic Ai Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 186.

infrastructure and organization. Ironically, they viewed comic books and photonovelas as a type of “subliterature” that distracted the publishing industry from the production of quality literature and consumed a remarkable portion of the nation’s paper.¹⁸⁴ Paper production within Mexico was insufficient, of poor quality, and expensive. In 1978, Mexico produced 5,000 new titles per year, some 15 million books, with an estimated print run of about 3,000 per title. Public reading habits fell into four broad categories: 1) newspapers, journals, and comic books; 2) text books and educational books, of which free primary school text books had the greatest circulation, distributed to twenty-one million schools; 3) bestsellers often produced by companies dedicated to buying the rights to foreign works and then translating and disseminating them in the Mexican market; and 4) specialty works by provincial and small publishers with small print runs, such as Fondo de Cultura Económica and Siglo XX.¹⁸⁵

Although comic books were one of the most popular forms of reading material, the SEP’s disdain for comic books prompted considerable hesitation in using the media for educational purposes. Letters and reports from bureaucrats in the SEP’s SCR and Department of Publications and Libraries (DGPB) reflect tension over the moral nature of comic books. On one hand, by producing their own version of comic books, the SEP believed it could elevate the comic medium in literary terms, thereby suggesting that

¹⁸⁴ Photonovelas are essentially comic books that use photos instead of drawings. Text balloons are either drawn by hand or are typed. For an overview of the history of comic books in Mexico, see for example Irene Herner de Larrea, *Mitos y monitos: Historietas y fotonovelas en Mexico*, 1st ed. (Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1979); and Harold E. Hinds and Charles M. Tatum, *Not Just for Children: The Mexican Comic Book in the Late 1960s and 1970s* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1992).

¹⁸⁵ Estela Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, “Historia e Historieta Episodios Mexicanos,” in *Los intelectuales y el poder en México: Memorias de la VI Conferencia de Historiadores Mexicanos y Estadounidenses* (presented at the Conference of Mexican and United States Historians, University of Chicago: El Colegio de México, 1981), 783–4.

commercial comics were debased and a form of subliterature. Nevertheless, SEP bureaucrats still expressed concern that the ministry's image would be sullied by the unsavory reputation of comic books. In the pages of *El Nacional*, Professor Victor Hugo Bolaños Martínez wrote to express his belief that comic books held no cultural value, while another scholar called them tools and products of bourgeois ideology and imperialism, perhaps influenced by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's influential text written in 1971, *How to read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*.¹⁸⁶

Despite their negative reputation, comic books still held the promise of massive audiences. Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach observed that in the face of the nation's dismal level of reading, intellectuals had two choices: they could either lament and condemn popular reading habits, or they could analyze, study, dignify, and use them as an instrument for the diffusion of positive cultural content.¹⁸⁷ The latter is the attitude that drew a group of historians, social scientists, writers, scriptwriters, and artists together to do the difficult work of marrying history and comic books.

The most effective means of transmitting culture, according to a 1979 SEP report, was through the education system, mass media (including radio, television, print, and film), and social organizations, especially family groups.¹⁸⁸ Even though only an estimated 6 percent of Mexicans purchased and read books, as of 1980, 70 million comic

¹⁸⁶ "Poder de Penetración Desaprovechado," *El Nacional*, 1 August 1984, 1. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *Para leer al Pato Donald: Comunicación de masa y colonialismo* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1972).

¹⁸⁷ Jiménez Codinach, "Historia e Historieta Episodios Mexicanos," 784.

¹⁸⁸ AHSEP-SCR, exp. 9211/1, Serie: Sría Particular 1979, p. 5.

books and photonovelas were published monthly in Mexico.¹⁸⁹ By citing the utility of media, the SEP was doing as they had been for decades: borrowing popular culture formats for public education projects. This type of project was not a new idea, however; it had been carried out with varied success in France, Italy, Canada, and Spain.¹⁹⁰ If their objective was to foster reading habits among the general public, comic books were a wise choice. Ultimately the SEP reasoned that their treatment of weighty concerns, like national identity, would elevate the medium and prevent criticism.¹⁹¹ It is clear, however, that the SEP's overriding concern was not to rescue the medium, but to entice Mexicans to read more:

Management of the program has been carried out under strict control of the image of the Secretariat and of the need to participate effectively in popular culture, trying to reclaim on the one hand, the work of intellectual creators in this area and on the other, highlighting the importance of the positive role played by publishers, distributors and street sellers.¹⁹²

The SEP was not concerned with the creation of a comic book, rather of creating a product that would be read.¹⁹³

Díaz de Cossío contracted noted comic-book scholar Irene Herner to coordinate the newly inaugurated *Historietas, Folletos y Fotonovelas* (Comic Books, Brochures and Photonovelas) program. Herner's subsequent report argued the market was already saturated with commercial comic books, so she proposed that the SEP approach

¹⁸⁹ Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 31; cited in *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁹⁰ Jiménez Codinach, "Historia e Historieta Episodios Mexicanos," 786.

¹⁹¹ AHSEP, 9213/12 Report for Roger Cossío, Subsecretario de Cultura y Recreación de la Secretaría de Educación Pública from Lic. Gabriel Larrea Richerand, Director of Publicaciones, 1979. p.14.

¹⁹² "El manejo del programa se ha realizado bajo un estricto control de la imagen de la Secretaría y de la necesidad de participar en forma efectiva en la cultura popular, tratando de reivindicar por una parte, la labor de los creadores intelectuales en esta area y por otra, señalado la importancia de la función que pueden desempeñar en forma positiva los editores, distribuidores y vocedores." *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

commercial comic books, like the enormously popular series *Lgrimas y Risas* (Tears and Laughter), about adding an informative insert. This strategy was also more cost effective: Herner estimated the project would cost four million pesos.¹⁹⁴ Herner approached Sr. Ángel González Avelar and Guillermo de la Parra from Editorial Marín, as well as researchers at the Attorney General's Office of Consumer Relations.¹⁹⁵ Top-level scriptwriters were also contacted to craft storylines promoting national identity, as communicated by Herner and the Publications Department (DGPB).¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, ultimately the SEP ignored Herner's advice and decided instead to publish a dedicated historical series. In a 2009 interview, Herner speculated that this was because Diaz de Cossio's successor, Javier Barros, was a childhood friend of Paco Ignacio Taiblo II, and he preferred to give him the larger contract to produce a comic book series rather than work with an existing commercial series.¹⁹⁷

The economic and political context in which the comic project was pitched and produced might also shed light on the SEP's decision to produce its own comic books, even though it was the more expensive option. Both series were conceived of and executed during the *sexenio* of José López Portillo (1976-1982). López Portillo and his predecessor, Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), promoted a free-spending populism inspired by the Cárdenas era. Their programs sought to reconcile divisions generated by decades of trickle-down industrialization policies as well as by the student massacre in 1968.

¹⁹⁴ Irene Herner, interview by author, Mexico City D.F., Mexico, Nov. 19, 2009.

¹⁹⁵ AHSEP, 9213/12 Letter to Roger Cossío, Subsecretario de Cultura y Recreación de la Secretaría de Educación Pública from Lic. Gabriel Larrea Richerand, Director of Publicaciones. 1979 pg.1.

¹⁹⁶ AHSEP, 9213/12 Letter to Roger Cossío, Subsecretario de Cultura y Recreación de la Secretaría de Educación Pública from Lic. Gabriel Larrea Richerand, Director de Publicaciones. 1979 p.13-14.

¹⁹⁷ Irene Herner, interview by author, Mexico City D.F., Mexico, Nov. 19, 2009.

Nevertheless, their populist rhetoric was called into question when unarmed peasant demonstrations in rural areas were met with brutal repression.¹⁹⁸ They were also the last presidents to embrace economic nationalism as a solution to the nation's economic dependency on the United States. Oil reserves discovered in 1976 created an economic boom, and in the words of López Portillo, "constituted an 'exit' from underdevelopment and instability."¹⁹⁹ Awash in petrodollars, López Portillo set to "administering abundance," his oft-repeated mantra, with a spending spree. Oil revenues, he hoped, would enable improvement of the nation's transportation, education, employment training, social development, and agriculture.²⁰⁰ *Episodios mexicanos* and *México: historia de un pueblo*, as part of a much larger campaign to tackle literacy and reading habits, were part of this moment of optimism about the nation's future. Perhaps this optimism and sense of abundance encouraged Javier Barros to opt for the more expensive option of SEP-produced comic books.

A 1981 proposed budget for the DGPB allotted *Historietas, Folletos y Fotonovelas* 256 million pesos, a figure greater than all other budget items combined.²⁰¹ The production cost of a commercial comic book from roughly the same time period was

¹⁹⁸ William Beezley, "Conclusion: Gabardine Suits and Guayabera Shirts," in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, ed. Amelia Marie Kiddle and María Leonor Olin Muñoz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 202; Alan Knight, "Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two 'Populist' Presidents Compared," in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, ed. Amelia Marie Kiddle and María Leonor Olin Muñoz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 30. See chapter three for more on Cárdenas.

¹⁹⁹ From a speech delivered to the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) on 9 January 1980 in Mexico City, as cited in Louise E. Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes After 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 75.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁰¹ AHSEP, 9207/4. "Anteproyecto de Presupuesto," 1981. p.2.

an average of 3.2 pesos, with fluctuations due to varying printing costs.²⁰² The SEP experimented with other didactic comic books that contributed to the goal of forging a national identity but were targeted at different audiences, such as *SNIF* and *Novelas mexicanas ilustradas*. The former was targeted at a select group of readers familiar with good quality international comic books. *Novelas mexicanas ilustradas* sought a broader public audience with comic book remakes of national literature classics distributed for free at schools, such as *El periquillo sarniento*, *Clemencia*, *Los de abajo*, *Santa*, and *El agua envenenada*.²⁰³ According to Jiménez Codinach, the quality of the editions varied. For example, *El periquillo sarniento* and *Los de abajo* were very well done, while others did not lend themselves to translation into comic book.²⁰⁴

México: historia de un pueblo and *Episodios mexicanos* were the SEP's first attempts to teach national history using a comic book format. True to *Historietas*, *Folletos y Fotonovelas's* mandate, both resulting comic book series emphasized pride in a glorious shared Mexican heritage. Although exact dates of preparation and publication are difficult to determine, they were both launched in August, roughly one year apart: *México: historia de un Pueblo* in August of 1980 and *Episodios mexicanos* in August of 1981. In those short years the SEP produced two series that were stylistically quite similar (with some exceptions), but with divergent approaches to the historical narrative. The following sections explore these similarities and differences.

²⁰² Herner de Larrea, *Mitos y Monitos*, 94.

²⁰³ For more information on *Novelas mexicanas ilustradas*, see Jacqueline Covo-Maurice, "Lecturas para el pueblo: novelas mexicanas ilustradas," in *Prensa, impresos, lectura en el mundo hispánico contemporáneo: homenaje à Jean-François Botrel*, ed. Jean-Michel Desvois (Pessac Cedex, France: PILAR, 2005), 239–249.

²⁰⁴ Jiménez Codinach, "Historia e Historieta Episodios Mexicanos," 785.

The Visual Art of Narrating National History

In deciding to create its own comic book series, the SEP faced the challenge of learning to use a new media form with very specific artistic conventions. These required multiple panels, limited space for text, and plotlines propelled by the promise “to be continued.” In order to navigate this learning curve, they drew on the experience of established comic book artists and writers. Nevertheless, while the resulting series conformed artistically to comic book conventions, *México: historia de un pueblo* was an expensive project. With the subsequent series, *Episodios*, the SEP attempted to offer a more affordable alternative, more in keeping with the business model of the comics industry. In order to understand the implications of how audiences and bureaucrats might have read the two series, the following sections compare three aspects: their production and physical appearance, their coordinators, and their representations of the conquest narrative. The latter two sections, on the authors and their narratives, reconsider the viability of an “official history” by situating the series’ coordinators – Taibo II and Jiménez Codinach – within a long and, at times, intimate relationship between the state and intellectuals.

México: historia de un pueblo aimed to “offer reading that [was] accessible, instructive, mild and capable of defining a national identity among children, young people and new readers of the country.”²⁰⁵ The first two volumes of the series were produced for the high cost of 9.5 million pesos. Just a year later SEP reports claimed it

²⁰⁵ Miriam Martínez Maza, Jorge Tlatelpa Meléndez, and David Zamora Díaz, *Las historietas en las colecciones de las bibliotecas públicas mexicanas* (Mexico City: Colegio Nacional de Bibliotecarios y Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, 1993), 105.

had penetrated the market.²⁰⁶ The series comprised twenty volumes that narrated the nation's major historical events, from the Spanish Conquest to the close of the Mexican Revolution, which it dated with the signing of the Plan de Agua Prieta in 1920. Volumes could be purchased at supermarkets and newspaper stands for a relatively expensive sixty pesos, making them accessible primarily to urban, middle-class consumers.²⁰⁷

Historia de un pueblo's high price tag reflects higher production values, which are evident in both physical appearance and contents. For example, though it measures almost the same dimensions as *Episodios*, volumes are considerably longer and their eighty pages are printed on thicker, higher-quality paper.²⁰⁸ This extra density also necessitated a different, more expensive glue binding. *Episodios*' shorter volumes (thirty-two and then forty-eight pages), printed on newsprint, in contrast, were bound simply with staples. The divergent physical construction and price tags of the two series potentially attracted different readers and/or influenced how those readers interacted with each comic book. Though longer than other comics of the period, *Episodios* is thin enough to be quite portable. It could be folded into a rear pants-pocket, and its simple staple binding could withstand the wear and tear of loans to multiple readers, similar to commercial comics. *México: historia de un pueblo*, in contrast, with its better quality

²⁰⁶ AHSEP-DGPB, 9229/8 Anteproyecto de Presupuesto por Programas: Producción Editorial Dirección General de Publicaciones y Bibliotecas: Para Proyectos que no son de Atención a la Demanda Educativa, 1981, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Marketing in supermarkets was noted by Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach in a personal interview. It is not evident from the interview whether *México: historia de un pueblo* was available for purchase elsewhere. Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, interview by author, digital recording, Mexico City D.F., Mexico, July 20, 2005. Vanderwood, in contrast, argues that the comics were sold inexpensively at newsstands. Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government*, 320.

²⁰⁸ Volumes of both series measure roughly 21.5 cm x 13.5 cm, about the size of Mexico's most popular comic book, *Káliman*.

paper and more costly, glued binding, was less flexible and more fragile, perhaps encouraging readers to treat its volumes more as collectibles than as everyday reading.

The cover and initial pages of *Historia de un pueblo* also reflect the higher quality of the series. The inside-cover offers a list of the titles of all twenty volumes, and the first page appears much the same as that of a traditional textbook title page. Following this page, the names of the collaborators, directors, artists and advisors are listed. A two-page historical summary of the topic provides readers with the historical and political background of the events depicted in the volume. Each volume concludes with a glossary, bibliography, publishing information page, and a preview of the next volume. Finally each back cover offers a bonus feature: *Trajes mexicanos* (Mexican dress), a colored portrait of typical Mexican figures and styles from different eras that recalled the costumbrista (local color) depictions of nineteenth-century artists. Each volume features a different typical figure's dress, including a woman of the middle class circa 1913, a Brigadier General from 1862, a well-dressed man from the Porfiriato, a *soldadera* circa 1910, and a mestizo from the beginning of the nineteenth century. As was the case for the historical telenovelas, getting the costumes right signaled historical authority.

The first issue of *Episodios mexicanos* hit newsstands in late August 1981. The second issue was offered free with purchase of the first, for three pesos. The cost of Mexico's most popular comic book, *Káliman*, was two pesos, albeit in 1977.²⁰⁹ Most issues of *Episodios* are forty-eight pages long, but there are a few of the early issues that are only thirty-two pages long. The size and layout of *Episodios* are similar to humor

²⁰⁹ This figure was taken from *Káliman* 18 February 1977. Herner in "La Cultura de la Imagen." Parte III. *Gaceta UNAM*, 12.



Figure 11
“Los Hombres del Alba: Los magonistas y el fin del Porfiriato.” No. 14. *México: historia de un pueblo*. Back cover.

comics of the same time period. The comic books were priced at three pesos until issue forty-five, when the price was increased to seven pesos. To put this into economic context, during the month of November 1981, the approximate time of this price increase, the Mexican peso was valued at an average of 25.75 to the American dollar.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ This average is taken from the Foreign Exchange figures from the *New York Times* for three dates, which roughly correspond to the release dates of issues 45 to 47 – November 17, 24, and 30. *New York*

Episodios' more accessible price is evident in its aesthetic differences: it has fewer pages, the covers are in color, but the newsprint interiors are monochromatic and simply staple-bound. Nevertheless, in contrast to popular commercial comic books which typically line the inside covers with advertisements, *Episodios mexicanos* provides a short explanation of the series, lists its publication information, and offers a list of further readings on the historical event addressed in the volume.²¹¹ The inside back cover offers the first page of the following episode, while the back cover page features an advertisement for another comic book series, *Novelas mexicanas*.

Five illustrators collaborated on *Historia de un pueblo*, several of whom were respected comic artists, including Sealtiel Alatríste, Ángel Mora, and Antonio Cardoso.²¹² Mora formerly illustrated the well-known comic *Chanoc*, and more recently under the pen name Garmaleón he has illustrated for the popular, trashy *Almas Perversas*.²¹³ Cardoso is a noted muralist and worked on the enormously popular *Torbellino* and contributed to *El Payo*.²¹⁴ In contrast to *Historia de un pueblo's* volumes, which are the product of individual illustrators, each *Episodios* volume is the result of collaboration

Times, 18 November 1981, 16(D); *New York Times*, 25 November 1981, 11(D); *New York Times*, 1 Dec 1981, 18 (D).

²¹¹ Hinds and Tatum cite a 1980 study which found an average of 2.75 ads per comic book. Of these ads, though, eighty percent were in-house ads for products or contests sponsored by the company. Hinds and Tatum, *Not Just for Children*, 12. This is also based on my own small sample of Mexican comic books from the eighties and nineties.

²¹² This is based on information garnered from Juan Manuel Aurrecochea and Armando Bartra, *Puros Cuentos: La historia de la historieta en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1988), 327; Daniel K. Raeburn, *Historietas Perversas: México's Perverse "Little Histories"*, vol. 4, *The Imp* (Chicago: Daniel K. Raeburn, 2002); Julia Emilia Palacios, "Torbellino: Toward an Alternative Comic Book," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 5 (1986): 188.

²¹³ See Aurrecochea and Bartra, *Puros Cuentos*, 327 for information on *Chanoc*; There are a number of examples of *Almas Perversas* in *The Imp*.

²¹⁴ *Torbellino* was published from 1969 to 1975. Julia Emilia Palacios, "Torbellino: Toward an Alternative Comic Book," 186. For further information on *El Payo* see George A. Parent, "Focalization: A Narratological Approach to Mexican Illustrated Stories," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 1 (1982): 204.

between two artists. Its sixty-eight volumes were created by twelve artists; perhaps the best known is commercial illustrator Sixto Valencia, the creator of *Memín Pinguin*.²¹⁵ Interestingly, four of *Historia de un pueblo*'s five artists also worked on *Episodios*.

Another difference in quality between the two series is their use of color. *México: historia de un pueblo* features multi-colored covers and interiors. Volumes vary in their use of color; some employ only muted or only vibrant colors, others mix bright and muted palates.



Figure 12
“Presagios: La llegada de los españoles a las costas de México.” *México: historia de un pueblo*. Vol. 1. Front cover and p. 73.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Three of the illustrators' names are illegible (Volumes 49, 62, 65).

²¹⁶ SEP – DGPE, “Presagios: La llegada de los españoles a las costas de México,” *México: Historia de un pueblo*, vol. 1 ((Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen and Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1980), front cover, 73.

With the exception of humor comics, most commercial comics do not employ multicolor interiors because of the sheer expense.²¹⁷ Similarly, *Episodios*' covers appear in color, while its newsprint interiors are printed simply in black ink (see figure 13).

The most distinctive feature of the drawing style of *Episodios mexicanos* is the consistent use of broken blank lines and cross-hatching. This detailing adds a measure of depth to objects and characters. As a stylistic device it aided in visual interest while compensating for the lack of color, and it also drew on nationalistic artistic conventions. Some pages appear similar to a woodcut print or the engravings of José Guadalupe



Figure 13
“El Encuentro.” *Episodios mexicanos*. Vo. 6. Front cover, p. 38-39.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Hinds and Tatum, *Not Just for Children*, 11.

²¹⁸ SEP- DGPB, “El Encuentro,” *Episodios mexicanos*, vol. 6. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1981), front cover, 38-39.

Posada, whose broadsheets and engravings of *Calaveras* from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a profound effect on successive generations of Mexican artists, particularly revolutionary artists and their nationalist works.²¹⁹ By drawing on these styles *Episodios* establishes a link between the history in its pages and a Mexican popular past. This style is also particularly effective in communicating the emotions and expressions of character, particularly facial expressions. Throughout the series the techniques of cross-hatching and broken lines create a palpable sense of urgency, anguish, strife, and struggle. Some solid black is used for dramatic effect, particularly for silhouetting, a technique which is also effective for expressing foreboding and expectancy.

For the most part, the characters in *Episodios mexicanos* are portrayed in a relatively realistic style. The artists of *Episodios* used little iconic graphic abstraction, except for cartoon conventions such as motion and sound lines and word balloons and diminishing thought bubbles. In the early issues, focused on the conquest period, there are a number of items that appear as pre-Colonial symbols and artifacts; some are worn as headdresses or adornment and others are decorative or ceremonial objects. It is evident that the artists who contributed to *Episodios* took care to include small details such as baskets, jugs, distinctive decorations, Aztec artifacts, clothing details, and carvings to situate the narrative in a specific time and place in Mexican history. Aztec palaces and settlements and Spanish buildings are also attentively drawn in detail. Indeed, one page features a close-up, finely detailed sketch of a burning candle, which

²¹⁹ Patrick Frank, *Posada's Broadsheets* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 5.

boldly underscores the inevitable passage of time. Again, small details signal fidelity to historical accuracy.

The drawing style employed by the artists who created *México: historia de un pueblo* is remarkably similar to the style of *Episodios mexicanos*, as well as many other commercial series. Evidently, the historical series drew on established media conventions as well as artistic expertise. People, objects, and scenery appear in realistic form, and the artists have also carefully cultivated a sense of place by bringing semi-detailed background objects into focus. There is, however, a greater variety of thick and thin lines used in *México: historia de un pueblo*.

The most distinctive stylistic difference between the two series is *México: historia de un pueblo*'s use of color. While the illustrators of this series employ cross-hatching and broken lines, they do not use them to the same extent as the other series because they are able to illustrate depth and sculpt figures, clothing and scenery with shades of color. The use of color varies between the volumes. In some volumes the color appears flat and uniform, and in others there is a substantial degree of shading and dimension in the use of color. In most volumes the color has the appearance of a watercolor painting, the result of the *aguada* half-tone technique. However, some issues appear sloppier than others, while in others, the color is carefully confined within the black lines.²²⁰

In many issues color is used effectively to highlight details such as building design, clothing embellishments, and distinctive jewelry.²²¹ However, color often detracts from the specificity of many scenes. Many entire scenes – people, scenery, and

²²⁰ This is interesting considering that where the colorist is noted, it is always the same person.

²²¹ See McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 188–9 for discussion of principles of color.

objects – are painted in monochrome or two-toned color. The effect is to animate particular characters and scenes and push others into the background. Drawn to nothing in particular, the eye is tempted to glaze over these scenes, which suggests that these people are of little importance.

Color also nominally underscores racial distinctions between Indigenous peoples, the Spanish, and later the mulatto characters. For the most part, color is ineffectual in this regard because shades and colors were inconsistently printed and often all characters appear in the same color. In *Episodios mexicanos* the illustrations are rendered in black and white, so the artists could not rely on skin color to signal racial difference. Instead, both series employ dress, adornment, hair, facial features, and physical build to demarcate race, gender, and class. It should be noted that generally, neither men nor women – Indigenous, mestizo, Spanish, nor mulatto – are depicted in the sexually revealing manner characteristic of commercial comic books of the time and of the present. There are remarkably few plunging necklines and no bare “bubble butts.”²²² This is striking given the prominence of sexualized images of natives, particularly of women, that were circulating in the titillating pages of trashier comic books. Evidently, this is where the didactic comics departed from the conventions of commercial comics.

Few of the artists’ work differ radically from the others. Most of the volumes leave very little blank space between the panels. Few of the artists employ a strictly same-size panel layout. Most illustrate using a variety of panel types. Some groups of images bleed into others and off the page without panel borders and many feature one large focal scene with other smaller ones overlaid. The effect of those that bleed off the

²²² Edgar Clément in Raeburn, *Historietas Perversas*, 79.

page is to situate the reader in a realistic world, one bound perhaps temporally to the past, but not bound only to the pages of a comic book. The commercial comics surveyed, in contrast, primarily standardize their layout to one or two panels per page. Some pages varied the horizontal and vertical organization of the two panels, but none were as diversified as the pages of *Episodios mexicanos*, perhaps another artistic decision aimed at adding interest without the use of color. Because there are few bordered panels and one scene often bleeds into the next, the order the text ought to be read in is not immediately clear to an untrained eye.

Amidst the busy pages of *Episodios mexicanos* and *México: historia de un pueblo*, readers' eyes are drawn to many ranges and perspectives. The two series differ little from each other, and in comparison to commercial comic books, in their use of perspective and dimension. Both feature an array of close-up images which provide insight into a particular character, mid-range shots which allow for the interaction of a number of characters with a moderately sophisticated backdrop, and finally, long-distance scenes which offer dramatic effect and instill a sense of place. Though most pages are quite busy, some artists have depicted one main scene to serve as a point of focus.

In order to communicate this vast history, both series employ the conventional methods of textual representation: speech and thought balloons. The different balloons fulfill a number of functions: they grant the reader access to dialogue between characters, grant them access to private thoughts, and position readers within the setting. Balloons of the latter sort serve as a kind of narrator. They guide readers through the plot

and narrative, and express information that allows readers to make sense of the images. Narrative text balloons and insertions in *México: historia de un pueblo* serve as a third-person backdrop to a rich dialogue between characters. There is a drawback, however. The dialogue becomes so weighty, even stiff and artificial at times, that it makes for arduous reading. In *Episodios* the dialogue, as with the narrative in general, is less dense. The pace of the plot is far quicker and moves far more fluidly. Nevertheless, compared to their commercial counterparts, images in both historical series anchor very textually dense narratives, which is not surprising given that they undertake to tell almost five hundred years of Mexican history.

Differences in the production values and physical appearance of the two series are significant because of how they likely influenced who could read the series; with its more expensive price tag and less durable binding, *Historia de un pueblo* might appeal to different readers than *Episodios mexicanos*. Furthermore, as novice comic book producers the SEP faced the learning curve of using a new medium to teach Mexican history and found that it could be a costly endeavor. In order to meet the stylistic demands of the genre (and its potential readers), the SEP contracted various intellectuals to oversee historical coherence of both series.

Intellectuals, the State, and Challenges to “Official History”

Although the creators of the two series had divergent views of history, both were “contracted” intellectuals, sharing a common and conflicted relationship with the state.²²³ Paco Ignacio Taibo II, a well-known journalist, activist, and fiction writer, had participated in the 1968 student protest movement and infused a Marxist vision to *México: historia de un pueblo*. Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, by contrast, had earned a Ph.D. in history at the University of London and brought an apolitical, empiricist view of history to *Episodios mexicanos*. Generally speaking, the “contracted” relationship has been mutually beneficial; intellectuals have provided a measure of legitimacy to the state by helping to craft historical narratives, in return for employment opportunities and support for their artistic works. But the collaboration has also brought the risk of compromising their intellectual stature, particularly in the case of authoritarian regimes. The following section places Taibo II and Jiménez Codinach within the context of this longstanding relationship between the state and intellectuals in order to suggest how such collaboration might challenge the state’s claim to an official historical narrative, particularly as it sought to reach out to intellectuals during the populist regimes of Luís Echeverría and José López Portillo.

In Mexico, there is a long tradition of intellectuals involved in government, particularly in federal bureaucratic positions in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (SRE)

²²³ Camp defines intellectuals as “leaders who create, evaluate, analyze, or present transcendental symbols, values, ideas, and interpretations on a regular basis to a broad audience.” Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexico’s Mandarins: Crafting a Power Elite for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 7 n8.

and Public Education, as well as in political posts such as governors, party leaders, and cabinet ministers. Many intellectuals have also cultivated advantageous ties to the government through schooling, and politicians often identify prominent intellectuals as having been influential as their professors.²²⁴ The National Preparatory School (EPN) and the National University (UNAM) provided a common experience for intellectuals and politicians.²²⁵ The EPN in the 1940s and 1950s, for example, emphasized three strands of *mexicanidad*, which subsequently appeared in public school textbooks: anti-Americanism, anti-clericalism, and anti-capitalism. Given this early ideological formation, it is not surprising that Marxism became highly influential, particularly in the discipline of economics.²²⁶

Some intellectuals actually fought in the Revolution of 1910, and large numbers later joined revolutionary governments. Later, as in other Latin American nations, intellectuals took up the project of persuading the government and the middle and upper classes to embrace radical social reform alongside economic development, in some cases drawing on the Marxist tradition of structural changes altering the present.²²⁷ Intellectuals have also played a fundamental role in recuperating the historical narrative and reconsidering it in the context of the changing arena of popular politics.

Politicians likewise benefited from collaboration with intellectuals, as it provided a measure of legitimacy to their policies, particularly after the 1968 massacre of student protesters at Tlatelolco. For a decade before the two comic series were created, under the

²²⁴ Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Transformation*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 149–50.

²²⁵ Camp, *Mexico's Mandarins*, 127.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

²²⁷ Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 118, 61.

administrations of both Luis Echeverría Álvarez and José López Portillo, the nation had been disillusioned by the violence of the student massacre and the economic crises of the 1970s. Echeverría attempted to coopt critics by offering them influential positions within his administration. López Portillo also made overtures to intellectuals by increasing their access to resources during his “golden age of state expansion” bankrolled by oil reserves.²²⁸ He was acutely aware of the continued popular influence of the left, which included many intellectuals. Perhaps this insight was influenced by his own ambitions and prior career as an “intellectual-cum-politician, a Johnny-come-lately to public life.”²²⁹ Prior to his presidency, López Portillo had improvised theories on the history and politics of Mexico, and once in power, he assigned to economist and politician Jesús Reyes Heróles the “hard work of government.”²³⁰

For their part, intellectuals’ work with the government was often financially and politically motivated. A lack of employment opportunities for intellectuals in Mexico has encouraged work for the government, meaning that it has not been necessary for the state to formally incorporate intellectuals into institutional relationships since the majority have worked with the state since the 1920s, if not earlier.²³¹ The following comment by Mexican cartoonist Abel Quezada offers a telling reflection of the economic realities faced by scholars: “in Mexico, there are very few means for an intellectual to make a living. It is almost impossible to survive on the basis of his [sic] own intellectual work,

²²⁸ Roderic Ai Camp, “The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution,” in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. William Beezley and Michael Meyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 612.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, trans. Hank Heifetz (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 756–7.

²³¹ Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 149.

since books sell so little. It is a physical necessity to choose public office because it the shortest and easiest route to live.”²³² For others, collaboration with the government offered the opportunity to shape public policy and to fulfill the political and public responsibilities expected of intellectuals.²³³ Octavio Paz, for example, has argued that “In Mexico, the intellectual’s mission is political action,” to serve as “the critical conscience of its people.”²³⁴ More critically, anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz argues that intellectuals and state bureaucrats “read the will of the people,” though their interpretation is based on the silence or incoherence of popular expression. The postrevolutionary state invested in the intelligentsia, whose role was to function as “interpassive” agents who would fuse various interests into a single “public opinion.” Intellectual interpretation, in particular, “is meant to be the symptom of the expected reaction of a public that is unable to articulate the views in the public sphere.”²³⁵

According to the political scientist Roderic Ai Camp, in his prosopographical study *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, “the majority of Mexico’s prominent intellectuals have held posts in the government (53 percent).”²³⁶ More particularly, in examining the public and academic career levels of members of the National College from 1943 to 1976, he found that the SEP was a primary employer of

²³² Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 213.

²³³ This political and public function has been widely noted by scholars. See for example, Jean Franco, “What’s Left of the Intelligentsia? The Uncertain Future of the Printed Word,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 28, no. 2 (October 1994): 16+; Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 32; Carl Boggs, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pg. 2 in Edward J. McCaughan, *Reinventing Revolution: The Renovation of Left Discourse in Cuba and Mexico* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 19.

²³⁴ Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 65.

²³⁵ Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 208.

²³⁶ Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 23.

those intellectuals engaged in political life; 36 percent of intellectuals who pursued public careers did so in the SEP, excluding teaching and university administration positions.²³⁷ Nevertheless, ideological affiliation did have some bearing on intellectual participation in government; according to Camp, for example, only 37 per cent of Marxist intellectuals pursued public careers, and those who did were concentrated in five areas: public officials, educators and professors, writers and poets, artists, and journalists.²³⁸ The media has played an essential role in the communication of intellectual activity and the reinforcement of its prestige. In Mexico, intellectuals have contributed to newspapers, magazines, radio, and, as we will see in chapter 3, to television. Though intellectuals since the Revolution have employed cartoons to provide political and social commentary, they have largely ignored the potential of comic books, with the notable exception of Abel Quezado.²³⁹

State employment was not simply an innocuous and apolitical arrangement between the government and intellectuals. Reflecting on this relationship in the context of *Episodios mexicanos*, Cornelia Butler Flores argues: “the cooptive mechanisms of the Mexican state are such that critical intellectuals can be hired to convert their criticism into projects within the comfortable state-private enterprise nexus that is modern Mexico.”²⁴⁰ However, the state’s hegemony was certainly not absolute. While the government granted a seal of approval to literary and cultural production, writers, artists,

²³⁷ Ibid., 151-3. Though it lists none of the historians, artists, scriptwriters, or coordinators of *México: historia de un pueblo* or *Episodios mexicanos*, it does suggest that members, if engaged in a public career, were frequently employed by the SEP; Ibid., 24.

²³⁸ Ibid., 114, 117.

²³⁹ Ibid., 185-6.

²⁴⁰ Cornelia Butler Flora, “Roasting Donald Duck: Alternative Comics and Photonovels in Latin America,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 18, no. 1 (Summer 1984): 170.

and intellectuals were not uniformly official spokespeople of government culture.²⁴¹ Noted sociologist Roger Bartra contends that “There is a close relationship between the folkways of government offices and the form the official reconstruction of Mexican culture takes: together they can be seen as the practice of a Mexican Office.”²⁴² Though Bartra’s “oficio mexicano” (Mexican Office) packages and promulgates an “official history,” the following discussion reveals that neither the “Office” nor its culture is monolithic. This idea is echoed by Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, another Mexican anthropologist, who also asserts the variegated nature of intellectuals within the state particularly in their role as mediators within regional cultures.²⁴³ Indeed, the two series reflect the aspirations and objectives of their coordinators more than they reflect a SEP-sanctioned official historical narrative.

Rival Historical Interpretations

The very different approaches to history taken by Taibo II and Jiménez Codinach are evident from the very first pages of the series, in their representations of the Spanish conquest. This section considers the training and likely ideological positioning of the two coordinators, and then examines their rival interpretations of the conquest. Both series were completed just a decade before the quincentennial of Columbus’ famous voyage, during a time in which the political and cultural significance of the conquest was hotly

²⁴¹ Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 213.

²⁴² Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink, and Culture*, 4.

²⁴³ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 248–249.

contested and following a period of widespread engagement with dependency theory in Mexico and across Latin America. Dependency theory, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a critique of modernization, identified continuity between the plunder of the Spanish conquest, and the unequal economic relationship that continued to plague Latin America through the twentieth century.

Paco Ignacio Taibo II, coordinator of *México: historia de un pueblo*, aptly fits Paz's characterization of an intellectual advocating for political change. He followed in the literary tradition of his father, Taibo I, a prominent Basque refugee from the fascist state of General Francisco Franco. Taibo II is a pioneer of the *neopolicialo* fictional genre, stories typified by the "characterization of the police as a force of chaos, of a barbarous system ready to suffocate its citizens in violence."²⁴⁴ Taibo II's best-known fictional character is Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, an incorruptible "pulp detective noir" who battles against a system in which state institutions are criminal. The series examines the failure of the Mexican Revolution and state that claimed itself heir.

Several of Taibo II's other literary projects reflect not only his political commitment, but also demonstrate his belief in the political nature of history. These include a biography of Ché Guevara, a twenty-year retrospective of the union movement, a narrative history of the Bolshevik movement in Mexico in the early 1920s, a novel co-authored with renowned leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, Subcomandante Marcos, another novel about the student massacre in 1968, and several other works that feature revolutionaries and anarchists. Furthermore, he taught history

²⁴⁴ Persephone Braham, *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons: Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 66.

and anthropology at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and in 2004 he made the following statement about the political nature of history: “A people without history is easier to control . . . for this reason, we must tell histories. But also to tell history, and I am convinced more and more of sentimental education than of formal education.”²⁴⁵ As a writer, Taibo II’s audience was largely the literate and educated classes, and perhaps for him, comic books offered a form of “sentimental education” that could expand his readership by communicating with the masses of illiterate and semi-literate Mexicans who preferred comic books to scholarship or even pulp fiction. But in fitting with a vanguardist approach – that an intellectual elite would inspire the proletarian revolution – he produced a series that was significantly less accessible in both cost and physical format than its subsequent counterpart.

Although he lacked professional historical credentials, Taibo II organized an editorial committee of some of the leading leftist academics in Mexico. The most notable figure was Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, a leading social anthropologist and former director of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). Bonfil Batalla wrote an influential *indigenista* manifesto, *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, which argued the thesis that the true soul of Mexico lay in the pre-Hispanic civilization and that western influences have served only to submerge this authentic heritage. Two other prominent consultants for the series were Armando Bartra and Juan Manuel Aurrecochea, leading scholars of Mexican comic books and co-authors of the influential

²⁴⁵ David Brooks and Jim Cason, “Reconstruir el imaginario colectivo, meta constante: Paco Ignacio Taibo, *La Jornada*, 14 Nov. 2004, México D.F., <<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/11/14/044f2con.php?origen=>>.

study, *Puros cuentos: historia de la historieta en Mexico*, which followed the Frankfurt School critical theory approach to cultural analysis.

Rooted in Marxist critiques of imperialism, the *dependista* view of Mexico's past and present was still popular in the late 1970s, and may have influenced Taibo II's interpretation of the conquest. *Dependistas* viewed the economic relationship between colonial empires, and later Western nations, and Latin America as one of exploitation, wherein the industrial "core" siphoned profits in the form of raw materials from a dependent "periphery," thereby locking Latin American countries into a state of chronic underdevelopment. *Dependista* scholars argued that the export orientation and struggle for economic progress of Latin American economies was a product of Spanish colonialism.²⁴⁶ Works such as Stanley and Barbara Stein's influential *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (1970) suggested that had Latin America been colonized by a different empire, their economic development would have unfolded very differently. The demonization of the Spanish, characteristic of this strain of dependency theory, parallels *Historia de un pueblo's* representation of the conquest.

One of the most outspoken critics of *México: historia de un pueblo's* representation of Mexican history was Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach. In fact, it was her strident criticism that led her to the role of coordinator of *Episodios Mexicanos*. In contrast to Taibo II, Jiménez Codinach was an academically trained historian; she

²⁴⁶ Tulio Halperin-Donghi, "'Dependency Theory' and Latin American Historiography," *Latin American Research Review* 17, no. 1 (1982): 115–130; J. Stanley and Barbara H. Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); James D. Cockcroft, André Gunder Frank, and Dale L. Johnson, *Dependence and Underdevelopment: Latin America's Political Economy* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1972).

obtained her doctoral degree in History from the University of London, authored *La Gran Bretaña y la Independencia de México, 1808-1821* and *El Mundo Hispánico 1492-1898: Una guía de manuscritos españoles en colecciones de Estados Unidos de América, Guam y Puerto Rico*, as well as several journal articles. She subsequently worked for the Library of Congress and as a researcher and curator for the Coordinación Nacional de Exposiciones of the National Institute of Anthropology and History.²⁴⁷

Debate over *México: historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios mexicanos* turned on the question of historical professionalism. A number of notable Mexican historians, including Sergio Carrillo and Jaime Labastida, denounced *México: historia de un pueblo* for presenting an inaccurate depiction of the nation's history. Jiménez Codinach argued that *Historia de un pueblo* offered readers a questionable form of "pseudohistory."²⁴⁸ On December 17, 1980, the SEP's DGPB formed a publishing committee, comprised of the director and subdirectors of the DGPB and four other people, including Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, to oversee the creative process of the new series. As coordinator, Jiménez Codinach assembled an interdisciplinary team of collaborators, including a historical advisory committee and three area coordinators, to facilitate the work of historians with specializations in each area, as well as consultants on social psychology, cultural anthropology, communications and popular vernaculars, and comic book technique and graphics. Several high profile historians participated, including Josefina Zoraida Vázquez Vera, Lorenzo Meyer, Luis González y González, Enrique Krauze, and

²⁴⁷ Estado de Guanajuato, "Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach," *Bicentenario de La Independencia de México*, 2010, <http://www.rppc.guanajuato.gob.mx/bicentenario/files/GuadalupeJimenez.pdf>.

²⁴⁸ Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, interview by author, July 20, 2005.

Alicia Hernández.²⁴⁹ They were not only well-known, with degrees from leading international institutions such as Harvard and the Sorbonne, and Mexico’s most prestigious institutions such as the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and Colegio de México, several of them went on to teach at these institutions as well. As a result, they espoused the highest professional standards of the period. Perhaps to offer a measure of political balance or to provide insight into comic books, Armando Bartra, a noted Marxist anthropologist of peasant and popular movements, as well as a leading scholar of the history of comic books in Mexico, also participated.²⁵⁰ According to Jiménez, she personally edited each script to remove any historical inaccuracies, echoing the traditional approach to tell history as it actually happened.²⁵¹

Stemming directly from their critique of *México: historia de un pueblo*, which suggested there was a singular “pueblo mexicano” or Mexican nation, the team choose to emphasize the “many Mexicos,” or the diversity of traditions and cultures. Furthermore, a comprehensive history of Mexico was simply not possible given the parameters of the genre and the project. Instead, the team chose an episodic emphasis, reflected in the series’ title, which would stress interesting and significant moments in the history of the nation. They also identified a series of objectives that would guide the project: to reflect the contemporary debates within the discipline of history; to expand the cultural landscape of readers; to de-mythologize history, which had been rewritten to serve

²⁴⁹ These names are listed on the interior back cover of all volumes of *Episodios mexicanos*.

²⁵⁰ For more on comic books by Armando Bartra, see Aurrecochea and Bartra, *Puros Cuentos*; Armando Bartra, “The Seduction of the Innocents: The First Tumultuous Moments of Mass Literacy in Postrevolutionary Mexico.”

²⁵¹ Interview with Jiménez Codinach; Nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke argued that it was the role of the historian to write history “as it actually happened” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Leopold von Ranke, *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations (1494 to 1514)* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1887).

political means for decades; to promote national values, instead of translating foreign mentalities and traditions to Mexican culture, getting the reader to identify with their origins; and to humanize history – to present protagonists (real and fictitious) as human beings, with doubts, successes and failures, weaknesses and strengths. By placing the characters within their historical contexts, the goal was to challenge the notion that they were simply destined to greatness.²⁵² The team sought to meet these goals, while offering an accessible product.

The divergences between professional historian Jiménez Codinach and Marxist activist and writer Taibo are reflected on the pages of the two series. An analysis of their representations of the Spanish conquest illustrates that while both stories anchor their historical narratives in melodramatic love stories, they present the Spanish and indigenous Mexicans in distinctly different ways, particularly as they turn on the controversial question of the relationship between the conquistador Cortés and his indigenous mistress and translator, Malinche. She has formed a pivotal role in understandings of the Spanish conquests, and indeed, of contemporary Mexican identity: “From the time those first messengers reached Moctezuma down to the very present, she [La Malinche] has remained a site for the ongoing negotiation of meaning and self understanding in Mexican America.”²⁵³

Malinche and Cortés are crucial to interpretations of the Conquest and the origins of the Mexican nation, particularly the dependency theory view which holds the Spaniards as the exploiters of the indigenous civilization and Malinche as the

²⁵² Estela Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach, “Historia e historieta episodios mexicanos,” 788.

²⁵³ Mary Louise Pratt, “‘Yo soy la Malinche’: Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism,” *Callaloo* 16, no. 4 (1993): 859.

representative of a *comprador* class that betrays the nation for her own benefit. Such a teleological approach was just what the professionals of the El Colegio school were trying to counter.

Both series employed romantic plot lines to evoke empathy for particular characters. *Historia de un pueblo* invites readers to relate to the viewpoint of the



Figure 14
“La batalla por México-Tenochtitlan.” *México: historia de un pueblo*. Vol. 3, p. 62²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ SEP – DGPE, “El Sol Vencido: La batalla por México-Tenochtitlan,” *México: Historia de un pueblo*, vol. 3 ((Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen and Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1980), 62.

Mexicas by highlighting the intimate relationships of fictional characters Moyana and Mazatzin. Moyana is also involved with Totocani, another important Mexica, who later turns out to be Mazatzin's brother. The nature of Moyana's relationship with Totocani is not evident, but it is clear that Totocani is quite upset when he learns of Moyana's marriage to his brother while he is off fighting the Spanish.²⁵⁵ The couple is pictured planning their wedding, getting married, having a son, and conversing with each other. They are pictured in figure 14 preparing to flee from the Spanish. The death of these two lovers at the hands of the Spanish emphasizes the destruction and injustice inflicted by the Spanish. The grandmother is left to care for the couple's young son when they die, and looking over the destruction of the Mexica's land and lives, she tells him, "your inheritance is a network full of holes."²⁵⁶ The grandmother subsequently dies of sadness, and the tale closes with missionaries carrying off the young boy. Responsibility for this tragic inheritance "full of holes" is understood to lie squarely at the feet of the Spanish, thereby positioning the Spanish as the villains of the tale and history.

Episodios mexicanos also employs a romantic plot line as a device to evoke empathy, but this series also encourages readers to relate to the viewpoint of the Spanish. In *Episodios*, readers follow the progression of a relationship between Nuño de Herrera, a member of Cortés' mission, and Citlalli, an Ocuiteca woman who is given to Cortés by the Mexicas and then in turn handed over to Nuño as a concubine.

The relationship spans their initial encounter, brief conversations, and having a child together. Nuño appears quite jubilant about the new arrival: he names him Diego,

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 8.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 78.



Figure 15
“El Encuentro.” *Episodios Mexicanos*. Vol. 6. p. 48.²⁵⁷

after his own father back in Spain and tells Diego he will grow up to be a brave man.²⁵⁸

The narrative is unclear about Citlalli’s feelings for Nuño. When a Mexica soldier castigates her for bearing a child with a Spanish man, “the enemies of our gods,” Citlalli

²⁵⁷ SEP- DGPB, “El Encuentro,” *Episodios mexicanos*, vol. 6. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1981), front cover, 48.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

pointedly responds that at least the Spanish do not intend to sacrifice her.²⁵⁹ Following this pragmatic retort, one that could have come straight from the mouth of Malinche, Citlalli runs off to reunite with the Spanish.

In *Episodios mexicanos*, Nuño plays a more central role in the plot than Cortés himself. Nuño is the type of fictional character added for dramatic effect, and he provides a narrative thread, along with his kin, for several volumes. In those focused on the early conquest, the focus on Nuño and his relationships humanizes the Spanish in way that was unlikely to be evoked through the character of Cortés. The result is a more favorable view of the Spanish than is offered by *México: historia de un pueblo*. Take for example, Nuño's friendship with fellow soldier, Francisco. Starting on the second page of "El Encuentro," readers meet pals Nuño and Francisco, whose friendship provides an anchor for the tale of the Aztec and Spanish encounter. Francisco earnestly tells Nuño, and readers by extension, that he is from a *campesino* family and that he cannot bear returning to Spain to work the land, still with nothing to eat.²⁶⁰ We follow the two as they explore the encampment and meet the Indigenous people who have allied with them and later as they express their fears about pressing forward toward Tenochtitlán. When Francisco is injured, he calls out to Nuño who immediately comes to his aid.²⁶¹

The friendship of Nuño and Francisco and the relationship between Citlalli and Nuño humanize the tale and encourage empathy for the Spanish position. Though readers are intimately introduced to few other Indigenous allies, this issue of *Episodios mexicanos* does offer a more lucid window into the opinions of those who allied with the

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 46.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

Spanish. Readers are privy to dialogue in which the elders express the hope that the alliance will liberate them from the Mexicas.²⁶²

México: historia de un pueblo supports a wide cast of characters – however, they do not stand in the foreground. Instead, they move about as a sort of middle stage corps and engage in heavy dialogue. As a result, readers have a cursory association with a number of characters, but are left with an appreciation of the intricacies of the events surrounding the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Compared to *Episodios mexicanos*, *México: historia de un pueblo* features a far more varied cast of characters who appear and engage with readers through dialogue. This more expansive cast and the comparative length of the volumes support a more complex plot.

The action in *Episodios*, in contrast, is less weighted by dialogue and context, allowing for the plot to unfold more rapidly. Given the shorter length of the *Episodios mexicanos* volumes, there are a number of omissions in its treatment of the early colonial encounter. For example, in *Episodios* little detail is offered about the capture of Moctezuma or the dialogue between Cortés and Moctezuma, which is illustrated and discussed thoroughly in *Historia de un pueblo*. Also absent is discussion of the manner of Moctezuma's death, the string of leaders who take his place once he is imprisoned by Cortés, the alliance of different Indigenous groups with the Spanish, and alternatively with the Mexicas, and Cortés' decision to flee voluntarily following his return from the coast.²⁶³

²⁶² Ibid., 28-31.

²⁶³ Ibid., 41.

Another striking difference is the two series' treatment of La Malinche. With the exception of a brief appearance at Cortés' side in a background image, La Malinche is all but absent from *Episodios mexicanos*. She does appear in *Historia de un pueblo*, in contrast, though the nature of her presence is notable. Again she invariably appears at the side of Cortés, but she says little. Cortés, on the other hand, is not always pictured with Malinche serving as translator and some scenes read as if Cortés needed no translator. Her significance, instead, is established by comments made about her by the Mexica. For example, in what is labelled as the "most intense moment of the battle," one of the Mexica leaders reasons that if they capture Malinche, the Spanish might surrender. Readers are left to speculate about the merits of this tactic because moments later the Mexica leader is shot down.²⁶⁴ The battle continues between the allied forces of the Mexica and the Spanish and their allies, but when the former can fight no longer, Cuauhtémoc, the last Emperor of the Aztecs, says, "I will go talk to Malinche tomorrow to see what tribute they want."²⁶⁵

The Mexica's many references to la Malinche in *Historia de un pueblo* suggest that she is implicated in the outcome of Spanish conquest. They may have granted her more power than she held, and in doing so, the authors place blame even more squarely upon her. No explanation is given to suggest how she came to serve as interpreter for Cortés, nor is there any mention of another translator who speaks Spanish.²⁶⁶ La Malinche transgresses the boundaries of her position as both woman and Ouiteca. The

²⁶⁴ *México: historia de un pueblo*, vol. 3, 50.

²⁶⁵ *México: historia de un pueblo*, vol. 3, 72.

²⁶⁶ Beezley and Meyer maintain that the translator Gerónimo de Aguilar performed the more crucial task of bridging Mayan and Spanish. Ross Hassig, "The Collision of Two Worlds," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer, and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 81.

consequence of this disruption of order was that a moral price had to be paid. Unlike most melodramas, which held the promise of redemption through illness, death, or reconciliation, it is clear from *Historia de un pueblo* that there was no redemption in this case. Life for indigenous Mexicans had been irrevocably altered.

Conclusion

Tensions between the collaborators on both series eventually curtailed *Episodios mexicanos* prematurely. In the end, *Episodios mexicanos* published sixty-eight volumes, concluding with the signing of the Constitution of 1917. Originally, the series was intended to have eighty issues, ending with the oil expropriation in 1938, but the scriptwriters who were in charge of the postrevolutionary period gave Jiménez Codinach scripts that she refused to publish. For example, historian Lorenzo Mejebo wrote a summary of the oil expropriation of 1938, but after ten weeks of work the scriptwriters returned with a tale called “The Red Knight of Tampico.” It was situated in a brothel, featured the nightlife of Tampico and a complicated plot starring a journalist who rented a room in a shack from a woman whose bed housed the archives of the Shell Company. To compound this, according to Jiménez Codinach, Taibo threatened the artists and scriptwriters that if they did not boycott *Episodios mexicanos*, they would never work again. When the news was leaked to one of Jiménez Codinach’s assistants, she contacted Javier Barros, and together they resolved the problem by announcing that the project had run out of funding. The SEP paid the artists, but they preferred not to publish any more.

The SEP's historical comic book project came to a close along with Mexico's latest experiment with populism and the oil boom that bankrolled it. In the final months of López Portillo's presidency, a decade of printing more money to fund government spending and leveraging petrol revenues and reserves into foreign loans was compounded by plummeting oil prices and increasing international interest rates. López Portillo's response was to suspend payment on the foreign debt and expropriate the nation's banking system, which alienated an important source of investment capital and the nation's business class from the ruling party.²⁶⁷ Miguel de la Madrid, López Portillo's successor, responded to the debt crisis with austerity measures, including drastically reduced spending on public education.²⁶⁸ Though they concluded in the midst of economic turmoil, the historical comic books were pitched and produced in a period of optimism about the nation's economic future, perhaps influencing the SEP's misstep in creating an expensive and less accessible first series.

While Jiménez Codinach reported frustration with and tension between historians and the writers and artists, both *México: historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios mexicanos* did a remarkable job of striking a balance between education and entertainment. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the SEP's initial concern that publishing comic books would tarnish its reputation ever came to fruition. Though they fretted over whether to employ comics as an educational medium, their learning curve was far less steep than Televisa's (and IMSS's) in making the historical telenovelas.

²⁶⁷ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 16, 100.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

Conflict, instead, turned on the type of history to tell. The struggle between the two series coordinators reflects tension over notions of historical professionalism. London-trained, professional historian Jiménez Codinach derided Marxist writer and activist Taibo II's representation of history as "pseudohistory," while her own work espoused empiricism. Evidence suggests that this contest over what constituted good history was between the two coordinators and was not debated by SEP bureaucrats. In this respect, the SEP gave the two coordinators sufficient leeway to produce two versions of national history within the short time span of just two years, which challenges the ruling party's claim to a singular official narrative. Furthermore, it reminds us that the state is always composed of individuals, many of whom have different ideological viewpoints and interests. In contracting Jiménez Codinach and Taibo II to coordinate the series, not to mention the teams they assembled, the SEP was doing as the Mexican state had long done, drawing on intellectuals for legitimacy.

Chapter 3
A Changing Revolutionary Family: Revisionism and the Neoliberal Turn in *Senda de gloria* and *El vuelo del águila*, 1982 to 1994

Introduction

Each Monday to Friday evening for half an hour, from March to October 1987, and again during a rebroadcast the following year, audiences witnessed the melodramatic translation of one of the nation's most significant historical periods into a didactic television series, *Senda de gloria* (Path of Glory).²⁶⁹ The path referenced in the title is the turbulent succession of presidents following the promulgation of the 1917 Constitution. That path of presidents culminates in triumph with General Lázaro Cárdenas' declaration of the nation's economic independence by expropriating foreign oil companies on March 18, 1938. Furthermore, the telenovela traces the genealogy of the PRI in its earliest incarnation as the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). These were familiar stories to Mexicans, who had heard them repeated in schoolroom history lessons and in public history projects, but the plot took an unexpected turn during the 1988 rebroadcast, when contemporary political events began to demand a reconsideration of that history. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of General Lázaro Cárdenas, defected from the PRI and ran a populist presidential campaign. Suddenly the ruling party, which had relied for decades on a particular version of history, found itself re-writing the past wholesale. The extent of this revisionism was evident in the next historical telenovela produced, entitled *El vuelo del águila* (The Flight of the Eagle). The new series was a

²⁶⁹ *Senda de gloria*, DVD, directed by Raúl Araiza and Gustavo Hernández (1987; Mexico City: Televisa, 2006).

biographic drama about the life of General Porfirio Díaz, the man whose embrace of market liberalism to the exclusion of citizens' rights and welfare catalyzed the Revolution of 1910 and cast him as the villain of twentieth century Mexico. Together, *Senda de gloria* and *El vuelo del águila* demonstrate the degree to which neoliberalism necessitated the revision of Mexican history.

As you will recall from chapter two, in August 1982 in the final months of his term, President López Portillo radically devalued the Mexican peso and ordered the expropriation of Mexico's banks. This move served to destabilize the economy and alienate the nation's wealthiest investors, many of whom provided important sources of investment capital. When he took over as president that December, Miguel de la Madrid promptly reversed the populist policies of his predecessor. He renegotiated the foreign debt with the International Monetary Fund and implemented a broad range of neoliberal reforms. This so-called "structural adjustment" entailed austerity measures such as drastic cuts to government expenditures, the privatization of industry, reorganization of the financial system, lowering of tariff barriers to foreign imports, abolishing workplace regulations to make it easier to fire workers, and joining the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT). The economic hardships imposed by de la Madrid were compounded by a destructive earthquake on September 19, 1985, which killed thousands and left nearly a quarter of a million people homeless in the nation's capital.²⁷⁰ Electoral fraud in the presidential election of 1988, which brought Carlos Salinas de Gortari to power, solidified the party's neoliberal path, but further eroded voter faith in the ruling party.

²⁷⁰ Walker, *Waking from the Dream*.

It is within this political and economic context that two blockbuster historical telenovelas appeared on Televisa: *Senda de gloria* (1987) and *El vuelo del águila* (1994). *Senda de gloria* was Televisa's third and last co-production with the Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social. Though it was the seventh historical telenovela Televisa had produced, and the second about the Revolution of 1910, *Senda* marks a departure from all of the series preceding it and set new benchmarks for the two that followed. First, it was a big-budget production, the most expensive telenovela produced to that date. Though Televisa did not have a co-sponsor for *El vuelo*, they continued to follow the big-budget model. Perhaps in an attempt to recoup some of the costs of these edutainment super-productions, Televisa eventually packaged *Senda de gloria*, *El vuelo del águila*, and a final historical telenovela, *La antorcha encendida* (1996), as collectible VHS and then DVD sets, which were sold at large department stores frequented by members of the middle class.²⁷¹

The historical revisionism of the telenovelas was certainly nothing new in academic circles, although the political opportunism was particularly blatant. Nevertheless, historians had been calling for a more nuanced and complex treatment of the Porfiriato and the Revolution for decades. The official party narrative of the Revolution emerged in the decades after 1917 and had clearly populist underpinnings, portraying the movement as a spontaneous, agrarian uprising that mobilized the nation's

²⁷¹ Arturo Cruz Barcenás, "Anuncian lanzamiento en dvd de tres telenovelas históricas de Televisa," *La Jornada*, September 7, 2003, p. 24; "Llevan novelas Históricas al DVD," *El Porvenir*, October 19, 2003, p. 9; *Senda de gloria*, DVD; *El vuelo del águila*, DVD, Directed by Carlos Sotomayor, Gonzalo Martínez Ortega, and Jorge Fons (1994; Mexico City: Televisa, 2006); *La Antorcha Encendida*, DVD, directed by Gonzalo Martínez Ortega and Claudio Reyes (1996; Mexico City: Televisa, 2005). Not surprisingly, pirated copies of the sets were sold, and continue to be sold, by street vendors. Sale in boxed VHS and DVD sets was common for popular telenovelas.

disenfranchised masses in unified opposition to the tyranny of Porfirio Díaz. The traditional scholarly narrative was more textured: details varied, particularly at the local level, and there was criticism that the promises of the Revolution were unfulfilled, but the belief that the Revolution was a positive process that propelled the country forward as a liberal democracy remained the dominant interpretation for almost fifty years. Nevertheless, as the PRI repudiated its democratic and social promises, by the 1950s scholars such as Daniel Cosío Villegas began to question the interpretation. This growing critique was galvanized by the student massacre in 1968, which demonstrated the fraudulence of the party that staked its political legitimacy on the permanent, institutional revolution. This academic revisionism rejected the official mythology, not only of the Revolution, but also of the Porfiriato. Scholars shifted their view of the Porfiriato as a dark period characterized by tyranny and abuse that gave impetus to the Revolution, instead emphasizing continuity between the Porfiriato and the post-revolutionary state's capitalist economic underpinnings and authoritarian rule.²⁷² Further complicating these scholarly approaches, a post-revisionist interpretation emerged in the 1980s that sought to recuperate some of the popular participation marginalized by revisionists by focusing on mass and elite political cultures.

While interpretations of the Porfiriato and the Revolution evolved in academic circles, this revisionism did not cripple the official party narrative of the Revolution, which remained more static. To be sure, the portrayal of Porfirio Díaz shifted marginally through second half of the twentieth century, evidenced in state mandated free

²⁷² Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 22, 160.

textbooks.²⁷³ Nevertheless, these changes did not keep pace with the interpretations of academic history, making the changes to the narratives in the neoliberal turn all the more notable in the 1980s and 1990s. Neoliberal reforms and cuts to government expenditure engendered decentralization in cultural funding. As Claudio Lomnitz observed at the time, it was “an era marked by the privatization and by growing differences between an increasingly proletarianized mass of low-prestige teachers, a somewhat fancier stratum of publishing academics, and a new cultural elite that fuses writing with business.”²⁷⁴ The careers of Fausto Zerón Medina and Enrique Krauze, historians who collaborated on the blockbuster historical telenovelas, and the launch of Krauze’s private publishing (turned multimedia) company, Clío, serves as an example of this shift in cultural production to the private sector.

The first half of this chapter employs the concept of the Revolutionary Family to read *Senda de gloria* in conversation with changes within the ruling party, and the country more broadly, in the late 1980s. The triumphant narrative of *Senda* culminates with Lázaro Cárdenas’s nationalization of oil in 1938, but this ending was cut when the series’ second broadcast coincided with the electoral fraud of 1988. At this point, *Senda*’s didactic repetition of the ideals of the Revolution no longer served as effective propaganda for the party’s commitment to democracy and social justice. Instead, it threatened to exacerbate a looming political crisis by underscoring the degree to which the party had abandoned these revolutionary ideals.

²⁷³ This is discussed in greater detail below. For a discussion of the contours of these changes in textbooks, see Denis Gilbert, “Rewriting History: Salinas, Zedillo and the 1992 Textbook Controversy,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 2 (1997): 271–297.

²⁷⁴ Claudio Lomnitz, “An Intellectual’s Stock in the Factor of Mexico’s Ruins (*Mexico: Biography of Power* by Enrique Krauze),” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 1053–4.

The chapter then turns to a subsequent historical telenovela, *El vuelo del águila*, which sought to instill among popular audiences a revisionist version of Mexican history in accord with the PRI's neoliberal policies. Porfirio Díaz, who had long been cast by the ruling party as the villain of Mexican history, and whose authoritarian rule caused the Revolution of 1910, was recuperated and presented as a flawed but principled leader who had sought to modernize Mexico's economy. This stark change in official history occurred during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who had embraced neoliberal policies reminiscent of the Porfirian era, culminating with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. *El vuelo* represents a current of comparison present in the 1990s, which considered Salinas alongside Díaz, as both had courted foreign investment and privatization.

A discussion of the controversies generated by *El vuelo* demonstrates how PRI hegemony was contested in the final decades of its seventy-year reign. In this context, popular culture was a direct articulation of political power. Read together, *Senda de gloria* and *El vuelo del águila* underscore the political nature of historical narratives in Mexico: heroes and villains were recast in the neoliberal turn, and in this political and economic transition, the very history that the PRI employed to legitimize its power discredited them and underscored their illegitimacy.

Revising the Revolutionary Family: *Senda de Gloria* and a Changing Ruling Party

With the foundation in 1929 of the PNR, the precursor to the PRI, Plutaco Elías Calles and other surviving generals sought to unify the different and opposing factions under the aegis of a “Revolutionary Family.” The term, first used by Calles in 1929 to end an era of personal power and rebellion, was popularized among scholars by the political scientist Frank Brandenburg.²⁷⁵ In his 1964 book, *The Making of Modern Mexico*, he argued “[t]he Revolutionary Family is composed of the men who have run Mexico for over half a century, who have laid the policy-lines of the Revolution, and who today hold effective decision-making power.”²⁷⁶ In order to cast this new family and forge unity, the party sanitized the internecine struggles between Madero, Zapata, Villa, Carranza, and Obregón and rewrote them as postrevolutionary founding fathers.²⁷⁷ Successive presidents were treated as the supreme patriarchs of the nation, and served also as the head of the family of political elites. The metaphor applied both to the PNR (and later to the PRI) as well as the official historical narrative of the Revolution.²⁷⁸ This section draws parallels between the Revolutionary family, the plot of *Senda de gloria*, and political alterations within the PRI during the 1980s; it analyses the rise of historical revisionism and attempts to ensure historical accuracy; and it examines the objectives of IMSS and the politics its of co-sponsorship of *Senda de gloria*.

²⁷⁵ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 2, 261.

²⁷⁶ Frank Ralph Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), 3.

²⁷⁷ Benjamin, *La Revolución*, 144.

²⁷⁸ Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 156.

Under the presidency of De la Madrid, the composition of the Revolutionary Family underwent a generational and political change. De la Madrid came to power amidst the 1982 peso crash, and his divergent approach to the national economy was immediately apparent. De la Madrid immediately selected his cabinet secretaries to replace veteran *priistas* with a new crop of technocrats, many of whom had experience as financial administrators, had post-graduate degrees from foreign universities, and were younger than their counterparts.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, rather than lauding the “Mexican miracle” as previous presidents had, De la Madrid’s inaugural speech emphasized the challenges that lay ahead:

Mexico is undergoing a grave crisis. We are suffering inflation that will reach almost 100 percent this year; an unprecedented public-sector deficit fuels the fire of inflation, while savings to finance public-sector investment are lacking... We are in an emergency.²⁸⁰

His administration responded to the crisis with austerity measures, cutting government budget deficits, imposing wage controls, abolishing subsidies and price supports, and closing or privatizing public firms. Of 1,155 state-owned firms, public trusts, and decentralized agencies in 1983, there were just 412 by 1988.²⁸¹ De la Madrid also broke with a tradition of protectionist policies by liberalizing trade through a reduction in the number of products subject to import taxes and by signing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, which drastically reduced tariffs and agricultural

²⁷⁹ Henry C. Schmidt, “The Mexican Foreign Debt and the Sexennial Transition from López Portillo to de la Madrid,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 1, no. 2 (July 1, 1985): 244.

²⁸⁰ Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, *Inaugural Address: December 1, 1982* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Comunicación Social de la Presidencia de la República, 1982).

²⁸¹ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 69.

subsidies in the hopes of attracting foreign investment and trade.²⁸² The debt repayment program became the top priority in De la Madrid's first year in office, made possible by massive loans from the IMF and 530 banks.²⁸³

The composition of the Revolutionary family underwent another major change when populists marginalized under De la Madrid and defected to form a new leftist party. In response to the administration's neoliberal policies and in protest against the *dedazo*, the selection of another technocrat, Harvard economics Ph.D. Carlos Salinas de Gortari, as the party's presidential candidate for 1988, left-leaning members of the PRI splintered off and formed what eventually became the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). This split formed between the oldline of populist politicians symbolized by Governor Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who were dismissed as “*dinosaurios*” (dinosaurs) by the up and coming technocrats led by Salinas, who in turn were derisively referred to as “*fresas*” (strawberries), a Mexican term for privileged youth who had inherited their position without having paid their dues.

Parallels between the Revolutionary family and *Senda's* Álvarez family are unambiguous. The Álvarez family members represent differing sides of the political debates in Mexico during this period, thereby illustrating to viewers the range of political opinion. The family's patriarch is General Eduardo Álvarez, a military man who fought in the Revolution from the very first days with Francisco Madero and signed the 1917 Constitution, the sacred text of twentieth-century nationalism. After General Álvarez

²⁸² Daniel C. Levy and Kathleen Bruhn, *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 161–2, 169. Note that GATT becomes the WTO in 1995.

²⁸³ Schmidt, “The Mexican Foreign Debt and the Sexennial Transition from López Portillo to de la Madrid,” 247.

witnesses the assassination of President Venustiano Carranza in 1920, he begins to question the meaning of the Revolution and to wonder whether the destructive civil wars justified the death of more than a million Mexicans. This internal questioning is externalized so that the audience will also ask such questions and be led, with General Álvarez, to the ultimate conclusion that the Revolution was indeed worth the cost. Each successive president after Carranza seeks out the General's advice because of his reputation for honesty and his commitment to the revolutionary principles.

The notion of the Revolutionary Family also served to reinforce an ideal stable Mexican family unit: "The idealized family of the postrevolutionary order was one in which the father was stern in his benevolence, the mother saintly in her maternity, and the children loyal in their obedience."²⁸⁴ It is in both the political and familial contexts that the Álvarez Family represents the Revolutionary Family. Not surprisingly, as the father General Álvarez is the supreme patriarch and teacher, to both the audience and characters in the series. He is a well-respected revolutionary general, and though he is a staunch Carrancista, he works with each of the subsequent governments, albeit in different capacities. It is through General Álvarez that viewers are privy to conversations between the presidents and their advisors and ministers. For example, when General Álvaro Obregón, president from 1920-1924, deliberates over whether to run for re-election as president in 1928, violating one of the basic principles that had inspired the revolution in the first place, General Álvarez is outspoken in his opposition. After Obregón is assassinated a short time later, the cabinet ministers propose to appoint President Plutarco Elías Calles, who had served from 1924-1928, for another term. General Álvarez

²⁸⁴ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 4-5.

recognizes the difficult political situation they face, but vehemently opposes the re-election as unconstitutional. In his heated debates with other politicians and fictional characters, viewers see the ways in which the law was contested and how the matter was ultimately resolved. His advisory position changes with each presidency, but it is clear that General Álvarez has a particular respect for President Cárdenas. Even though the General supports many of the previous revolutionary presidents, he maintains a measure of criticism about their authoritarian tendencies. This tension is absent in his relationship with Cárdenas, who is presented as the culmination of Álvarez's – and Mexico's – commitment to revolutionary principles.

The matriarch of the telenovela family is Señora Fernanda Álvarez, a woman who feels conflicted by her roles as mother, wife, and Catholic. As an archetypal revolutionary mother, Sra. Álvarez serves as the moral fabric of the family. Like her husband, she has strict moral principles, though hers pivot around her gender role and religion. Sra. Álvarez's Catholic convictions frequently pit her against her husband, and she rarely retreats from opposing his anti-clericalism. She disregards her husband's declaration forbidding her to get involved in the dispute between the government of Calles and the Cristeros, an opposition group of Catholics, and joins the League for the National Defense of Religious Freedom. When their youngest son Antonio, a devout priest, returns from abroad to support the Catholics, she conspires with him to support the Cristeros, even to the point of smuggling arms to the counter-revolutionary insurgents, who fought a civil war against the government from 1926 to 1929.

The other three Álvarez children – Felipe, Julieta, and Andrea – also represent divergent viewpoints and personalities, consequently humanizing the struggles between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries as tales of good and evil. Thus, while Sra. Álvarez and Antonio are fighting to defend their faith, the eldest son, Felipe, collaborates with Andrea’s British husband to sell arms illegally to the Cristeros.²⁸⁵ He is not driven by any moral or religious conviction, but simply by the desire for profit, perhaps chastising the disloyal “sacadólares” who withdrew their pesos from Mexican banks, exchanging them for American dollars and sending the economy into a tailspin.

The eldest daughter, Julieta, is one of the most interesting female characters in all of the historical telenovelas. Although Mexican women were expected to marry, she was freed by the plot device of the execution of her fiancé, a military officer. This period of independence is heightened by her ability to live apart from her family home, which enables her to pursue her own interests. Her fiancé’s murder by military rebels makes her weary of revolutionary politics, to the great frustration of her father. Her apathy is transformed when she witnesses a lecture given by José Vasconcelos, at the time rector of the National University (later the UNAM). With renewed interest in politics, she assists with Vasconcelos’ educational campaign in the early 1920s. Though there is little explicit evidence of a romantic relationship between the two, the series does hint that they carry on a clandestine affair, which she eventually ends.²⁸⁶ Julieta’s relationship with Vasconcelos takes place during the height of his intellectual and political project, as

²⁸⁵ The choice of a British husband underscores British investment in Mexican petroleum.

²⁸⁶ The character of Julieta shares some characteristics with María Antonieta Rivas Mercado, namely an affair with Vasconcelos. For more on Rivas Mercado see Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 112–128.

a charismatic and idealistic leader establishing a national education system for a modern Mexico and attempting to bring art to the masses through his support of the muralist movement. Vasconcelos all but disappears from the series following his loss in the presidential election of 1929, at which point he became increasingly bitter, claiming the governments between the late 1920s and late 1930s were “barbarous” and had abandoned the revolutionary ideals.²⁸⁷ Vasconcelos’s ideas seduced an innocent Julieta, and Mexico, with promises of modernity, grandeur, and prosperity. Though Julieta never marries, she finds love in Hector, an anarcho-syndicalist. Together they go to Spain to fight against the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, and she is fatally wounded, suggesting the dangers of radical politics in the new post-revolutionary Mexico and fulfilling telenovela genre’s demand that happy, extramarital sex be punished, for women.

Younger sister Andrea’s character is less developed, though she plays an important role in the plot. In contrast to her older sister, Andrea is not interested in political affairs. Instead she plays the stereotypical role of a woman concerned primarily with personal matters, particularly those related to love. Early in the series, Manuel, a train stoker from the poorer Fortuna family, saves Andrea from an attack by anti-government rebels, and the two fall passionately in love. Through a series of unfortunate events, Andrea believes Manuel to be dead and marries a foreign investor, James Von Hallen, but only after she gets pregnant with Manuel’s child. In typical melodramatic fashion, Andrea and Manuel remain in love through the series, but do not formally reunite until the end of the telenovela, when they are able to live their love openly.

²⁸⁷ Ilan Stavans, *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 39.

Andrea is freed of James at the same time that Mexico is freed of foreign oil interests, echoing the postrevolutionary glorification of Mexicaness and exhortation to build a Mexico by and for Mexicans.

Manuel, the primary character in the Fortuna family, rises in status with the progression of the Revolution, thus serving to illustrate how the movement improved the lives of average Mexicans. Under the guidance of General Álvarez, Manuel leaves his position as a train stoker, learns to read, and is schooled in the political history of Mexico. He quickly rises to become one of the nation's most prominent journalists. As the telenovela progresses and Manuel becomes increasingly politically aware, his role as a journalist allows him to inform viewers about opinions critical of the revolutionary leaders. He is often shown interviewing presidents, important politicians, and well-known rebels. These interviews and the resulting editorial pieces serve as didactic moments.

Indeed, the didactic role of the Álvarez family and Manuel Fortuna seem more important than the literary purposes of narrative cohesion and plot development. As General Álvarez teaches Manuel about the constitution and its various articles, viewers also become students. In their first tutoring session, Manuel asks General Álvarez, "What is the constitution?" General Álvarez responds to Manuel, and the audience by extension, that it is a document that contains many articles which guarantee that all Mexicans have the right to choose their representatives, to education, work, strike, land, health. General Álvarez insists that Manuel and all Mexicans (read: audience members) ought to start by reading the constitution, studying it, learning it, and practicing it. *Tele*

Guía, Televisa's television guide, facilitated this instruction by offering a short article on rights under the constitution and including copies of the constitution in a subsequent issue.²⁸⁸

A number of scenes in *Senda* take place in Congress, giving viewers a sense of the major constitutional debates of the period. In these scenes, as well as in discussions between fictitious and historical figures alike, the Constitution of 1917 is repeatedly cited, particularly the revolutionary trinity of Articles 3, 27, and 123, which mandated, respectively, free and secular education for all Mexicans, declared that all territory was the property of the Nation, and provided the basis for legal protection of the rights of labor. In a scene that clearly lauds IMSS' sponsorship, union supporters celebrate Article 123, which they explain guarantees the protection of minors and women, the right to strike, protection from accidents, and the Law of Social Security. *Senda de gloria* reminds readers that IMSS was a direct legacy of the Revolution. More generally, the political transformations produced by the Revolution, and presented in *Senda de gloria*, lent credibility to the PRI-controlled Mexican state of the twentieth century.

Manuel's political education as a journalist also allows him to inform viewers about opinions critical of revolutionary leaders such as Carranza and Obregón, thus demonstrating their personal limits and helping to move the narrative forward to the culmination of the Revolution under Cárdenas. Manuel's safety is jeopardized by his determination to expose the shortcomings of these presidents. After writing a critical piece about Obregón, Manuel's print workshop is destroyed and his uncle is harmed. Manuel escapes without injury, but in a subsequent attack he is shot and then incarcerated

²⁸⁸ "Tele Guía contribuye a la cultura de de sus lectores," *Tele Guía*, May 21-27, 1988, 35.

and his uncle is murdered when his house is set on fire. Manuel escapes from prison and flees to San Luis Potosí to work on an oil camp. This development gives audiences an intimate view of the working conditions and struggles of oil workers, demonstrating the need for Cárdenas to intervene and nationalize the industry in 1938. Such violations of the freedom of expression do not resurface in *Senda* following the election of Cárdenas as president, suggesting that the abuses had ended after 1934. By writing itself as the heir of the Cárdenas government, the PRI positions itself as a party that permits nonconformity and dissent.

If Manuel represents the political conscience of the Mexican people, General Álvarez represents the idealized state. He is the supreme patriarch and teacher. Throughout the series his commitment to revolutionary principles does not waiver. His convictions finally find representation in Cárdenas. He is energized by his travels around the country in support of Cárdenas' candidacy and, more than any previous political issue he has been dedicated to, General Álvarez works tirelessly to examine and implement the oil expropriation. The telenovela closes with the General looking pensively at Diego Rivera's murals at the National Palace, while flashbacks recall historical events as the General experienced them in *Senda de gloria*.²⁸⁹

By pinning the telenovela's interpretation of Mexican history to the well-known murals, *Senda* presents a tidy continuity between the series, the imagined narrative of the Revolution, and the context of the 1980s. From the disunity of the Revolutionary

²⁸⁹ Flashbacks are a commonly employed narrative device in Mexican film. On its use in the iconic *María Candelaria*, see for example Andrea Noble, "If Looks Could Kill: Image Wars in *María Candelaria*," *Screen* 42, no. 1 (March 20, 2001): 77–91.

factions pictured in the mural, a unified and stable Mexico emerged, suggesting that audiences maintain optimistic about the economic crisis facing them in the 1980s.



Figure 16
General Álvarez in front of Rivera mural at National Palace,
Senda de gloria, 1987

Standing in front of the mural, and the fractious events of the Revolution featured in the series, General Álvarez assures viewers that sacrifices, both past and present, were well worth it.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Rodríguez Cadena views the historical telenovelas as “kinetic murals.” That is, they “portray the interaction of the past in contemporary issues and illustrate the diversity of versions of the collective history created with a variety of resources that appeal to mass audiences.” For more see María de los Ángeles Rodríguez Cadena, “Contemporary Hi(stories) of Mexico: Fictional Re-Creation of Collective Past on Television,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 49–55.

If the fictional characters in *Senda de gloria* represent the myriad of political opinions of Mexicans, what do the ultimate fates of these characters suggest about the fate of Mexico? General Álvarez loves his wife and each of his children, in spite of their conflicting ideals, but ultimately it is *his* political opinion that triumphs at the end of the series. Sra. Álvarez is notably cold and dismissive of Cárdenas when he first starts visiting the Álvarez house because of his connection to the resolutely anti-clerical Calles. Nevertheless, Sra. Álvarez is eventually persuaded by Cárdenas' integrity as president. Felipe, committed more to profit than principles, is forced into exile when he is caught illegally selling arms, an act of justice that is all the more compelling because his politically connected father does not intervene on his behalf. Two of the other children perish in defense of their beliefs: Antonio dies defending the Cristeros and Julieta is killed fighting fascists in Spain. It is no coincidence that Julieta, the Álvarez with the most aberrant political beliefs, turns out to be adopted. If the Álvarezes are intended to represent the Mexican nation as a family, Julieta's identification with anarchism suggests that this political philosophy is a foreign influence, not naturally Mexican. Finally, the central love story in *Senda de gloria* is also telling. Andrea and Manuel remain in love throughout the series, but do not formally reunite until the end of the telenovela. In classically melodramatic form, good triumphs over evil. Like Mexico, the couple have overcome obstacles, but are ultimately united and look with hope toward the future.

With its triumphant narrative of national progress, *Senda de gloria* was well received by the general public. It was, on many accounts, the culmination of Televisa and IMSS's edutainment learning curve. It borrowed from *La tormenta* placing a

fictional family at the center of the story. It also employed the same lead actor, Ignacio López Tarso, who was even more beloved as General Álvarez. López Tarso declared *Senda* to be “the most important telenovela ever made in the history of Mexican television.” Its extraordinary quality was supported by its sale in foreign markets, including Italy, Germany, Spain, China, and Japan.²⁹¹ Fans, like Josefa García Angeles of Atizapán, wrote to newspapers and the television guide to express how the series made them proud to be Mexican.²⁹² Despite pressure from families of historical figures to soften the treatment of their family members, and even from the President of the Republic to be cautious in their portrayal of the army, the nation’s heroes, and religious beliefs, some viewers regarded *Senda* as an historical opening.²⁹³ A number of newspaper articles applauded the series as an unofficial admission of historical injustices carried out by revolutionaries, particularly those of Calles. For example, it explicitly accused Calles for the wrongful execution of Father Miguel Agustín Pro.²⁹⁴ This point was made in a letter to *Proceso* by Jorge A. Quintana, the son of the lead actor in *La sombra del caudillo*, a 1960 film about the Mexican Revolution based on a novel by Martín Luís Guzmán. Having previewed it as a child, Quintana was one of the few who had seen the film before it was banned for implicating Calles in the murder of opposition presidential candidate General Francisco Serrano. Quintana applauded *Senda de Gloria*’s choice to

²⁹¹ Cristina Martínez, “Nacho López Tarso,” *Tele Guía*, February 13-19, 1988.

²⁹² See for example, Josefa García Angeles, “Confetti,” *Tele Guía*, August 6-12, 1988, 85.

²⁹³ “La Senda de Televisa,” *Proceso*, August 8, 1988, 26.

²⁹⁴ “La declaración de Roberto Cruz, que responsabilizo directamente a Calles,” *Proceso*, August 19, 1988.

include this episode, and he applauded the progress the nation had made in the arena of censorship and freedom in this new generation.²⁹⁵

The real-life political success of the actor who played General Álvarez, López Tarso, also suggests the degree to which *Senda* legitimized PRI power. In 1989, he ran for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies as a representative of the PRI. While campaigning door to door to solicit votes, López Tarso recalls that people (usually women) would exclaim, “My General Álvarez, of course I will vote for you.”²⁹⁶ When López Tarso ultimately won the seat, the opposition candidate for the National Action Party (PAN) declared that it was not López Tarso that had won; it was General Álvarez.²⁹⁷

Although the traditional narrative met with popular acceptance from the Mexican public, professional historians had begun to question many of these tenets, giving rise to a revisionist interpretation that would dominate academic histories. Within Mexico this traditional, pro-Revolution position had its critics earlier than it did outside Mexico. One of the early critics was Daniel Cosío Villegas, who declared in 1947, “The goals of the Revolution have been exhausted to such a degree that the term *revolution* itself has lost its meaning.”²⁹⁸ His revisionist argument culminated in the monumental *Historia moderna de México* (1955-1972), a ten-volume collection he coordinated and helped write, which offered a more nuanced view of political evolution and economic development under Porfirio Díaz. Cosío Villegas was among the first scholars to

²⁹⁵ Jorge A. Quintana, “En Senda de gloria Criterios Arcaicos,” *Proceso*, August 15, 1988.

²⁹⁶ “Mi general Álvarez, por supuesto que votaré por usted.” *El Porvenir*, May 1, 2005, 7.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Daniel Cosío Villegas, “Mexico’s Crisis,” in *American Extremes*, trans. Américo Paredes (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 3.

emphasize continuity from the Reforma to the Revolution, rather than the latter as a complete break from the past.

Continued disillusionment with the pro-Revolutionary narrative was cemented by the ruling party's bloody repression of student demonstrators in 1968. The moral and political legitimacy that the PRI lost following 1968 put the state in a position where it was forced to make accommodations with those inside and outside the party. This created an opening for intellectuals to critique the state's official narrative of the past.²⁹⁹ This revisionist interpretation emphasized continuity between the Porfiriato and the postrevolutionary state and argued the Revolution was not popularly based, thereby asserting it was not a revolution at all. This shift was evident at the third congress of Mexican and North American historians in Oaxtepec in 1969, which revealed that there was little agreement amongst revisionists, except for condemnation of the official mythology.³⁰⁰ Instead of a revolutionary family, headed by benevolent leaders, some scholars had begun to perceive the ruling party as a political machine, founded by Calles and then reworked by Cárdenas. Not surprisingly, as scholars reconsidered previous beliefs about the Revolution, they also questioned the ideological nature of the Cárdenas' administration, and they increasingly argued that his government was moderate, rather than radical.³⁰¹ One of the more divergent works of revisionist history is Alicia Hernández Chávez's *La mecánica cardenista*, in which she argues that Cárdenas'

²⁹⁹ Allen Wells, "Oaxtepec Revisited: The Politics of Mexican Historiography, 1968-1988," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 7, no. 2 (1991): 334.

³⁰⁰The proceedings of the conference were published as *Investigaciones contemporáneas sobre historia de México: Memorias de la tercera reunión de historiadores mexicanos y norteamericanos. Oaxtepec, Morelos, 4-7 noviembre de 1969* (Mexico City and Austin: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; El Colegio de México; and the University of Texas, 1971).

³⁰¹ David C. Bailey, "Revisionism and the Recent Historiography of the Mexican Revolution," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (1978): 75-6.

presidency was not the result of aligning with discontented workers and campesinos.³⁰² Instead, she asserts, Cárdenas allied with excluded political factions including caudillos and competing and marginal Revolutionary military groups.³⁰³ In her interpretation, Cárdenas' political power was won with the support of the army, minimizing the influence of popular classes on the corporatist politics of the ruling party.

In the late 1960s professional historians also turned to local or regional studies of the Revolution. Both the traditional (and antirevisionist) and revisionist camps found evidence for their interpretations in regional histories.³⁰⁴ Luis González's *Invitación a la microhistoria* reminded historians to move beyond the center to examine the varied experiences of revolution across Mexico. This regional focus shifted focus from viewing the state as monolithic, instead emphasizing how the "many Mexicos" produced many Revolutions.³⁰⁵

While interpretations of the Porfiriato and the Revolution evolved in academic circles, this revisionism had little popular influence on the official party narrative of the Revolution, which remained more static. In the words of Allen Wells: "With a wealth of resources at its disposal, the ubiquitous regime has been able to present what amounts to a promotional campaign of their version of untrammelled progress in a host of different settings."³⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, then, *Senda de gloria* does not reflect the changing historiography outlined here. Though the series enlisted the consulting services of

³⁰² Alicia Hernández Chávez, *La mecánica cardenista* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1979).

³⁰³ Thomas Benjamin, "The Leviathan on the Zocalo: Recent Historiography of the Postrevolutionary Mexican State," *Latin American Research Review* 20, no. 3 (1985): 209.

³⁰⁴ Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman, *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910-1929* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 1-3.

³⁰⁵ Thomas Benjamin and William McNellie, *Other Mexicos: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1876-1911* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

³⁰⁶ Wells, "Oaxtepec Revisited," 334.

historian Fausto Zerón Medina, in most regards it presented the same triumphant narrative that the party had been touting for decades. Perhaps this is because Zerón Medina is both a historian and an entrepreneur, like Krauze with whom he has co-authored several books, and had an incentive to present popular ideas that would sell to a wide audience. After earning his master's degree from Cambridge University, with a thesis on the history of the Catholic Church in Mexico, he worked for Clío for a number of years, advised on *Senda de gloria* and *El vuelo del águila*, and later published *Saber Ver*, a bi-monthly arts magazine that he purchased from Televisa.

The media, likely scripted by Televisa, lauded this hopeful and triumphant series as a “superproducción” before it even aired, citing its super-sized budget, the largest to date for a telenovela in Mexico.³⁰⁷ An article in Monterrey's *El Porvenir* notes the network's declaration that no expense, economic or physical, had been spared to achieve this production.³⁰⁸ Just for the Álvarez family, the main fictional characters, the budget called for six hundred garments, sixty pairs of shoes, and fifty hats.³⁰⁹ Luminaries of Mexican film and television were so honored to participate in the series that they worked for less money and took smaller roles than they would have normally accepted.³¹⁰ Many of the series' actresses and actors count the historical telenovelas among their greatest artistic works, including the lead actress for *Senda*, Blanca Sánchez.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ See for example, “A punto de iniciar la telenovela Senda de Gloria,” *El Porvenir*, March 13, 1987, 10; “‘Senda de Gloria’ cuenta con un gran vestuario - 600 vestidos,” *El Porvenir*, June 5, 1987, 13. “Numeralia,” *El Porvenir*, May 12, 1987, 3-A; “‘Senda de Gloria’ la telenovela más costosa de los últimos años,” *El Porvenir*, May 1, 1987, 12.

³⁰⁸ “Interpretar Personajes Historicos: Toda un labor,” *El Porvenir*, September 4, 1987, 10.

³⁰⁹ “‘Senda de Gloria’ cuenta con un gran vestuario - 600 vestidos,” 13.

³¹⁰ Cristina Martínez, “Ernesto Alonso,” *Tele Guía*, February 13-19, 1988.

³¹¹ Martha Carrillo, “Blanca Sánchez,” *Tele Guía*, March 19-25, 1988, 83.

The large-scale budget reflected, in part, an attempt to create a “historically accurate” product: meticulous costumes, armies of extras to stage battle scenes and other historical events, and on-location filming in historically significant locations across the country, all overseen by a team of professional historians as advisors. The historical advisors consulted on a range of aspects, from the historical narrative to the careful reconstruction of daily life down to the smallest details, such as decoration, clothing, and customs. Though each of the previous historical telenovelas was produced with the assistance of historical consultants, *Senda de gloria* set a new precedent for historical detail, which was met and exceeded by the subsequent two series *El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*. The heightened concern for historical accuracy in *Senda* reflects not only a desire to create an educational product, but suggests anxiety about fidelity to the dominant historical narrative.

As a superproduction, *Senda*’s extravagant price tag reads as an attempt to underscore a super-commitment to the Revolution’s ideals. This is striking at a time when the ruling party was shifting further from its institutionalized rhetoric about the Revolution, including the Revolutionary Family. For Televisa, a sizable investment in educational entertainment about the Revolution would earn them civic prestige and signal their continued support for the PRI. For the local and state governments who loaned support for on-location filming in their jurisdictions, the telenovela held the promise of reminding viewers of their significance in the nation’s history.

A Public/Private Partnership: IMSS's Co-sponsorship of *Senda de gloria*

What civic benefit, or otherwise, compelled Lic. Ricardo Garcia Sainz, Director General of IMSS to sign a contract along with Televisa Vice-President Miguel Aleman Velasco, agreeing to co-produce *Senda* with Televisa? As discussed in chapter one, this was not their first partnership; it was their fourth (*La Tormenta* in 1967, *Los Caudillos* in 1968 and *El Carruaje* in 1972). Nevertheless, *Senda* was a greater financial investment than the previous telenovelas. Its subject matter was also particularly meaningful for IMSS; asserting the significance of the Revolution was paramount to insisting upon its own importance. Indeed, the leadership at IMSS, as an important federal bureaucracy, constituted integral members of the Revolutionary Family.

IMSS viewed its own emergence as a response to the outcry for a social security system that would meet Mexico's basic needs, a fulfillment of Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution, which guaranteed the rights of workers. Section 29 of the Article established that the "Enactment of a Social Security Law shall be considered of public interest and it shall include insurance against disability, loss of life, against involuntary work stoppage, accidents, and other forms for similar purposes."³¹² The amendment included no allusions to cultural or historical programs; nevertheless, by the early 1980s IMSS's Comisión de Comunicación Social – the unit responsible for promoting the work of IMSS and operating a range of diverse cultural programs – had a well-developed theatre program and established engagement with mass media via radio and television. In

³¹²This legacy remains important today. See for example, Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social, "The Mexican Institute of Social Security: Evolution, Challenges and Perspectives", 2011, 5–6, http://www.imss.gob.mx/english/Documents/NEW/120313_IMSS_ECP.pdf.

their attempts to reach mass audiences, IMSS also collaborated with the public television channel, IMEVISION, and the Archivo Histórico Toscano to produce a documentary series featuring previously unedited and aired material from Salvador Toscano, a pioneer in documentary cinematography in Mexico and Latin America. The series comprised fourteen chapters that focused on the most significant subjects of the Revolution.³¹³

IMSS not only paid half of the five million peso price tag for *Senda de gloria*, it was also involved in decision making for the series: they proposed a title, viewed the proposed cast lists and commented on chapters carefully delivered by Televisa to avoid a leak.³¹⁴ A 1987 report by the division responsible for collaborating on the telenovela, the Comisión de Comunicación Social, declared, “*Senda de gloria* is one of the greatest efforts in the history of Mexican television to combine the legitimate interests of the audience with the emotional highs of fictitious characters, with teaching the of the fundamental stages of our history.”³¹⁵ The publicity spots IMSS aired during *La Tormenta* demonstrate their attempt to harness the didactic potential of advertising to complement *Senda’s* glorious tale of the Revolution with nationalistic pleas for worker safety. IMSS’s contract with Televisa notes that the publicity spots aired during sponsored programs promised an impressive diffusion of information about IMSS’s services and public campaigns.³¹⁶ A subsequent proposal further identified three explicit objectives: 1) to use television to promote healthy recreation amongst Mexicans; 2) to

³¹³ Comisión de Comunicación Social, nd, AHIMSS 003 6-8-7 15707.

³¹⁴ “Situación que guarda la relación IMSS-Televisa en torno al proyecto de coproducción de una teleserie de tema histórica” December 4, 1985. AHIMSS 003 6-7-32 15539. Note that at this stage in planning, the series was titled *La Trinchera*, not *Senda de Gloria*.

³¹⁵ Comisión de Comunicación Social, 1987. AHIMSS 002 7-8-6 18617.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

provide information that contributes to knowledge and examination of national history; and 3) to promote the proper utilization of free time.³¹⁷ The first and third objectives raise some interesting questions about what constitutes “healthy recreation” and appropriate uses of free time. Furthermore, it raises the question of state interest in the recreational and leisure activities of Mexicans.

No doubt, healthcare institutions are heavily invested in the health of their members, and this involves questions of lifestyle and recreation. That telenovela viewing would be advocated as a form of healthy recreation is more suspect.³¹⁸ It is more likely that IMSS intended to suggest that learning about history was the favored recreation. The widespread popularity of telenovelas made them a compelling didactic format. Nonetheless, there are a myriad of ways to encourage civic engagement and learning about national history. Using telenovelas as the medium for this message ran the risk of endorsing television viewing. Echoing similar debates elsewhere, concerns about the effects of television watching, especially for children, were commonplace in newspapers in Mexico at this time.³¹⁹ It is unlikely that IMSS would have been unaware of this controversy.

More contentious was the economic context in which *Senda* was produced. In the 1980s, funding for IMSS was drawn from an 8.5 percent payroll tax from employees in

³¹⁷ AHIMSS, Exp. 203 4-6-34 10746, Propuesta, July 1985 – March 1986.

³¹⁸ The telenovela alternative airing at the time was *Rosa salvaje*, featuring Verónica Castro (who went on to star in *Los ricos también lloran*). Television listing appears in *El Informador*, August 10, 1987, 2-D.

³¹⁹ See for example newspaper articles from Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada, Archivo Economico, TV 1981-92 CO 6007: “Funcion Social y Exigencia Publica,” *Unomásuno*, December 3, 1989; “Influencia de la TV Sobre la Vida Familiar,” *Novedades*, July 5, 1981; “La Comunicacion Social de Ser Formadora y Educadora,” *El Día*, December 15, 1985; “La Sociedad Espera Que Los Medios de Comunicación Social Cumplan su Función,” *El Día*, November 13, 1985; “Los Concesionarios de la Radio y TV Deben Evitar Influencias Nocivas Sobre la Niñez,” *El Día*, November 29, 1985; “Los Niños, Las Principales Víctimas de la Televisión,” *El Día*, January 25, 1981.

the formal sector; IMSS funds pensions, health care, and disability benefits.³²⁰ The contraction of the economy following the 1982 economic crisis caused a drastic reduction in real wages and employment that negatively impacted the Institute's revenue, combined with an increased demand for services.³²¹ That IMSS paid half of the five million peso price tag for *Senda de gloria* while failing to meet its primary responsibility for healthcare provoked the ire of critics. In her weekly column in *Proceso*, television critic and columnist Florence Toussaint commended the superb acting on the part of the main characters, but noted that the sponsorship of IMSS had unleashed sharp criticism.³²² Underscoring the failure of IMSS by pointing out the consistent shortage of hospitals, medicine, and doctors in their facilities, critics revealed the government's failure to ensure the well-being of citizens.³²³

Perhaps what is more surprising is that none of these critics made connections between IMSS' sponsorship of *Senda de gloria* and the massive earthquake on September 19, 1985, which caused such widespread death and destruction in the capital. Central communications, financial, and government systems were disrupted, and citizens expected the government to respond: "Under the PRI system, citizens were discouraged from organizing to solve problems on their own;" the state retained the power to resolve problems so as to reinforce their own legitimacy.³²⁴ Instead, in the days following the

³²⁰ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 167, 190.

³²¹ Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social, "The Mexican Institute of Social Security: Evolution, Challenges and Perspectives", 2011; Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, p. 191.

³²² Florence Toussaint, "Senda de Gloria," *Proceso*, August 15, 1988. See also, "El IMSS ha crecido al ritmo de la demanda," *El Informador*, January 19, 1989, 3-C.

³²³ Correa Guillermo, "De la retórica optimista de los funcionarios a la realidad cotidiana, El Seguro Social hoy: escasez de médicos y enfermeras, espacios insuficientes, equipo obsoleto," *Proceso*, July 19, 1993.

³²⁴ Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 98.

quake, government officials “acted in a confused and uncoordinated manner,” revealing the dangerous consequences of their neglect and ineptitude.³²⁵ Even though there were still survivors under the rubble, the authorities sought to bulldoze the ruins, in some cases arguing that the dead posed a risk of disease. Nevertheless, residents were not the helpless, atomized victims the government might have expected. Instead, “weighed down by the tragedy, the people of Mexico City yet showed themselves ready to organize and run their lives in the face of the complete failure of government to find an effective response.”³²⁶ With voices still audible in the rubble, people formed neighborhood groups and attempted to rescue missing people that the government had ignored. As we will see in the following chapter, the urban neighborhood organizations that emerged to rescue thousands of victims from the rubble because of the failings of state were an important facet of a changing civil society.

As the nation’s (indeed, Latin America’s) largest health care provider, it is not surprising that IMSS came under attack for their inadequate response to the devastation. The earthquake was responsible for the destruction of the National Medical Center, which equated to the loss of 2,500 hospital beds, most of which were the most technologically sophisticated in the country.³²⁷ The area most severely affected by the earthquake and its tremors held a major concentration of hospitals. The loss of these hospitals, along with the National Medical Center, negatively affected health care service

³²⁵ Aurora Camacho de Schmidt and Schmidt, trans., “Foreward: The Shaking of a Nation,” in *Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), xvi.

³²⁶ Francisco Pérez de Arce of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) quoted in *Ibid.*, xvi.

³²⁷ Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social, “The Mexican Institute of Social Security: Evolution, Challenges and Perspectives,” 5–6.

and the future training of physicians.³²⁸ Though planning for *Senda de gloria* had already started before the earthquake, and the contract with Televisa had been signed on May 28, 1985, the contract outlines the project in such detail that it is likely that the series had been under consideration for some time before then. Furthermore, the contract outlines the dates of the financial transactions, which were not scheduled to take place until after the earthquake. At the very least, the continued funding of a telenovela under these circumstances reveals the misplaced priorities of IMSS.³²⁹

Social Security officials may well have recognized this broadcast as a public relations disaster, for *Senda* was the last historical telenovela that IMSS co-produced. Without access to Televisa's archives and with very few documents about the partnership in the IMSS historical archives, it is impossible to identify the reasons that IMSS did not continue their collaboration. Given their close identification with the Revolution and the Revolutionary Family, it is possible that IMSS did not support the revisionism engendered by the cutting of Cárdenas in the next broadcast of *Senda* and in the recuperation of Porfirio Díaz in *El vuelo*.

Cutting Cárdenas: Fraud, Revisionist History, and Neoliberalism Ascendant

Following the success of the first broadcast of *Senda de gloria*, Televisa re-aired it only two months later, but this time the political context had shifted enough that the network cut the final scenes including Cárdenas. The rebroadcast started in January of

³²⁸ G. Soberon, J. Frenk, and J. Sepulveda, "The Health Care Reform in Mexico: Before and After the 1985 Earthquakes," *American Journal of Public Health* 76, no. 6 (1986): 677.

³²⁹ AHIMSS, Exp. 002-30-95 18417, Convenio con Televisa.

1988, and this time Televisa responded to public demand that the series be aired at a more accessible time.³³⁰ It proceeded without incident until July 30, 1988, when viewers tuned in to see an incomprehensible montage of scenes. Gone were the scenes of Cárdenas attempting to improve conditions of workers and peasants, and working to limit foreign influence, and certainly absent was the series' climax, Cárdenas' nationalization of oil in 1938. Almost immediately a consensus in the print media emerged: it was an act of censorship tied directly to presidential politics.³³¹ In the intervening six months since the rebroadcast had started, Cárdenas' son, Cuauhtémoc, had run against the PRI in the presidential election of 1988. In contrast, to the neoliberal PRI candidate, Salinas, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas espoused many of the positions advocated by his father. Following a fraudulent election, Cárdenas Sr., the man previously considered to be the culmination of the revolution and whose social reforms had been harnessed to legitimize the PRI, became instead a reminder of the ideals the party had abandoned, particularly in its embrace of neoliberalism. As a result, history was revised and Cárdenas was cut.

Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the man whose presidential challenge caused the re-writing of Mexican history, had been a stalwart of the Revolutionary family that his father had helped to found. Known as "el hijo del general," he had served the party in a variety of capacities, including as governor of Michoacán, as senator, and as undersecretary of forestry. In the wake of the economic crisis of 1982 and the austerity measures, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas joined a number of PRI party members who opposed

³³⁰ Cristina Martínez, "Ernesto Alonso," *Tele Guía*, February 13-19, 1988.

³³¹ See for example, *Proceso*, *El Financiero*, *El Día*, *El Universal*, *Unomásuno*, and *Excélsior*.

De la Madrid's neoliberal program of trade liberalization and privatization.³³² Along with former PRI party president Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, he gathered left-leaning PRI members into an opposition group within the PRI, called the Democratic Current. In 1987, the group split entirely from the PRI over opposition to the *dedazo*, the process whereby a sitting president appoints his successor. They later joined other smaller parties to form a coalition called the National Democratic Front (NDF), and Cuauhtémoc was chosen to lead their presidential bid.

As his father had in life – and on television in *Senda de Gloria* – Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas crisscrossed the country in support of his candidacy. Though he was not a charismatic speaker or campaigner, throngs of voters came out to support him. No matter the remoteness of the location, if his campaign team found out that his father had been there fifty years earlier, Cuauhtémoc made an appearance. One of his advisors noted the historical memory of Cárdenas remained a powerful force: “The historical memory of the lands he distributed and the roads and schools he built are still strong, and it has attached itself not to the PRI but to the figure of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.”³³³ During the campaign, support for Cárdenas grew steadily and he faced the July elections with enough strength to displace the National Action Party (PAN) as the leading challenger to PRI hegemony.³³⁴ Like his father, he was poised to reshape the terrain of Mexican politics.

³³² Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 132.

³³³ Preston and Dillon, *Opening Mexico*, 157.

³³⁴ Aguilar Camín and Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Revolution*, 242.

On Election Day, July 6, 1988, the PRI committed one of its most egregious and conspicuous frauds in the six decades it had held power.³³⁵ After ballots had been cast and the counting began, the first results showed that Cárdenas was in the lead. PRI officials, including the Nation Voter Registry (RNE), which was not an independent agency but rather under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior, appeared not to have considered the possibility that they could lose. Elías Ruiz, the technical subdirector of the Technical Monitoring Committee (Comité Técnico de Vigilancia), seems to have been the first person to recognize the magnitude of the problem. He noted that when he had booted up all the computers, the same information appeared on all of them: the PRI had lost.³³⁶ Desperate and panicked, high ranking officials did not wait for the other vote tallies to arrive. Manuel Bartlett Díaz, Secretary of the Interior and President of the Federal Election Commission (CFE), announced that the election results could not be delivered immediately. Among the explanations offered by the PRI for the delay were computer failures and “atmospheric interference.” Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, then a PAN representative, commented “se calló la computadora”, using the verb “callar,” to shut up or keep quiet. A PRI representative stepped in and quickly clarified that “el sistema se cayó” (the system crashed).³³⁷ Both versions referred perceptively not only to the electoral computers, but also to the government itself, which had maintained such an effective political system. President Miguel de la Madrid later declared Salinas the victor. In his 2004 autobiography, the former president admitted his role in the fraud,

³³⁵ Haber et al., for example, refer to it as “the most fraudulent election in modern Mexican history,” *Mexico Since 1980*, p. 132, nb 21.

³³⁶ Martha Anaya, 1988: *El año que calló el sistema* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2008), 19.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

although he suggested it was the party president who had advised him: “You have to proclaim the triumph of the PRI. It is a tradition that we cannot break without causing great alarm among the citizens.”³³⁸ The fraud was possible because technicians across the country could input their own results, but they could not access the general pool of results. Furthermore, the opposition party representatives did not even know where the central computer was located; “for security reasons,” its location was kept a secret.³³⁹ The Federal Electoral Commission confirmed Salinas’ victory a week later, after a supposed manual tallying of the votes, but by then “almost no one believed them.”³⁴⁰ The slogan “el sistema se cayó” defined the 1988 election for years to come, representing not only egregious fraud, but the wholesale failure of the PRI. Three years after the election, PRI congressional deputies allied with conservative PAN legislators, who likewise feared a leftist Cárdenas presidency, to order the 1988 ballots burned, effectively destroying the evidence and making recourse impossible.

Following Televisa’s censorship of the Cárdenas years, public outcry ensued in the media. In an article titled “History as legitimization of power,” reporter Bermejo Mora stated: “Anyone who knows anything about politics could guess the motives for the censorship.”³⁴¹ Newspapers and news magazines as diverse as *El Financiero*, *El Día*, *El Universal*, *Excelsior*, and *Proceso* concluded that the early curtailment of *Senda de gloria* was an act of censorship intended to quell any links made between former

³³⁸ Ginger Thompson, “Ex-President in Mexico Casts New Light on Rigged 1988 Election - New York Times,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/09/world/ex-president-in-mexico-casts-new-light-on-rigged-1988-election.html>.

³³⁹ Martha Anaya, 1988, 17.

³⁴⁰ Preston and Dillon, *Opening Mexico*, 150.

³⁴¹ Eduardo Bermejo Mora, “La historia como legitimación del poder,” *El Día*, August 15, 1988, 5.

President Lázaro Cárdenas and his son Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' loss to Salinas in the questionable presidential election only weeks before. Televisa silenced (se calló) Cárdenas from *Senda* in its second broadcast without consultation with its producers or writers.

The term “mutilation” was used frequently to describe the cut, underscoring its severity.³⁴² The enormous popularity of *Senda de gloria* provided a weapon for attacking contemporary politicians of the PRI. Manuel Fortuna’s critique of press censorship under Carranza and Obregón in *Senda de gloria* became a critique of the censorship and silencing of the show by the PRI and Televisa. Not only did the press use the language of “mutilation,” so too did *Senda*’s producer Raúl Araiza.³⁴³ He publically repudiated the cut, asserting that the creators had nothing to do with the decision to truncate the telenovela. Instead, he argued that it all fell under the control of *Pablo García Sainz*. He termed it an act of barbarity without precedent that had eliminated not only four years of Cardenista history, but also the very inspiration for the series.³⁴⁴ When asked to comment on the connection between Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and the telenovela, Araiza opined that it seemed like silly and juvenile politics because the figure of Cárdenas would never disappear, because for the last fifty years he had been presented to

³⁴² See for example, Carlos Marín, “Cardenismo hoy, ni en telenovela: Los autores de ‘Senda de gloria’ repudian la mutilación de su obra,” *Proceso*, August 8, 1988; Macarena Quiroz, “Raúl Araiza Reprueba la Mutilación de la Telenovela Senda de Gloria,” *Excélsior*, August 10, 1988, 4B; Patricia Ávila Loya, “El Corte de Capítulos de Senda de Gloria, Ocasión Para Reclamar Cambios en la Obsoleta Ley del Derecho del Autor,” *El Financiero*, August 11, 1988, 62; “Infantilismo Político, la Mutilación de ‘Senda de Gloria,’ Dice Carlos E. Taboada: Desconocen Quien la Ordena, Arguyen en Televisa,” *El Heraldo*, August 11, 1988, 8. “Confeti,” *Tele Guía*, September 24-30, 1988.

³⁴³ Quiroz, “Raúl Araiza Reprueba.”

³⁴⁴ Marín, “Cardenismo hoy, ni en telenovela.”

Mexicans as the modern hero. It would require the elimination of many streets, monuments, busts, schools, and hospitals that had been named in his honor.³⁴⁵

Fausto Zerón Medina, the lead historian for *Senda de gloria*, also publicly opposed the censorship of the Cárdenas years. He publicized a letter sent by the Minister of the Interior to Televisa, which called for the elimination of scenes that did not "favor our historical knowledge and our pride in the institutions and men who constructed modern Mexico."³⁴⁶ Zerón Medina also sent letters to both the presidents of Televisa and IMSS, and these letters were reprinted in the popular weekly *Proceso*.³⁴⁷ In them he asserted that it was a grave act against freedom of expression and against his rights as an author of the series. He called for the culprit responsible to be named publicly, the motivations explained, and the omitted episodes aired. In another interview, Zerón Medina asserted that history could not simply be erased because it was the very root of contemporary Mexico and its collective identity.³⁴⁸

In an interview with the *New York Times*, Zerón Medina clearly noted the political weight of Cardenismo in the present: "Cárdenas the hero has become an inconvenience, and the system which contributed to the sculpting of his monument must now hide him."³⁴⁹

Zerón Medina's outrage contrasted strikingly with his previous comments about the relative freedom he enjoyed as a collaborator on the series.³⁵⁰ Interestingly, a sequel to

³⁴⁵ Quiroz, "Raúl Araiza Reprueba."

³⁴⁶ Larry Rohter, "That Was the Mexican Revolution That Was . . . or Was It? - New York Times," *New York Times*, August 14, 1988, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/14/world/that-was-the-mexican-revolution-that-was-or-was-it.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>.

³⁴⁷ Fausto Zerón Medina, "Cartas del Historiador a los Coprietarios de 'Senda de Gloria,'" *Proceso*, 1988.

³⁴⁸ "Infantilismo Político," *El Heraldo*.

³⁴⁹ Larry Rohter, "That Was the Mexican Revolution That Was . . . or Was It?"

³⁵⁰ Sonia Morales, "'No se recurrió a la historia oficial': el asesor histórico: Los héroes salen del mito para entrar a 'Senda de Gloria,'" *Proceso*, March 30, 1987.

Senda de gloria was initiated in 1991.³⁵¹ The series was to commence in 1938, where the first series ended and continue from the presidencies of Avila Camacho through to López Mateos. I have found no evidence that the series was ever actually carried through, perhaps because of competition from another historical telenovela project, *El vuelo del águila*. Neither Zerón Medina nor Raúl Araiza, the two most outspoken critics of the censorship, were asked to contribute to the ill-fated sequel of *Senda*, despite the fact that Araiza believed his criticism would not harm his long-standing relationship with Televisa.³⁵²

A number of well-known authors, including Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Raymundo Mier, David Martín del Campo, Carlos Puig, and Raúl Trejo Delarbre, also spoke out against the censorship and used the opportunity to bring attention to the obsolescence of the General Law of the Rights of Authors.³⁵³ These authors emphasized how the cut represented a lack of respect for intellectual work. Compared to those who asserted that this censorship was in contrast to an opening in the media, these authors reminded readers that such censorship was nothing new. In recent times there had been a number of attacks against the free expression of ideas that had affected works of art and theatre and resulted in a large number of assassinations of journalists.³⁵⁴ Evidently, contest over the right to freedom of expression was not resolved after Cárdenas.

³⁵¹ Héctor Rivera, “Vuelven las telenovelas históricas: Segunda parte de ‘Senda de Gloria’: de Avila Camacho a López Mateos, y el Porfirio Díaz de Enrique Krauze,” *Proceso*, August 6, 1991.

³⁵² Quiroz, “Raúl Araiza Reprueba.”

³⁵³ “El Corte de Capítulos,” *El Financiero*.

³⁵⁴ Lucinda Nava Alegria, “¿Reconversión histórica?” *El Universal*, August 3, 1988, 7; “La Senda de Televisa,” *Proceso*, August 8, 1988, 26.

On August 7, 1988, the news magazine *Unomásuno* printed a political cartoon to accompany an article on the cut. The drawing features a hazy image of Cárdenas, as if the television transmission has been interrupted by static. A small garbage pail with a television sitting lopsided in it sits in front of Cárdenas. The image is titled “Path of scum,” (*Senda de escoria*), a play on Path of Glory (*Senda de gloria*). The suggestion is that the transmission of Cárdenas, and his legacy, has been interrupted by Salinas: “the Path of Glory,” Cárdenas’ trajectory, has been replaced by Salinas’ “Path of Scum.”

The previously pursued path of social justice had shifted, at least rhetorically. In the context of the electoral fraud, the plot’s persistent references to the ideals of the Revolution serve to underscore the degree to which the PRI had really strayed from those ideals. The artist’s stylistic choice suggests a further commentary on the link between *Senda*’s historical subject and the election of Salinas. The blurring static lines are also reminiscent of etchings and engravings popularized in Mexican broadsheets by printmaker José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), and subsequently by the Taller de Gráfica Popular, which formed in late 1938.³⁵⁵ Posada’s prints contained satirical and biting commentary on Porfirian society, and his work was later hailed for inspiring the work of postrevolutionary artists. By referencing Posada, “Senda de escoria” links the political and economic courses of Salinas and Porfirio Díaz. It was a remarkably prescient commentary, given the sympathetic treatment of Porfirio Díaz in the next historical telenovela.

³⁵⁵ For more on Posada and the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), see Diane Miliotes, *Jose Guadalupe Posada and the Mexican Broadside*, Bilingual (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2006). Thank you to Anne Rubenstein for noting the image’s reference to radical folk art.

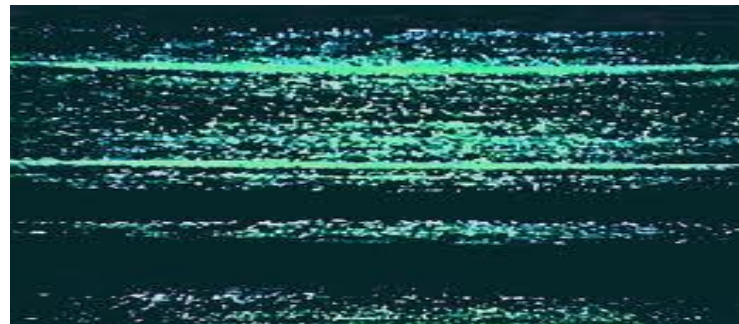


Figure 17
Above: “Senda de escoria,” *Unomasuno*, August 7, 1988, 24.³⁵⁶
Below: Image of television static

³⁵⁶ The image appears along with Jorge A. González, “Producción de telenovelas: melodramas organizados,” *unomásuno*, August 7, 1988, p. 24. He is also author of Jorge A. González, *La cofradía de las emociones (in)terminables: miradas sobre telenovelas en México* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1998).

If the Cárdenas years represented the most progressive gains of the Mexican Revolution, what might the curtailment of this period mean to modern viewers? The original *Senda* finale concludes with a sense of hope about the future of Mexico. The absence of such an ending reflects the disillusionment that many Mexicans felt with the PRI in throughout the 1980s, as the welfare of the majority of Mexicans declined with neoliberal cuts to social programs. The PRI managed to maintain control following the economic crisis of 1982 because of the absence of a strong opposition.³⁵⁷ However, the events of the 1988 presidential election revealed that this monopoly was shifting. The revision of history in the curtailment of *Senda de gloria* reflects an attempt to mitigate the backlash, though it did not alter the neoliberal course.

El vuelo del águila: Revising Díaz in the Age of Salinas

Like its predecessor, *El vuelo del águila* (Flight of the Eagle) was a superproduction. Months before the series aired it was already a topic of interest in the pages of newspapers across the country. According to one newspaper article, the series took almost five years to complete, and finally debuted on July 4, 1994, on Televisa's *Canal de las Estrellas*, during a primetime slot, Monday to Friday from 10 to 10:30 pm.³⁵⁸ Producer Ernesto Alonso – who collaborated on most of the previous historical

³⁵⁷ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 123; “Contesting Mexico,” 13.

³⁵⁸ Gloria Calzada, “Comentarios de...,” *El Informador*, June 26, 1994, 6. Without access to Televisa's archives, I cannot pinpoint the exact date that executives and writers initiated the project. Another article from July 1993 notes that filming was suspended in October of 1992 for production reasons and resumed two months later, in May of 1993. Edgar Betancourt Cárdenas, “Vuelve Beatriz a la vida,” *El Porvenir*, July 13, 1993, 4.

telenovelas – deemed the final product “a televisual mural of 83 years of Mexican history.”³⁵⁹ The series is a biographic telenovela about the life of one of Mexico’s most controversial figures: General Porfirio Díaz. He participated in the most significant battles in Mexico in the nineteenth century: he fought in the Mexican American War, joined Benito Juárez in his Liberal War of the Reform (1858-61), and became a hero in the French Intervention (1862-67), leading a cavalry charge at the Battle of Puebla on Cinco de Mayo (May 5, 1862). He eventually rebelled against Juárez in 1871 and then again against Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, who succeeded to the presidency after Juárez died in office in 1872. Díaz became president in 1876, and as promised he did not seek re-election in the following term; instead he selected a loyal and trustworthy successor. He won re-election in 1884 and abandoned his “no reelection” slogan altogether, remaining in power until overthrown by revolutionaries in 1911. Initially, he enjoyed widespread support, but it waned as his presidential terms accumulated, and the repercussions of his embrace of economic liberalization and modernity over land and labor rights were widely felt. These were precisely the policies that Salinas’ neoliberal agenda sought to reinstitute, and *El vuelo del águila* was part of a “romantic revisionism” intended to revise the historical memories of Mexican audiences, who had been taught to revile Díaz and his program.³⁶⁰

El vuelo del águila presents Díaz’s life in six parts: 1) Origin, 1830-1855; 2) War, 1855-1857; 3) Mission, 1867-1876; 4) Power, 1876-1900; 5) Collapse, 1900-1911; 6)

³⁵⁹ Hector Rivera J., “El vuelo del águila, sexta telenovela historical de Televisa, que crea una vicepresidencia sobre el genero para Ernesto Alonso,” *Proceso* No. 0924-36, July 18, 1994.

³⁶⁰ Alan Knight identifies *El vuelo* as part of a broader attempt to rehabilitate Díaz and the Porfiriato. Alan Knight, “Patterns and Prescriptions in Mexican Historiography,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25, no. 3 (2006): 347.

Exile (1911-1915). Staging a historical production of this duration was a massive undertaking. Approximately 900 actors and 5,000 extras participated, including acclaimed stars such as Patricia Reyes Espindola, Manuel Ojeda, and Salma Hayek.³⁶¹ Five hundred cavalry and infantry soldiers even worked alongside the actors.³⁶² The series was filmed on 461 sets and 150 different sites on location. Historical investigators consulted hundreds of books and documents in public and private archives, both in Mexico and abroad.³⁶³

This extravagance was not cheap. Again following the lead of *Senda, El vuelo* was one of the most expensive productions ever undertaken by Televisa.³⁶⁴ In fact, when Ernesto Alonso was asked if he believed Televisa would recuperate their investment, he responded: “It’s too much, I do not think it would be possible. In fact, the company does not care. We make these soaps out of love for the history of Mexico.”³⁶⁵ It is just as well that Televisa was motivated by “love for the history of Mexico” and not profit because they did not have a co-sponsor to share the enormous production costs. Though the series’ opening credits thank various government agencies including the Mexican Army, the National Railways of Mexico (Department of the Federal District), Ministry of the Navy, the state governments of Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, and Veracruz, the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA), the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), and the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA), this

³⁶¹ Juan Alvarado Gonzále “Se van ‘Dos Mujeres’ por ‘El vuelo del águila’” *El Porvenir*, July1, 1994, 4.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ Hector Rivera J., “El vuelo del águila, Sexta telenovela historical de Televisa, que crea una Vicepresidencia sobre el Genero para Ernesto Alonso,” *Proceso*, July 18, 1994.

³⁶⁴ Calzada, “Comentarios de...,” 6.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

support was likely in-kind in the form of permissions for on-location filming, expertise, and the use of historical costumes.

The production may not have generated significant revenues, but it did win industry praise. At the close of the year, it was nominated for five *TVyNovelas* (admittedly, a Televisa publication) awards in 1994 for the categories of Best Telenovela, Best Leading Actor, Best Leading Actress, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Music, and it won the latter three.³⁶⁶

In contrast to *Senda*, critics attacked not the telenovela's budget, but its representation of history. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the memory of Díaz's early popularity was eclipsed by the view of Díaz as a dictator, a man whose repression and cruelty left Mexico's popular classes with no recourse but to rise up in protest. At least this was the tale recounted by the PRI through much of the twentieth century, until it formed one of the foundations of the official history of the Mexican Revolution. This history was codified in the public imagination in formal and informal public education – in textbooks, comic books, and telenovelas – and did not change significantly until the 1990s.³⁶⁷

The contours of historiography of the Porfiriato parallel those of the Revolution because of their connection and perceived causality. In the first volume of *Historia moderna*, Cosío Villegas asserted continuity in the “constitutional relaxation” of Juárez, Lerdo de Tejada, and Díaz, and subsequent volumes treated the Porfiriato as distinct periods: a shaky first presidency (1877-1888), the presidency of Manuel Gonzalez

³⁶⁶ *TVyNovelas*, Telenovela awards, 1994.

³⁶⁷ For more on the changing representation of Porfirio Díaz in history textbooks, see Gilbert, “Rewriting History.”

(1880-1884), and the period from 1888 to 1910 as one of Díaz's absolute authority.³⁶⁸

After Cosío Villegas broke the "ideological barrier of 1910" by viewing the Porfiriato as more than simply the "repressive old regime," other historians also noted that his regime was undifferentiated and omnipotent.³⁶⁹ One relatively recent work by Patrick McNamara argues Díaz's rule in Oaxaca is best understood in three distinct stages: the first, 1876 to 1890, was characterized by a consensus forged between local elites, peasants and workers, and Díaz, when he fought alongside and developed personal relationships with campesino communities in Oaxaca during the Reform Wars and the French Intervention; in the second, beginning in 1890, a new generation of mestizo elites who had no direct memory of the civil wars took power, and as a result, they neither comprehended or respected Zapotec political culture; and third, by 1906 the earlier consensus had all but dissolved into three groups: hostile and incensed Serrano communities, an indifferent and out-of-touch Díaz, and greedy local power brokers.³⁷⁰

Particularly after the late 1960s, revisionist scholars emphasized continuity between the Porfiriato and the postrevolutionary period, particularly in their efforts to establish and maintain strong central governments. The regionalist trend also extended to studies of the Porfiriato, which even in name implied a singularity of experience that had been ignored previously.³⁷¹ In his 2006 assessment of patterns in Mexican historiography, Alan Knight notes an increase in economic histories of the Porfiriato. These histories moved beyond treating the Porfiriato as simply the dark period before the

³⁶⁸ Charles A. Hale, "The Liberal Impulse: Daniel Cosío Villegas and the *Historia Moderna de México*," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 3 (1974): 484.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 682.

³⁷⁰ McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra*.

³⁷¹ Benjamin and McNellie, *Other Mexicos*.

Revolution, instead taking it on its own terms. Like Knight, I regard this rehabilitation of Díaz as linked to the neoliberal turn and the delegitimation of the PRI.³⁷² Furthermore, it was the PRI's embrace of neoliberal policies that allowed professional historians' more revised view of the Porfiriato to be presented in a forum as public as a historical telenovela.

The historians responsible for this new representation are also noteworthy. Enrique Krauze joined Fausto Zerón Medina in leading the historical team for *El vuelo* and writing its historical script. As noted above, the two are both entrepreneurs and historians; Krauze in particular serves as an appropriate illustration of the shift in funding from the public to private sector attendant with neoliberal and austerity policies implemented after the 1982 peso crisis.³⁷³ Whilst the government cut university salaries, it also created a new system of evaluation that intensified the pressure to publish.³⁷⁴ Both the De la Madrid and Salinas administrations coupled their tight fiscal policies toward the universities with generous patronage of specific intellectual groups including *Vuelta* and *Nexos*, cultural and literary magazines – the former founded by Octavio Paz, and later directed by Krauze; and the latter directed by Héctor Aguilar Camín, who is discussed

³⁷² Knight, "Patterns and Prescriptions in Mexican Historiography," 347.

³⁷³ Krauze completed his doctorate in history at El Colegio de México under the guidance of eminent Mexican historian, Daniel Cosío Villegas. He has worked at Centro de Estudios Históricos at El Colegio de México, St. Antony's College at University of Oxford, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars DC. He has a long list of works to his credit; the most notable include Enrique Krauze, *Caudillos Culturales En La Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1976); Enrique Krauze, *Daniel Cosío Villegas: Una Biografía Intelectual* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1980); Enrique Krauze, *Por una democracia sin adjetivos* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1986); Enrique Krauze, *Siglo de caudillos: biografía política de México (1810-1910)* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1994); the series *Biografía del poder*, which was also published in English, and a television series, *México Siglo XX*. He is a member of both the Academia Mexicana de la Historia and El Colegio Nacional. He has also served as a board member for Televisa.

³⁷⁴ Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 219.

below. As the recipients of government contracts and subsidies, *Vuelta* and *Nexos* accumulated vast cultural power in the 1980s and 1990s.

While Zerón Medina was at work on *Senda de gloria*, Krauze preferred to focus on documentaries, eventually manifested as a series of documentary scripts and books. Indeed, the seeds of Krauze's historical empire lie in funding he received from the De la Madrid government to publish *Biografía del poder*, which drew intense criticism from other historians.³⁷⁵ In a caustic and public critique of the work and Krauze's career path, noted Mexican scholar Claudio Lomnitz charged that "Krauze's power was amassed in a moment in which the government turned its back on public education and research and subsidized a process of cultural privatization that had similar characteristics to other privatizations: enormous concentration of power in very few hands, and the formation of a new elite."³⁷⁶ Krauze views his own work as an engagement with public history, a legacy of his greatly admired mentor and doctoral advisor, Cosío Villegas, whose *Historia minima*, according to Krauze, is a "jewel of precision, clarity, simplicity, and readability" that was originally conceived as a television script not a book.³⁷⁷ However,

³⁷⁵ *Biografía del poder* was first published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica, one of Mexico's most prominent presses, founded by Daniel Cosío Villegas in 1934 and now government funded. It was later translated and published as Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power; A history of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, trans. Hank Heifetz (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1997).

³⁷⁶ Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 220. Lomnitz's critique was initially published as Claudio Lomnitz, "An Intellectual's Stock in the Factor of Mexico's Ruins (Mexico: Biography of Power by Enrique Krauze)," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 1052-65. It was subsequently translated into Spanish and published in the weekly newsmagazine, *Milenio*. Krauze responded and a debate ensued in *Milenio*'s pages throughout May 1998, with insults flung like "Krauze and his factory of history" and the "cardenazo in Chicago." The centrality of Krauze's identification as a public historian is evident in his response to Lomnitz, in which Krauze positioned Lomnitz's attack as an "intellectual" against a "public historian." Perhaps more damning, Krauze referred to him as "Mister Lomnitz," suggesting that Lomnitz had abandoned Mexico for academic positions in the US. Lomnitz's response and an opening reflection are published in *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 212-27.

³⁷⁷ Enrique Krauze, "Historia Para Todos," *Blog de La Redacción - Letras Libres*, September 19, 2011, <http://www.letraslibres.com/blogs/blog-de-la-redaccion/historia-para-todos>.

as Lomnitz astutely notes, Cosío Villegas's "factory of history," which produced the monumental *Historia moderna*, was built in a public institution in which scholars published books based on their own research, whereas Krauze's was built in the private sector and on the backs of teams of researchers who did not receive any credit.³⁷⁸ Interestingly, Krauze's publishing company Clío was born of a collaborative initiative begun in September 1911 with none other than the Televisa mogul, Emilio "el Tigre" Azcárraga Milmo.³⁷⁹ According to Krauze, the press's first objective was to publish illustrated volumes with contributions from recognized historians to accompany series produced by Ernesto Alonso and Fausto Zerón Medina, including *El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*. Over the following twenty years, the press published approximately 150 titles. In 1998, Krauze realized his dream of producing documentaries with the broadcast of Clío's first documentary series, *México: Siglo XX*, and thirteen years later, Clío has produced more than 350 documentaries.³⁸⁰ Photographs and documents Krauze and his team of researchers collected for *Biografía del poder* were repurposed repeatedly in Clío's documentaries and were also published in a series of illustrated books that accompanied the broadcast of *El vuelo del águila*. The six volumes correspond to the life stages covered in the telenovela, from the period of Díaz's birth to his death in 1915. Krauze and Zerón-Medina authored them, and Clío published them. They were designed for the mass public at a relatively economical 29 pesos per volume,

³⁷⁸ Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 220.

³⁷⁹ For more on Azcárraga's career and launch of Televisa into the largest media empire in the Spanish-speaking world, see Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, *El tigre: Emilio Azcárraga y su imperio Televisa* (México: Grijalbo, 2000).

³⁸⁰ Krauze, "Historia Para Todos," *Blog De La Redacción-Letras Libres*, September 19, 2011.

and later as a set for 109 new pesos.³⁸¹ The 80 page volumes are printed on thick colored paper and contain photographs, drawings, artwork, and primary documents from the period of study. Short textual blocks explain the images, but often the images are left to speak for themselves. The arrangement of these images, particularly those of period artifacts, has a referential effect, demonstrating to readers, “this is the way things were.”³⁸² In addition to their educational content – including back matter such as a timeline, bibliography, notes on images, and archives consulted – all of the volumes also include twenty-six pages of advertisements for contemporary products that are presented in Porfirian style. The Victoria beer ad, for example, features a dapper man in suit and tails holding a beer stein alongside the slogan, “Hoy como siempre...” (Today as always).³⁸³ Even the ads create a link between the Porfirian past and the Salinas present.

Rumor has it that Krauze purchased many of the rights to the photographs from the national archives at a time when they could be purchased for only a few pesos each. Likewise, it is also rumored that Krauze’s team copied so many documents at the national newspaper archive, la Hemeroteca Nacional, that the archive changed its policy and required researchers to pay much higher fees for copying and reproduction. In doing so, Krauze amassed a private archive, whilst making research less accessible to other scholars. Evidently, his embrace of the spirit of capitalism made him an appropriate

³⁸¹ Alfonso Mendiola and Guillermo Zermeño, “El Impacto de Los Medios de Comunicación En El Discurso de La Historia,” *L’Ordinaire Latinoamericaine* 1, no. 159 (1995): 70.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ Enrique Krauze and Fausto Zerón-Medina, *Porfirio* (Mexico City: Editorial Clío, 1994), 83.

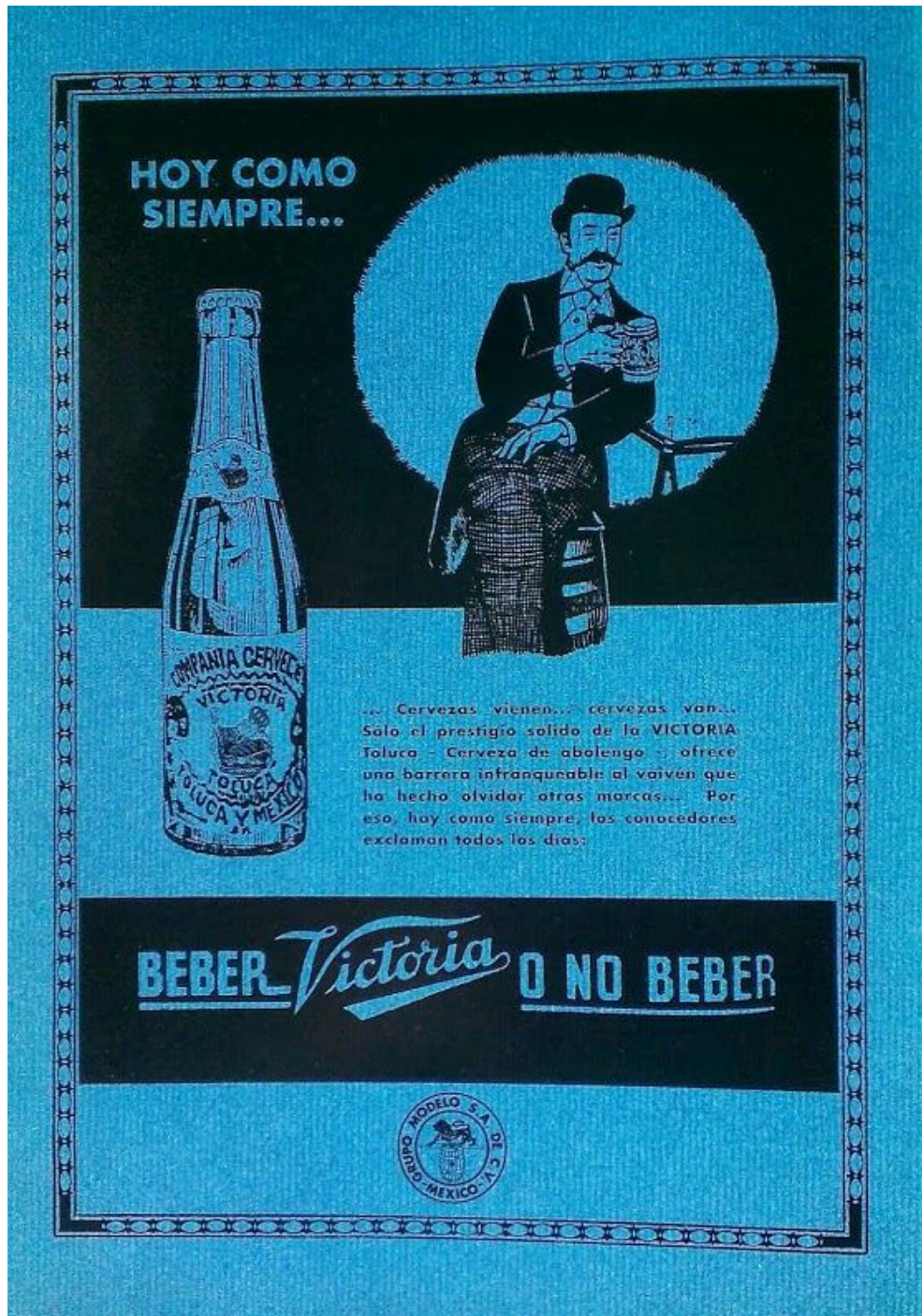


Figure 18
Advertisement for Victoria Beer in *Porfirio*, p. 83.

choice to undertake a rehabilitation of Díaz during the nation's transition to a neoliberal economy.³⁸⁴

El vuelo was not the first artifact of neoliberal revisionism, however. Historical revisionism already underway within the academy began to reach popular audiences with a textbook revision in 1992. At that time SEP minister Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, aided by President Salinas, undertook a revision of the free and mandatory history texts for grades four, five, and six. They personally selected to coordinate the revisions Hector Águilar Camín and Enrique Florescano, both prominent Mexican historians who were accused of being supportive of the administration.³⁸⁵ Both served as directors of *Nexos*, an influential literary and cultural magazine that came under scrutiny for receiving generous contracts and subsidies from the De la Madrid and Salinas governments.³⁸⁶ Águilar Camín's early work on the Sonoran dynasty, the succession of presidents that dominated Mexican politics between 1920 and 1934, argued that the unique regional history of Sonora favored pragmatic politics over the democratic development.³⁸⁷ Florescano's work spans the colonial and modern period, though it does not directly treat the Revolution. Nevertheless, he has been influential as a leading figure at El Colegio de México. In addition to these two noted professional historians, both Zedillo and Salinas

³⁸⁴ Enrique Florescano and Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Historiadores de Mexico en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1995), 532.

³⁸⁵ In February 2001 evidence surfaced that Águilar Camín received major financial kick-backs from Salinas. Miguel Badillo, "Favoreció Salinas a Aguilar Camín," *El Universal*, February 9, 2001, <http://www2.eluniversal.com.mx/pls/impreso/noticia.html?id_nota=47393&tabla=nacion>. Águilar Camín termed allegations that he had any kind of partnership with Salinas "puras fantasías."

Ivonne Sánchez, "Héctor Aguilar Camín, inventar la realidad," *Radio France Internationale*, March 13, 2009, <http://www.rfi.fr/actues/articles/111/article_11153.asp>.

³⁸⁶ Lomnitz, "An Intellectual's Stock."

³⁸⁷ See for example Hector Aguilar Camín, *La frontera nómada, Sonora y la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1977) and "The Relevant Tradition: Sonoran Leaders in the Revolution," in *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution*, D. A. Brading, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 92-123.

even read the manuscript and selected the cover image. As had each of the previous major revisions of textbooks, the 1992 texts engendered enormous controversy and public outcry and this time it was because they emphasized Díaz's economic achievements, rather than his dictatorial nature.³⁸⁸

If the 1992 texts sought to redress the imbalanced representation of Díaz that had been circulated since the Revolution by including the growth of railways and communication systems, *El vuelo* was downright sympathetic and eulogistic. It was a strikingly different representation of Díaz, and one that was, judging by the textbook controversies, rather risky. Yet the resulting program actually provoked less public ire than the textbooks had only two years earlier. How? By humanizing the demon of turn-of-the-century Mexico. Fortunately for the proponents of neoliberalism, Televisa executives already had discovered the secret of historical revisionism in the fiasco of *Carlota y Maximiliano*, which humanized the pair, turning the national hero Benito Juárez into the villain. With *El vuelo*, Televisa once again used the power of television to shape popular opinion. Of course, audiences did not simply swallow this historical representation neatly packaged as melodrama. As the second section demonstrates, in the context of NAFTA and the Zapatista uprising, history – revised or not – remained highly contentious in the mid-1990s as critics and viewers responded to what they perceived as

³⁸⁸For an analysis of the 1992 controversy and the changing representation of Diaz in the context of the free textbook policy and previous controversies, see Gilbert, "Rewriting History: Salinas, Zedillo and the 1992 Textbook Controversy"; See Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "The Riddle of a Common History: The United States in Mexican Textbook Controversies," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 1 (Spring 2009): 93–116 for a discussion of the changing representation of the US in Mexican history textbooks. In order to illustrate the heated public nature of this debate, I counted at least twenty-five articles that at least mentioned the 1992 textbook controversy in the weekly newsmagazine *Proceso*.

historical inaccuracies and a group of concerned citizens in Tehuantepec protested the representation of women from their community.

Humanizing Díaz in *El vuelo el Águila*

Early on in its experiment with historical telenovelas, Televisa learned the power and potential peril of humanizing historical figures; with *Carlota and Maximiliano* the accidental effect had been to villainize Juárez. For *El vuelo*, Televisa wielded the strategy to recuperate a former villain. The series encompasses the entire lifespan of Díaz (1830–1915), and so doing, asks viewers to reconsider Díaz as he was before he became dictator. Díaz is most humane in the early episodes of the series, particularly with his mother, his first wife, and his children. The series opens with the cries of his mother, Petrona, giving birth. Upon learning that they have their first son, the proud father grants his own name as well as the name of his saint day, José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz Mori. Porfirio's father dies from cholera when he is just a toddler, leaving his mother with five small children to raise. Marked by the stigma of the father's death by cholera, his mother Petrona laments, "How sad is to be without name," a foreboding commentary on Díaz's future infamy. Soldiers tie her up and pull her through the street to humiliate her. Nevertheless she is strong and resourceful and keeps her family together by raising animals and selling tapestries. Petrona holds a special place in Porfirio's esteem: her strength, determination, principles, and love earn Porfirio's respect, and viewers see in him a devoted son who learns these traits from his mother.

When a lover encourages him to visit his mother in her old age, Porfirio gruffly answers that she will live forever, though a tear betrays his true concern. This was certainly not the image of Díaz portrayed by the ruling party for much of the twentieth century.

The Porfirio of *El vuelo* is also tender and protective of his older sisters, particularly Manuela, who at a very young age became pregnant with his niece, Delfina. Porfirio promises that he will always support and protect Delfina, foreshadowing how he eventually marries her. Viewers see a captivating and mischievous, but talented, young Porfirio, already charming the local girls and getting into trouble with his school and seminary friends. As he grows older his political views start to develop: he is influenced by his work with liberal judge Marcos Pérez, and later Benito Juárez. It is Porfirio's brother who enrolls in the Military College; Porfirio does not attend so that he can take care of his family. Nevertheless, he goes on to have an extensive and decorated military career. In the many battles staged for *El vuelo*, viewers witness Díaz's bravery and prowess. Initially, he identifies as a military man, not a politician, even declining a political post from Juárez. When asked to make a speech at a social function, Díaz responds, "I don't know how to speak in public, that's not what military men do." Even when he earns a post in the Camera de Diputados, he bemoans moving to the capital. Together these scenes paint a portrait of Díaz as a practical man of action and man of the people.

Of course, he does become a politician, and though he always relishes his return visits to Oaxaca, he grows accustomed to life in Mexico City and eventually to his power as president. As his years as president accumulate, viewers see Díaz become increasingly

power-obsessed, suspicious, and ultimately reprehensible. Because his character is developed over such a long duration, Díaz is presented not as innately evil, but rather as an initially honorable man corrupted by power. Even when he wields near absolute power, he remains a loving husband, father, and grandfather. By the time he is defeated and forced to leave Mexico, he is a man of eighty-one, heavily afflicted by rheumatism and Parkinson's disease, and visibly distraught at leaving his oldest daughter behind. *El vuelo* concludes with Díaz's death, surrounded by his wife, children, and grandchildren. Moments before he dies, scenes from his life paint the picture of a man's strengths and weaknesses, his great love for his family, his unwavering commitment to his principles, his embrace of progress and modernization, and finally his abuse of power. Thus, the concluding use of flashbacks, pioneered in *Senda de Gloria*, visually weigh the costs and benefits of Díaz's long life, clearly suggesting to viewers a favorable balance.

The premise that Díaz, the man and the politician, changed over time was a necessary addition to the PRI's narrative of Díaz as the villain of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that the characterization of Díaz in Mexico shifted in the early 1990s.³⁸⁹ As discussed earlier in the chapter, Salinas' support for trade and economic liberalization and privatization challenged two of the most cherished ideals of the Revolution: the redistribution of land and the nationalization of resources and industry (both of which were championed by Cárdenas). The parallels between Salinas and Díaz are illustrated in the following piece by cartoonists El Fisgon y Helguera: A tiny Salinas peers at the top half of Porfirio Díaz as reflected in his mirror. The size

³⁸⁹ Though the official narrative of Díaz ought to be revised, this assertion should not be read as a negation of the brutality and dire consequences for many, particularly peasants, in Mexico in the latter part of his reign.



Figure 19
Cover of *El sexenio me da risa: la historieta no oficial*.³⁹⁰

differential might suggest the relative power each president possesses. An older Díaz is pictured, drawing the comparison to Salinas with the Díaz at the height of his power and its abuse. At this point, Díaz had been in power for several terms and open elections were not permitted. Díaz's reign of power stands in contrast to the PRI, who at this point, had been in power for sixty-five years; and as was demonstrated earlier in the chapter, Salinas's own presidency was deemed the most fraudulent election in PRI history.

³⁹⁰ El Fisgón and Helguera, *El sexenio me da risa: la historieta no oficial* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1994), cover.

Nevertheless, he successfully asserted his authority, and achieved apparent economic progress that won him popularity among wide segments of the lower classes, thereby winning back many of those critics. Salinas illustrated his divestment of revolutionary rhetoric and his investment in neoliberal policies by negotiating and ultimately signing NAFTA. Most contentious of the NAFTA changes was Salinas' revision of Constitution Article 27, which eliminated collective land holdings (*ejidos*). Given this context, many viewers identified *El vuelo del águila* as an attempt to recuperate Díaz and his embrace of foreign investment, free trade, and economic modernization.

Emilio Azcarraga Milmo demanded that all aspects of *El vuelo*'s production be kept absolutely secret. No doubt, he was aware of the polemical nature of the series and likely recalled the political significance of careful timing in the broadcast of such programs, as had been proven by the debacle over *Senda de gloria* in the wake of the 1988 election. In the end, the timing of the series was fraught with political significance – some intended and others unforeseen. The super-production was scheduled to debut in January 1994, which would also coincide with the implementation of North American Free Trade Agreement and the lead up to the presidential election, to be held in July of 1994.

Because the telenovela was postponed, it actually aired close to the next presidential election in July of 1994, which further underscored the lack of democracy and political opposition. Columnist Juan Sánchez García noted the irony of Díaz's belief that Mexico was ready for democracy, as noted in he claimed in his 1908 interview with James Creelman, the telenovela's reiteration of the ruling party's claim that they had pursued

the social justice aims of the Revolution, and the simultaneous timing of *El vuelo* and a presidential election no one expected to be democratic.³⁹¹ Democracy still eluded the nation eight decades after Díaz declared Mexico ready. It was also interesting timing as no other historical telenovelas had been produced and broadcast in the intervening *sexenio* (six-year presidential term).

The neoliberal revision of Mexican history did not go unchallenged. On January 1, not only did NAFTA go into effect, but 3000 members of the Zapatista Liberation Army (EZLN) occupied six large towns and hundreds of ranches in an armed uprising. In response to the implementation of NAFTA and decades of abusive policies, a primarily indigenous movement emerged in the southern state of Chiapas that held widespread support in much of the rest of the country. Once again, the political context of the day threatened to disrupt the carefully crafted historical and political messages in a historical telenovela. The debut of *El vuelo*, originally scheduled to air in February, was quickly postponed.³⁹² According to articles that appeared in the Monterrey-based newspaper, *El Porvenir*, the order to postpone the broadcast came from very high up.³⁹³ One of the writers speculated: “I’m not talking about Emilio Azcarraga, rather a person who had real power and who viewed ‘the tiger’ as simply a cat,” implying the order came from the president himself. If this journalist was correct, why would the president fear the impact of *El vuelo*? The article’s explanation was echoed in other national

³⁹¹ Juan Sánchez García, “El Vuelo del Aguila,” July 8, 1994, 7. For Creel’s interview with Díaz, see James Creelman, “President Díaz: Hero of the Americas,” *Pearson’s Magazine* 19 no. 3 (March 1908), 237. <http://www.emersonkent.com/historic_documents/creelman_interview_1908_original_07.htm>

³⁹² Elia Marinez Rodarte, “Será Don Porfirio carta fuerte,” *El Porvenir*, December 25, 1993, 4.

³⁹³ Grassilina Almendros, “Cancelan emisión de Porfirio,” *El Porvenir*, January 22, 1994, 6; “Murmulllos,” *El Porvenir*, July 27, 1994, 7.

newspapers: the series contained several scenes of the Revolution that might swell support for the Zapatistas. The characterization of the Revolution as *el pueblo*'s struggle for social equality, and its subsequent institutionalization as the PRI, had been reiterated so frequently that it produced a powerful language with which to make political demands. The scenes of the Revolution in *El vuelo*, and even earlier in *Senda*, juxtaposed with the demands for social justice and equality by the EZLN underscored the fraudulence of the PRI.

Like its predecessors, *El vuelo del águila* also generated public critique. Articles from the major newspapers reveal that audiences made the connections between NAFTA and the telenovela, and many were not pleased. Prominent Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman argued in an article in *Proceso* that *El vuelo* responded to commercial interests, not cultural ones, and that it committed historical felonies by linking together events that were unrelated.³⁹⁴ In addition to O'Gorman, other viewers noted that the series misrepresented rural campesinos by presenting them in clean garb, in modest but clean dwellings, thus creating "Potemkin villages" that were worthy of Porfirian efforts to present a more modern and sanitized image of Mexico.

The most significant of these critiques arose from the gendering of the series, and the portrayal of one woman in particular, played by Salma Hayek: Juana Catarina Romero, an exceptional woman from Tehuantepec, a small town in southern Oaxaca. When she first met Díaz in 1858 she was an illiterate cigarette vendor, and she went on to become a merchant and sugar refiner, and eventually "the most powerful economic and

³⁹⁴ Ana Cecilia Terrazas, "Mas comercio que cultura: para Edmundo O'Gorman, *El vuelo del águila* niega hasta en detalle a la historia de Mexico," *Proceso*, July 18, 1994.

political force on the Isthmus.”³⁹⁵ *El vuelo*’s sexualized representation of Isthmeñas drew criticism; as one columnist declared: “No woman in the previous century, even the brazen and aristocratic *Güera Rodríguez* dared go swimming in a pool with a man, show him her legs, or look him head-on, least of all a mestiza Oaxacan.”³⁹⁶

El vuelo del águila’s stereotypical portrayal of the peoples of Oaxaca and Chiapas, and in particular the representation of women in those regions, generated protest in Tehuantepec. In Tehuantepec, a region noted for its political autonomy and militant municipal authorities, concerned citizens wrote a letter to Televisa to express their outrage at the offensive representation of Tehuantepec women, and of women of the Isthmus more generally.³⁹⁷ Cultural promoter and *cronista* Cesar Rojas Petriz personally delivered the letter to Televisa and copied it to other media outlets. The letter was subsequently published in the local journal, *Dáani Beedxe*, in order to keep the community informed about the protest. The letter outlined five critiques of *El vuelo*; some take issue with representation, while others identify historical inaccuracies. In addition to their view that the representation of Isthmus women was insulting, the community was particularly upset about the sexualization of Juana Catarina Romero.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Francie R. Chassen-López, “Distorting the Picture: Gender, Ethnicity, and Desire in a Mexican Telenovela (*El vuelo del águila*),” *Journal of Women’s History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 107.

³⁹⁶ Luz Ma. Silva, “El Mexico del TLC: Los pobres de Chiapas y los de Televisa.” *El Economista*, July 15, 1994, 10.

³⁹⁷ There is a long list of signatories. The first several include: Ing. Venustiano Gutiérrez Reyna, Presidente Municipal Constitucional; Profr. Gerardo Molina Sánchez, Regidor de Hacienda; César Rojas Pétriz, Cronista de la ciudad; Dr. Gustavo Toledo Morales, Coordinador del Taller de zapoteco “Fray Juan de Córdoba”; Profr. Mario Mecott Francisco, Círculo Literario “Cedo ‘Guie’”; Profr. Melesio Ortega Martínez, Investigador Histórico; Lic. Jorge Rodríguez Ortiz, Investigador de la tradición oral. For more on the political history of the region, see Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997); Howard Campbell, *Zapotec Renaissance: Ethnic Politics and Cultural Revivalism in Southern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

³⁹⁸ Juana Catarina Romero is alternatively referred to as Juana Cata and Juana Catalina Romero.

According to Rojas Petriz, Romero was such a remarkable woman in the history of the region and the nation as a whole that she deserved her own telenovela.³⁹⁹

El vuelo presents Romero, played by Salma Hayek, as “an indigenous woman, exotic, sexually aggressive, yet childlike,” who quickly seduces Díaz and effectively erases the role she played as a businesswoman and entrepreneur.⁴⁰⁰ As historian Francie Chassen-Lopez notes, the telenovela reduces Romero to Díaz’s sexual dalliance and erases her pivotal role in Isthmus and national history.⁴⁰¹ To be sure, the exoticization and sexualization of Isthmeñas dates back to the sixteenth century, contributing to a myth of “wild women” and “amazons” that has perpetuated throughout Mexico for centuries. In neoliberal Mexico, *El vuelo* perpetuated the containment of gender, class, racial, and ethnic agency.⁴⁰² For example, in the telenovela, Romero has been transformed from a cigarette vendor into a ribbon vendor. Selling cigarettes gained Romero access to the barracks of both the Liberals and the Conservatives, whereas in the telenovela she simply peddled the ribbons in the town plaza. During the Wars of the Reforma, Romero risked her life to spy for the Liberals, and access to the barracks helped facilitate her spying. Though she played a important role in several victories, the telenovela reduces her work as a Liberal spy to mere gossip.

The sexualization of Romero is evident from the first moment that telenovela-Díaz lays eyes on her and is immediately captivated. Aware of his attraction to her, she boldly approaches him and seductively wraps a ribbon around his neck. Díaz is left

³⁹⁹ César Rojas Pétriz, interview by author, Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico, August 15, 2011.

⁴⁰⁰ Francie R. Chassen-López, “Distorting the Picture.” 108.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 108–9.

speechless and simply watches as she walks away, after which his *compañero* warns him about strong Isthmeña women. Later she steals into his room, undresses and climbs into bed with Díaz. Not only is she sexually confident, she is also opinionated and vocal. Though the romance between the two important figures is not a fabrication of the telenovela, the Tehuantepec letter reminds readers and viewers that although local and national legend has linked the two romantically, no documentary evidence exists to verify that Juana Catarina Romero ever had a relationship with Díaz.

Romero was not the only sexualized woman of the Isthmus presented in the series. Petrona, a fictional Juchitecan character, offers Díaz her “confidential services,”



Figure 20
Salma Hayek as Juana Cata in *El vuelo del águila*, 1994

which are both sexual and political. Anxiety about the notion of women's power and agency was instead projected onto notions of hypersexuality.

The letter from the Tehuantepec community also took issue with the representation of the relationship between Juchitán and Tehuantepec, two neighboring Zapoteca towns. The telenovela portrays an antagonistic relationship between the two towns, which does have historical merit, but the letter asserts that all of the most important social changes brought about on the Isthmus were "headed by a Tehuantepec and a Juchiteca, united by the same ideals."⁴⁰³ Finally, the letter also outlines two additional inaccuracies. First, the telenovela represents Tehuantepec women's dress inaccurately. The creators failed to recognize that women's dress in the Isthmus has evolved through several stages and the version depicted in the telenovela did not exist in 1858 when Díaz was in Tehuantepec. Finally, the capture of Oaxaca on August of 1860 was carried out by Tehuantepec General Cristóbal Salinas and not by Díaz, as depicted in the telenovela. Errors such as these are not only historical distortions, but omit Isthemena heroes from the nation's historical narrative.

Though the letter commends producer Ernesto Alonso for his commitment to historical telenovelas, which rescue historical events and bring them into the homes of Mexicans, it also asserts the primacy of historical accuracy. The letter urges the telenovela's collaborators to review the historical documentation that underpins the telenovela, including consideration of all aspects of the historical period, the locations, the dress, the music, etc, and not to fabricate fictional alternatives. Following a list of

⁴⁰³ "La Historia no Debe Distorcionarse: ¡Las mujeres de Tehuantepec y del Istmo merecen respecto de todos!" in *Dáani Beedxe*, 13 (Sept-Oct 1994), p. 18-20.

fifteen signatures, the letter concludes with the message, “Respecting the rights of others is peace,” effectively making the Tehuantepec letter not simply a response from a small community, but asserts its significance as a matter of their human rights.

What is interesting is that the concerned citizens of Tehuantepec did not place the sexualization of Tehuantepec women in *El vuelo* within a longer history of representing Tehuantepec women, and Zapotecs more generally, as exotic, indigenous others.⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, sexualized images of Tehuantepec women recurred in muralist depictions of the 1920s by Diego Rivera among others. According to signatory Rojas Petríz, the community’s concern was aimed directly at *El vuelo* and its creators, and their objective was to elicit an apology from Televisa. In these terms they were ultimately successful.

Their protest gained such public traction that Televisa was forced to respond. On March 13, 1994, well-known television anchorman and commentator Jacobo Zabludovsky interviewed Krauze on his popular television show, *La hora*. When asked if he had any critiques of his work, Krauze answered that it would be the sin he committed against the figure of Juana Catalina Romero. Krauze went on to recognize that contrary to the image of Romero as simply a love interest of Díaz, she was in fact an extraordinary figure in the region’s history. Though he failed to recognize her importance in nation building more generally, he did offer a “disculpa amplia para el pueblo de Tehuantepec.”⁴⁰⁵ The transcript of this apology was published in *Dáani Beedxe* in the local newspaper, *Sol del Istmo*, under the title, “Enrique Krauze se

⁴⁰⁴ For an excellent analysis of the misrepresentation of Romero as emblematic of the representation of women and indigenous people in Mexican history, as well as a reconstruction of Romero's actual role in history, see Chassen-López, “Distorting the Picture.”

⁴⁰⁵ “Enrique Krauze se disculpa ante el Pueblo de Tehuantepec: Entrevista en el noticiero ‘24 Horas’ de Televisa,” *Dáani Beedxe*, 13 (Sept-Oct 1994) 19.

disculpa ante el Pueblo de Tehautepec.” Krauze also telephoned Rojas Petriz to personally apologize. The recording of this conversation was subsequently aired on Rojas Petriz’s local radio news program, “Analizemos un tema.” Ultimately, the community was satisfied with Krauze’s apology. In journalism, there is a rule that corrections must be made on the same page that the error appeared.⁴⁰⁶ It was appropriate, then, that Krauze and Televisa apologized on national television.

Despite their best forecasts, studies and intentions, neither Televisa executives nor government officials could predict or control the ways in which audiences employed the historical telenovelas to make sense of the changing political and economic context of Mexico in the neoliberal turn. It is unclear if *El vuelo* had any impact on the way Mexicans understood the neoliberal changes underfoot in the late twentieth century. There is evidence to suggest that the series did pique a general interest in Díaz: used bookstore owners I interviewed in Mexico City noted an increase in interest in works about Díaz when *El vuelo* aired. Certainly, a measured and more balanced analysis of Díaz was long overdue. Nevertheless, his utility as a historical scapegoat for all of the nation’s social ills was no longer viable as PRI presidents embraced economic liberalization and shunned political liberalization remarkably parallel to Díaz.

Conclusion

This chapter spans nearly a decade of intense change and crisis in Mexican social, political, and economic life, and the production and broadcast of two historical telenovela

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Rojas Petriz.

super-productions, *Senda de gloria* (1987) and *El vuelo del águila* (1994). *Senda's* laudatory portrayal of a unified Revolutionary family belied fracturing within the PRI family as a result of their shift from a corporatist to a neoliberal model, the attendant rise in power of technocrats in the party, and the decline of the PRI old guard. As with chapter two's discussion of the SEP, analysis of IMSS here underscores the ways in which the state was not a monolith with uniform objectives. IMSS's decision to collaborate on historical telenovelas was motivated by the opportunity to educate viewers on worker safety and to remind them of IMSS's Revolutionary lineage, in contrast to the SEP's desire to promote literacy and the habit of reading. Though they had different objectives, personal relationships (between Sainz and Aleman Velsco and Barros and Taibo II) may have been influential, and both projects demonstrate a belief in historical edutainment as a way to reach mass audiences.

Senda's triumphant nationalist narrative won the hearts of viewers and confirmed that fictional families were a staple formula for edutainment success. Despite this success, however, the debacle over the second broadcast of *Senda* demonstrated that even a well-received historical telenovela could be turned on its head by political context. Televisa executives heeded this lesson when they elected to postpone the debut of *El vuelo* to avoid connections made between the Zapatista uprising and Díaz's abysmal record with the nation's indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, some viewers responded to one of the most radical historical revisions of official Mexican history with protest. Many viewed the parallels between Porfirio Díaz and neoliberal policies under Salinas and resisted Televisa's attempts to harness the power of television and history to shape

popular opinion about the present. *El vuelo*'s portrayal of Díaz as a young, tender, family man represents the most striking example of how neoliberalism altered national historical narratives.

After collaborating with IMSS on three historical telenovelas (*La tormenta*, *Los caudillos*, and *Senda de gloria*), Televisa made the final two series (*El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*) without government co-sponsorship. Perhaps IMSS came under fire for the debacle following the elimination of Cárdenas from *Senda*; perhaps they were criticized for their large financial contribution to a television program when their health care programs were suffering; or perhaps they fell victim to the intense cuts made to social programs with neoliberal austerity measures. Whatever their reasons, the funding of the historical telenovelas reflects a transition in cultural funding, not a complete privatization per se, as the state did not shift all responsibility for the cultural field to the private sector, but rather concentrated subsidies and contracts within a select group of "intellectual 'stars.'"⁴⁰⁷ The career of Enrique Krauze, historical advisor and scriptwriter of *El vuelo* provides a window onto this concentration of power within the cultural field that followed cuts to public education in the wake of the 1982 economic crisis. Chapter four continues this discussion with an analysis of Televisa's withdrawal from cultural funding, particularly the production of historical telenovelas.

⁴⁰⁷ Claudio Lomnitz, "Narrating the Neoliberal Moment: History, Journalism, Historicity," *Public Culture* 20, no. 1 (December 21, 2008): 45, 55.

Chapter Four
***La antorcha encendida*: Legitimacy, Democracy, and Multicultural Neoliberalism in
Remembering the Wars of Independence**

Introduction

“Teresa, you and I are not from the same world, but I am going to work very hard, and one day I am going to marry you,” declares Mariano Foncerrada to Teresa de Muniz in *La antorcha encendida* (*The Lit Torch*).⁴⁰⁸ However profound their love might have been, the young lovers face repeated obstacles because of their class differences: Teresa is born into a respectable Spanish family, while Mariano is an illegitimate child. The arduous path of their relationship and the trials of the Foncerrada family – Mariano’s family of five illegitimate brothers and their adoptive peasant mother – are the series’ narrative anchors. The historical backdrop to this love story is the epic tale of the struggle for Mexican Independence, spanning from 1785 to 1821. After three hundred years of inequality and exploitation as a Spanish colony, a desire for independence is nascent, and this desire unites Mariano and Teresa, beyond their mutual love for each other. The forces of reaction are embodied in Pedro de Soto, a patriarch and *hacendado* who stands in the way both of Mexico’s freedom and of Mariano and Teresa’s union. In typical melodramatic fashion, Teresa and Mariano are not able to marry until the final moments of the telenovela when Mexican independence has been won. The couple and their fellow insurgents successfully demonstrate that all Americanos are legitimate

⁴⁰⁸ *La antorcha encendida*, DVD, directed by Gonzalo Martínez Ortega and Claudio Reyes (1996; Mexico City: Televisa, 2005)..

citizens of the new nation; this theme of legitimacy also underscores political changes underway in the 1990s, when *La antorcha* was produced and aired on Televisa.

Like *El vuelo del águila* and *Senda de gloria*, the two historical telenovelas that preceded it, *La antorcha* was a super-production replete with an enormous cast of megastars and legions of extras used to stage the period's bloody battles, an extensive wardrobe, filming on location in different regions, including Michoacán, Querétaro and Guanajuato. To ensure the meticulous historical accuracy, Televisa established a dedicated unit called the Asesoría Histórica, under the direction of veteran historical consultant Fausto Zeron-Medina.⁴⁰⁹ Together with screenwriters such as Marcela Fuentes Berain, the Asesoría continued the edutainment learning curve of using historical telenovelas to popularize national history while shaping contemporary politics. Thus, *La antorcha* benefitted from the successes (and failures) of its predecessors, by balancing fact and fiction and placing an archetypal family at the center of the plot as in *La tormenta* and *Senda de gloria*. Televisa's historical-telenovela team was careful to ensure that the series was not too stuffy; initially the series was titled "Los insurgentes," but the creators feared it sounded too didactic.⁴¹⁰ In this context, "didactic" seems to have implied that the term "Insurgents" had been used in countless propagandistic references, from textbooks to street signs. Instead, they sought a more original title

⁴⁰⁹ "Ernesto Alonso Enciende la 'Antorcha' de los insurgentes." *El Porvenir*, 12 Feb. 1995, p. 11. See chapter 3 for more on Zeron-Medina, particularly his critique of the censorship of Cárdenas in the re-broadcast of *Senda de Gloria*.

⁴¹⁰ "A punto de encender la 'Antorcha,'" *El Porvenir*, May 1, 1996, 4; "Será una dama curiosa," *El Porvenir*, November 19, 1993, 6; "Ernesto Alonso Enciende la 'Antorcha' de los insurgentes," *El Porvenir*, 12 Feb. 1995, p. 11.

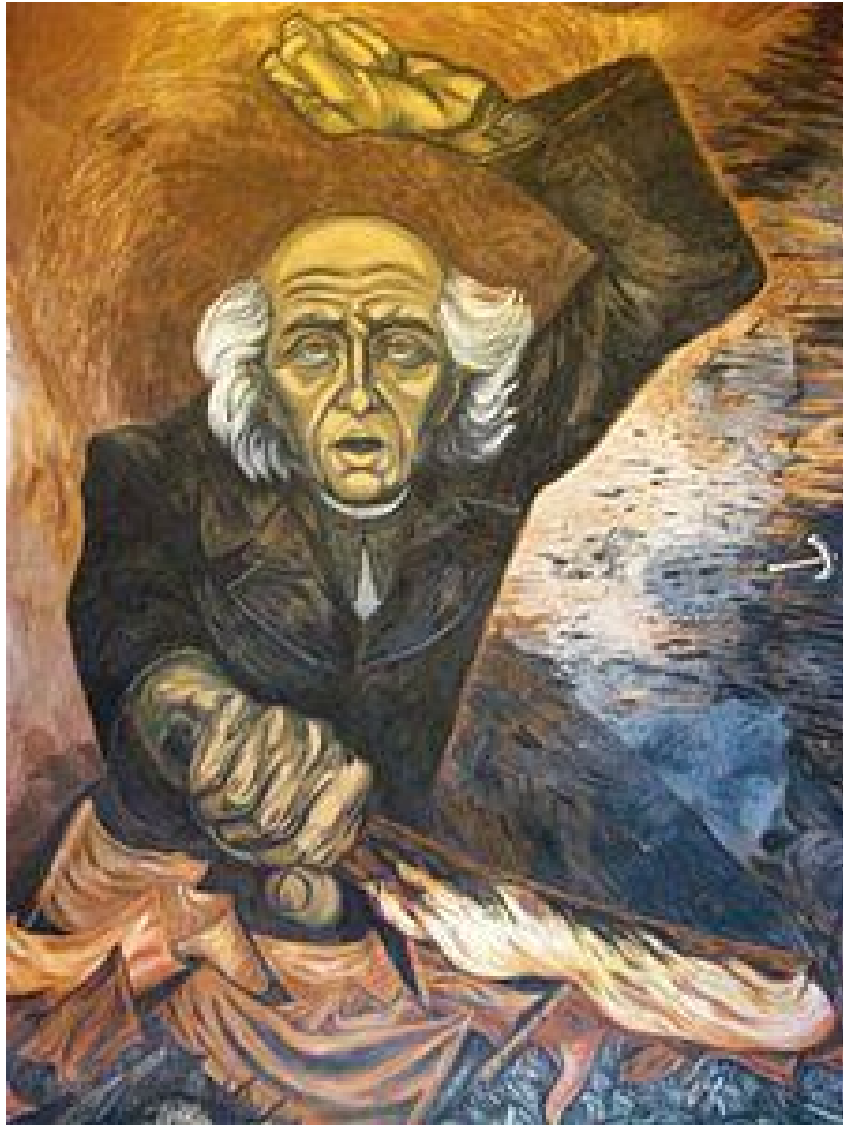


Figure 21
Mural of Hidalgo by José Clemente Orozco, Palacio del Gobierno, Guadalajara

drawing inspiration from a mural painted by José Clemente Orozco (Figure 21) in the Government Palace in Guadalajara, Jalisco. In Orozco's mural, a massive Hidalgo rises above a sea of undifferentiated peasants, one arm raised in a fist and the other brandishing a lit torch that illuminates the masses below. With deft references such as

this one, the team provided a fresh look at a well-trodden but crucial epoch in Mexican history.

As the re-broadcast of *Senda de gloria* during the disputed 1988 election demonstrated, contemporary politics could disrupt a series' intended message. *La antorcha*'s producer Ernesto Alonso recognized a parallel between the mid-1990s, with its currency crisis and Zapatista rebellion, and the difficult times in New Spain at the end of the eighteenth century, which sparked the wars for independence. "As it happens," Alonso stated, "we are experiencing difficult times like those who lived in the early stage of formation of the nation. . ." Nevertheless, he insisted "one thing has nothing to do with the other."⁴¹¹ Perhaps he denied any connection between the two periods because he wanted to avert debate over the legacies of colonialism at a time when the government was trying to encourage foreign investment, including the sale of Mexican banks to Spanish rivals. Whatever the reason, Alonso's comment was far more astute than he was willing to admit, and it hints at the neoliberal transitions that would make this the last historical telenovela to date.

While *La antorcha* was winning over viewers during its primetime, weekday slot, a battle for a different kind of independence was being fought against PRI hegemony and for democracy and social rights for indigenous communities. In order to certify the results of the 1988 election and to pass neoliberal reforms, the PRI was forced to make democratic concessions that would enable meaningful independence from the party's monopoly on federal politics. In a bid to further repair their political legitimacy, they also

⁴¹¹ "A punto de encender la 'Antorcha,'" *El Porvenir*, 1 May 1996, p. 4.

embraced the contemporary discourse of multiculturalism and declared Mexico a pluricultural nation.

The independence movement's struggle to assert that the legitimate heirs to the culture, history, and land of Mexico were not only the Spanish-born *peninsulares* also resonates with the political context of the 1990s, a time in which Mexicans were increasingly questioning the PRI as the legitimate heirs to the Revolution and demand for the recognition of Indigenous rights, multiculturalism, and ethnic plurality was more widespread. This embrace of pluralism must be understood as an articulation of multicultural neoliberalism, which emphasized autonomy and rights in a manner that did not make demands on a welfare state.

Getting it Right

For *La antorcha*, Televisa created a special department called the Asesoría Histórica to oversee all historical aspects of the series. An undergraduate thesis, written by Claudia Ferreira Ascencio, a student who interned for the department, provides beneficial insight into how the team conceptualized historical accuracy.⁴¹² One of the primary responsibilities of the team was to educate personnel working on all aspects of the series, starting with a course on the history of Mexican independence. The team also trained the producers, writers, and crew in the historical specificities of the Independence period so that everyone was equipped to make choices appropriate to the era. To further

⁴¹² Claudia Ferreira Ascencio, "Memoria Profesional: Telenovelas Historicias" (unpublished tesis de licenciado, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998). Ferreira Ascencio has since completed a PhD in History at El Colegio de México.

this aim, the team sourced artwork for the make-up, hair, scenery, and costume departments to provide them with visual references. The team also aimed to demonstrate accuracy across the temporal span of the series. For example, hairstyles changed between 1785 and 1809, shifting from long to short hair. In *La antorcha*, viewers see this trend taken up first by the insurgents and then later by the general population, so that the adoption of the trend is staggered and more believable. Similar transitions are apparent in clerical habits and hair, and lay clothing styles for both women and men, which the historical team designated as either fin de siècle or Imperial. As has been discussed throughout this dissertation, getting appearances right was crucial to the acceptance of a narrative as historically correct.

The Asesoría Histórica also worked with the scenery department to ensure that filming both on set and on location (205 studio sets and 150 sets on location) was attentive to the smallest historical details: no street names, electrical cables, or posters were to appear in the outdoor shots, and the buildings needed to reflect the appropriate level of upkeep, neither renovated nor too deteriorated.⁴¹³ The props department was even schooled on the texture and color of paper from the period. The team took extra care with iconic scenes that viewers would immediately identify or recall reading about in textbooks, again trying to achieve a balance between what viewers expected to see and what limited remaining evidence indicated. During preproduction and taping, representatives from the Secretary of National Defense also assisted by supervising the representation of military uniforms and the use of flags for both royalists and the insurgents, by verifying that the various types of armaments were used correctly, and by

⁴¹³ Ibid., 61.

supervising the taping of military-related and battle scenes.⁴¹⁴ Taken as a whole, the details outlined in Ferreira Ascencio's thesis suggest that the Asesoría Histórica located historical accuracy in the most minute of details.

In contrast to Orozco's heroic portrayal of Hidalgo, which inspired the telenovela's title, the creators of *La antorcha* sought to present the heroes of the Independence of Mexico as complex humans with faults as well as merits, to divest them of their stuffiness. This approach not only made these historical heroes more interesting, it had the added benefit of shifting some focus away from the "great men" narrative to the experiences of ordinary people. The producer, Ernesto Alonso, commented: "Our central interest from the start was not to make a didactic novela that conformed to the history that we have been told in books, but to attempt to show the human side of these characters, so that people understand why Independence came and what initiated this important historical period."⁴¹⁵ It was not an easy task, admitted Alonso. "They are not heroes of marble and stone, but people whose trajectories brought them to this heroic dimension."⁴¹⁶ For this reason, audiences witness Hidalgo's (supposedly) less pious side, drinking *charandas* (cane liquor), playing *mus* (card game) and dominos, and cheering on cock fights. Nevertheless, this expose of Hidalgo's vices fell short of mentioning his sexual affairs, perhaps recognizing the limits that the public would accept in revising

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 74–5.

⁴¹⁵ "Nuestro interés se centró desde el primer momento no en hacer una novela didáctica que se ajustara a la historia que se nos cuenta en los libros, sino en procurar mostrar el lado humano de los personajes, y que se entienda por qué vino la Independencia y cómo se gestó esa importante etapa de la historia." "A punto de encender la 'Antorcha,'" p. 4.

⁴¹⁶ "Los personajes ficticios transmiten mayor el context político y social": Marcela Fuentes, coguionista de "La antorcha encendidos" by Rosario Manzanos, *Proceso*, No. 1062-31, 10 March 1997

iconic figures.⁴¹⁷ At the same time, telenovela writers faced the challenge of capturing the different personalities of a cast of historical and fictional characters. For example, Hidalgo was more socially outgoing, while Morelos (whose illegitimate child was featured) was disciplined and introverted. These differences made it difficult to get the audience excited about Morelos, when he could frequently be eclipsed by Hidalgo.

The thirty-six year scope of the telenovela also required that the writers employ fiction to bridge the narrative holes that occurred when characters died. It also allowed the writers to ensure that the series delivered enough melodrama to keep audiences engaged. After all, to overplay the didactic dimension “would be suicide. They’d change the channel and rightly so; after work who wants to turn on the television to be told ‘sit down because you’re an ass and you know nothing.’”⁴¹⁸ Interestingly, the production team believed that a didactic approach was insulting to viewers, rather than the assumption that historical information had to be tempered with melodrama. In the end, just over half the characters were fictitious: of approximately 227 characters in total, 92 were historical.⁴¹⁹ *La antorcha*’s writers ultimately employed the same formula used for *La Tormenta* and *Senda de gloria*: a fictitious family anchored the narrative and interacted with historical figures. Perhaps, to avoid the scandals generated by *Senda* in 1988 or *El Vuelo* in 1994, the debacles freshest in the minds of *La antorcha*’s creators,

⁴¹⁷ Interestingly Hidalgo’s sexual affairs were featured in the bicentennial blockbuster, *Hidalgo*. The film was released during a PAN presidency, which may explain this historical opening. *Hidalgo: la historia jamás contada*, DVD, directed by Antonio Serrano (Mexico City: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment Mexico, 2010).

⁴¹⁸ “...eso seria suicida. Te cambian el canal y con toda la razon: despues de trabajar quien quiere prender la televeision para que le digan ‘sientate porque eres un burro y no sabes nada.’” Rosario Manzanos, “‘Los personajes ficticios transmiten mayor el context politico y social’: Marcela Fuentes, coguionist a ‘La antorcha encendida,’” *Proceso*, No. 1062-31, 10 March 1997.

⁴¹⁹ Claudia Ferreira Ascencio, “Memoria Professional: Telenovelas Historicias,” 48.

Emilio Azcárraga demanded that the entire series be edited before it went to air.⁴²⁰

Ultimately, the project was a success. The romantic liaisons between the fictitious characters captured audience interest, and the representation of historical figures did not offend historians, at least not enough to provoke public ire to the extent that earlier telenovelas had.

Legitimacy in Colonial Historiography, *La antorcha encendida*, and the Mid- to Late 1990s

“Filthy sin! My God, what shame!” bellows Don Irigoyen to his daughter, Catalina, who lies at his feet sobbing and begging for forgiveness; but he will not hear it and instead banishes her.⁴²¹ What elicits this father’s dramatic outburst? Catalina is pregnant out of wedlock. Thus opens *La antorcha encendida*, and this exchange immediately establishes the centrality of legitimacy in the series. In classic melodramatic, moralistic fate, Catalina pays for her indiscretion with her life. In a decision he will regret for the rest of his life, Don Irigoyen orders his driver to remove Catalina from the hacienda immediately. In the darkness of the night, the driver does not notice when turbulence throws Catalina from the carriage, leaving her injured and dying in a remote rural area. A poor campesino couple finds her, helps her deliver the baby, and then solicits the assistance of Padre Julian to administer last rites when it is clear that she is about to die. He immediately recognizes her as the daughter of the wealthy and prominent hacendado, Don Irigoyen. When he hears her confession, she confides that the

⁴²⁰ Juan Alvarado González, “Ofelia Guilmain, Ella sí es primera actriz,” *El Porvenir*, March 10, 1996, 4.

⁴²¹ “Sucio pecado. Dios mío. ¡Que vergüenza!”

baby's father is the powerful and tyrannical hacendado, Pedro de Soto. Before Catalina dies she names the baby Mariano (so that the Virgin might protect him) and swears Padre Julian to secrecy about the baby's paternity. Padre Julian delivers the tiny orphan to Juana Foncerrada, an indigenous woman who already has four adopted sons. Meanwhile, the wife of Mariano's biological father learns about her husband's indiscretion and worries that the mistress' child will be born before she can have her own. Her mother-in-law chides her, reminding her that only the child she carries will be the legitimate heir, this other child will be a bastard. This distain is a common refrain throughout *La antorcha*, with several characters referring to the adopted Foncerrada brothers as *bastardos*.

La antorcha encendida's focus on illegitimate children, defined as those conceived out-of-wedlock, is appropriate to the colonial and Independence periods and reflects anxieties about the maintenance of gendered and racialized norms of honor, heightened by challenges to colonial authority in the late-eighteenth century. Social histories of women and the family flourished between the 1970s and 1990s. Interestingly, study of the family was significantly more established among Latin American scholars than was women's or gender history, which received equal attention from US scholars.⁴²² These social histories illuminated everyday experiences of gender, status, race, and ethnicity, which were often omitted by previous works that focused on exceptional male figures within the elite.

⁴²² Silvia Marina Arrom, "Historia de La Mujer y de La Familia Latinoamericanas," *Historia Mexicana* (1992): 379. This focus on women's and family history was part of a broader scholarly trend. See for example Leonore Davidoff, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

By the early to mid-1990s, social historians had examined several issues of potential interest to the creators of *La antorcha encendida*: notions of honor, legitimacy, and female sexuality. Familial honor was linked to regulation of female sexuality and could be blighted by feminine indiscretion and adultery.⁴²³ Not surprisingly, there was a double standard within colonial social codes that disproportionately punished women for failing to control their sexuality. Men enjoyed a certain degree of liberty as long as their relations were with single women.⁴²⁴ That is not to suggest that honor was punished uniformly for all women who transgressed these social modes. Rather it was more of an “elastic commodity,” wherein “honor might be maintained or restored with good investments.”⁴²⁵

The ability to restore familial honor depended on the class, marital, and religious status of the parents. Illegitimate children born to unwed parents, called *hijos naturales*, were legitimized once the parents married. *Espurios* or *bastardos*, in contrast, were born of adulterous or incestuous relationships or where one parent had taken a religious vow.⁴²⁶ The *Siete Partidas*, which defined normative law, relieved fathers of obligation to support this second category of illegitimate; this was believed justifiable since women who bore bastards were considered sexually out of control.⁴²⁷ This assumption was

⁴²³ Pilar Gonzalbo, *Familia y orden colonial* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1998), 49–75.

⁴²⁴ María Jesús Rodríguez, “La mujer y la familia en la sociedad mexicana,” in *Presencia y transparencia: la mujer en la historia de México*, ed. Carmen Ramos-Escandón (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1987), 23.

⁴²⁵ Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 65.

⁴²⁶ Pilar Gonzalbo, *Historia de la familia* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Instituto Mora, 1993), 22.

⁴²⁷ Asunción Lavrín and Ann Twinam, eds., “Introducción,” in *Sexualidad y matrimonio en la América hispánica: siglos XVI-XVIII* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes - Grijalbo, 1991), 5.

rooted in the difficulty of establishing paternity when women had multiple partners. The surest way to maintain honor in these cases was by keeping the pregnancy private, so it was only an option for elite women who could afford the time and expense.⁴²⁸ The hierarchy of honor discriminated against those of darker skin and the lower classes.

During the Bourbon reforms, increasingly complex racial mixing and the high numbers of illegitimate children, “irregular” partnerships, and abandoned children were viewed as symptoms of the disorder and corruption of the late colonial period. The work of social historians in the 1980s and 1990s indicates that, despite this perception, the proportion of illegitimates actually declined.⁴²⁹ One of the most prolific of these historians was Pilar Gonzalbo, whose quantitative study of illegitimacy according to parish records indicates that 50 percent of the children were Spanish, 26 percent were mestizo, 17 percent were indigenous, and the remainders were mulattos and not identified.⁴³⁰ Investigation of foundling homes revealed that children of mixed race (*castas*) were abandoned for different reasons than their Spanish counterparts. The former were sent to such houses because they were orphans, because of an ill mother, or poverty, while Spanish children were abandoned to maintain family honor.⁴³¹ If the

⁴²⁸ This notion of “private pregnancy” is derived from the work of Ann Twinam, whose translated work would have been available to historians working on *La antorcha*. Ann Twinam, “Honor, sexualidad y ilegitimidad en América Latina durante la colonia,” in *Sexualidad y matrimonio en la América hispánica: siglos XVI-XVIII*, ed. Asunción Lavrín (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes - Grijalbo, 1991), 118–155; Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets*, 66–73.

⁴²⁹ Gonzalbo, *Familia y orden colonial*, 223–4, 227, 230; 229; Claude Morin, “Los libros parroquiales como fuente para la historia demográfica y social novohispana,” *Historia Mexicana* 21, no. 3 (1972): 389–418.

⁴³⁰ Interestingly, there was a notable absence of black Mexicans. Gonzalbo, *Familia y orden colonial*, 234.

⁴³¹ Felipe Arturo Ávila Espinosa, “Los niños abandonados en la Casa de Niños Expósitos de la ciudad de México,” in *La Familia en el Mundo Iberoamericano*, ed. Pilar Gonzalbo and Cecilia Andrea Rabell (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994), 278; Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, “La Casa de Niños Expósitos de La Ciudad de México: Una Fundación Del Siglo XVII,” *Historia Mexicana* 31, no. 3 (1982): 409–430.

pregnancies were private, some of those children were in turn “adopted” within the family’s “private circle,” including one of the parents or married relatives.⁴³²

Children were also abandoned because honor was understood as a condition passed down to children from their parents; therefore, the stain of their mothers’ indiscretions passed on to their offspring.⁴³³ Furthermore, there was a mutually reinforcing notion that spurious children had a negative influence upon their mothers and their mothers upon the children. As a result, illegitimate children were sometimes forcibly removed from their homes and put in orphanages. In other instances, mothers were not coerced into giving up their children; rather they willingly gave up their children because of poverty or the fear of social stigma. Illegitimate children circulated informally within households and formally within institutions such as the state and church. Children abandoned to foundling homes suffered particularly high mortality rates, while other illegitimate children became an important source of labor in a period of high labor demand.⁴³⁴ Children’s experiences of illegitimacy were profoundly influenced by the nature of the family into which they were born.

The Foncerrada brothers, Luis, Juan, Diego, Lorenzo, and Mariano, are spared the hardships of cruel foundling homes or forced labor, and are instead adopted by the saintly Doña Juana de Foncerrada, played by Patricia Reyes Spíndola.⁴³⁵ Though *La antorcha*’s writing team claimed they were determined to move beyond historical archetypes in their

⁴³² Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets*, 178–181.

⁴³³ Twinam, “Honor, sexualidad y ilegitimidad en América Latina durante la colonia,” 125.

⁴³⁴ Ávila Espinosa, “Los niños abandonados en la Casa de Niños Expósitos de la ciudad de México,” 300–305.

⁴³⁵ Recall that Patricia Reyes Spíndola also played Porfirio Díaz’s mother in *El vuelo del águila*. See chapter three for more details.

character development, their depiction of Juana de Foncerrada as a metaphoric mother of the patria was entirely archetypal.⁴³⁶ Screenwriter Fuentes-Berain described Juana as “a dark woman like those that appear in primary school books, a simple country woman who collects abandoned children.”⁴³⁷

Juana is not any simple campesina, however; she is an embodiment of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the ideal Mexican woman par excellence. Octavio Paz’s characterization of the Virgin as a provider of “refuge for the unfortunate” and the “Mother of orphans” is also a fitting description of Juana.⁴³⁸ The image of her below, joyously accepting the baby Mariano from Padre Julian, echoes this sentiment as well as paintings of the Virgin Mother and child (see figure 22).



Figure 22
Juana de Foncerrada in *La antorcha encendida*, 1996

⁴³⁶ Rosario Manzanos, “Los personajes ficticios transmiten mayor el context político y social”: Marcela Fuentes, coguionista de ‘La antorcha encendida,’” *Proceso*, No. 1062-31, 10 March 1997.

⁴³⁷ “...una mujer morena parecida a la que aprecia en los libros de la primaria, una mujer de campo sencilla que recoge niños abandonados.” “Los personajes ficticios transmiten mayor el context político y social.”

⁴³⁸ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 85.

Furthermore, since Juana is left childless as a young widow, the possibility of Juana's virginity is left open. She devotes her life to raising her five adopted boys. She teaches them to write by dictating prayers, requires them to do work on the hacienda in order to learn humility, and emphasizes Catholic morality, even when it means having to punish them.

La antorcha's writers may have intended for Juana to represent a simple campesina woman, at least financially, but she does not appear that way early in the telenovela. She owns and runs Hacienda Foncerrada with the help of several servants and workers. Later in the series her hacienda is taken from her by the sinister Pedro de Soto, and she is forced to go live with her sister in Mexico City. In general, as was the case in *El vuelo del aguila*, poverty is whitewashed with immaculately clean, new clothing on most of the campesino characters. This also suggestively demarcates the Mexican pueblo as virtuous and the Spanish colonial government as tyrannical.

While Juana represents the purity and virtue of the Virgin, the boys' biological mothers are marked by the stain of their indiscretions. They bear the stigma of the whore of Mexican history, la Malinche. In contrast to the mass veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Malinche is remembered by many as the medium of conquest, "the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition."⁴³⁹ La Malinche, like the Virgin of Guadalupe, is directly linked to the establishment of national identity in Mexico, albeit in expressly negative terms. In *La antorcha encendida*, Mariano and the other creole brother, Luis, are both the result of illegitimate unions between wealthy women from prominent families and Pedro de Soto. Mariano's birthmother dies in an accident as she is being

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 86.

banished from her house. Luis's mother maintains her honor, perhaps because she was able to keep her pregnancy private. She does not reveal her identity until Luis is an adult. Even decades later, she is unable to cope with the disclosure of his birthright, so she bribes him to keep silent. She is emotionally haunted by her illegitimate son, and eventually suffers an early death at the hands of that son's biological father.

As the plot unravels, viewers learn that the single mulatto brother, Lorenzo, was given up because of poverty. His mother was a prostitute from Veracruz, a coastal city with a large Afro-Mexican population. The mother's race is ambiguous, though she appears mestizo; nothing is ever said of the father who was certainly of African heritage. The morally tainted mother, known only as Sonia, achieves redemption when she joins the fight for independence. Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, known as La Corregidora, takes Sonia under her wing and finds her reputable, gender-appropriate work as a seamstress. Through her contacts with the Independence conspirators, Sonia is able to locate and eventually establish a relationship with her son Lorenzo. Sonia's redemption suggested that there was room for the underclasses, provided they embraced the Independence ideals. With the exception of Sonia, the mothers of the illegitimate children pay for their indiscretions – with insanity and death.

When Padre Julian asks Juana de Foncerrada to adopt the newborn Mariano, she responds emotionally, “with all my heart I will, as I received the four other boys. With this I have five boys and they are all my sons and they will grow up as brothers.” It is not until the five brothers – Juan, Lorenzo, Diego, Luis, and Mariano (see Figure 23) – engage with the outside world, particularly as adults, that the stigma they bear as a result



Figure 23
The five Foncerrada brothers as adults in *La antorcha encendida*;
Top – Juan (indigenous), Lorenzo (mulatto); Middle – Diego (mestizo);
Bottom – Luis (creole), and Mariano (creole)

of their illegitimate births is revealed. On Hacienda Foncerrada, they are shielded from judgment and ridicule. Nevertheless, Juana cannot shelter them from the highly classed society of the colonial period, where “honor was the key to political authority.”⁴⁴⁰

Illegitimate children were prohibited from becoming doctors, lawyers, or priests, and it was not until after 1784 that they were permitted to enter the crafts and trades.⁴⁴¹

Mariano faces this obstacle when he attempts to enter the priesthood and is denied. For most of the brothers, transcendence of the stigma of disreputable birth was the result of hard work, commitment to the Independence struggle, and servitude to the Catholic Church. This emphasis on Catholicism is interesting politically, since restrictions on the Church were being relaxed in the 1990s.

Though the Foncerrada brothers transcend the stain of illegitimacy, as they face trials throughout the series each realizes the distinct privileges and disadvantages of his race. The racial variety of the brothers – two creoles, a mulatto, an indigenous, and a mestizo – underscores the racial nature of legitimacy and honor. When their mother’s hacienda is threatened, for example, Mariano is able to secure a loan, but his brother Juan cannot. Angry and frustrated with the circumstances, he confronts Mariano:

Juan: The color of your skin, of your eyes, and of your hair. Look at me! Look at my color! What color is my skin?

Mariano: So what. You and I are brothers.

⁴⁴⁰ Sueann Caulfield, Sarah C. Chambers, and Lara Putnam, eds., “Introduction: Transformations in Honor, Status, and Law over the Long Nineteenth Century,” in *Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

⁴⁴¹ Nara Milanich, “Historical Perspectives on Illegitimacy and Illegitimates in Latin America,” in *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society*, ed. Tobias Hecht (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 76.

Juan: No, no we are not brothers. We were raised as brothers, which is very different. I am an *indio* and you are not.

Mariano: What is going on, Juan?

Juan: Every day I hate the *guachupines* more, and I am fed up with the injustices they commit and I worry about my mother. She has taken care of and worked her lands all her life. Why is she losing it? Why?

As the brothers attempt to protect their mother and save her hacienda, racial discrimination is addressed explicitly. Lorenzo, the mulatto brother, goes to find work to support his mother, “in the only place where blacks and *indios* can find work”: in the mines. Ultimately, the boys’ efforts are not sufficient and Juana is forced to abandon her hacienda and move in with her sister in Mexico City.

La antorcha encendida’s focus on parentage and illegitimate children is not only historically appropriate, it is also a common feature of contemporary commercial telenovelas. As noted in the introduction, in the well-worn melodramatic formula for telenovelas the leading pair fall in love quickly, relatively early in the plot. Certainly Mariano’s youthful pledge to Teresa, cited in the opening paragraph of this chapter, demonstrates fidelity to the formula. By identifying the two lovers early in the plot, audiences recognize who will end up together; intrigue is based on how the couple will overcome the obstacles they face from the story’s antagonists. The stain of illegitimacy generates the class difference necessary to challenge the marriage of protagonists, whilst leaving open the possibility of unknown family wealth that could nullify class difference. Though birthright in the colonial period was a pillar of authority and power, it still had to be publicly recognized. This meant that there was a degree of fluidity to the system of

honor: it was “subject to negotiation.”⁴⁴² This negotiation followed both formal and informal courses, via options such as passing and *gracias al sacar*, the legal purchase of whiteness. Considerable social mobility was available for a price, and perhaps this is why Señora de Soto was so concerned about her husband’s child with another woman. After all, both the child’s biological mother and father were wealthy and powerful *peninsulares*, so financial means were not a barrier.

What is remarkable about *La antorcha*, then, is not the family of bastard brothers at the center of the plot, but their racial diversity. Juana’s pride in her racially diverse sons represents a counter to anxieties about racial mixing and miscegenation in the colonial period as well as it reflects official state rhetoric about the pluricultural nature of Mexico that surfaced in the 1990s. Just as the Virgin of Guadalupe is considered to be a symbolic mother of *mestizaje*, Juana serves as a mother of multiculturalism. As if she were appealing to viewers to honor the common bonds of nationalism, she urges the boys to always be united and to watch out for each other. She vows to treat each of the boys equally. The multi-racial make-up of the Focerrada family, and Juana’s emphasis on equality, reflect changing notions of race in Mexican identity circulating in Mexico in the 1990s.

First, it is important to note that while *La antorcha* can be read as an articulation of the new official discourse of multiculturalism, the telenovela itself rarely addresses race directly, and even in its indirect treatment, racial equality is highly idealized. Juana raises the five boys as equals and the brothers, in turn, are blind to the racial differences imposed by the *casta* system. Juan’s outburst noted above is an exception, though it

⁴⁴² Twinam, “Honor, sexualidad y ilegitimidad en América Latina durante la colonia,” 125.

comes when the boys are adults. One of the few recognitions of racial difference that *La antorcha encendida* registers is the mulatto character, Lorenzo. When the family struggles to save their farm, the brothers seek employment. Lorenzo is the only brother who is forced to work in the mines. It is there that he encounters the series' other mulatto and black characters.

While mining would certainly have been considered appropriate employment for a mulatto man of the period, the Foncerrada family's model of racial harmony was not. This anachronism, I argue, is the result of the writers reading the ideals of the post-Revolutionary period and then multiculturalism onto the struggle for independence. Though Morelos called for the equality of all, the abolition of slavery and the erasure of caste distinctions, "that the only distinction between one American and another shall be between vice and virtue," it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that the country embraced, at least superficially, the notion of a racially harmonious Mexican family through *mestizaje*.⁴⁴³

From Mestizaje to Multiculturalism

Following the 1910 Revolution, the state, intellectuals, artists, and authors declared Mexico a mestizo nation in an attempt to unify a fractured and heterogeneous population. Jose Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica*, along with the works of Andrés Molina Enríquez, Alfonso Caso, and Manuel Gamio, established a national identity based on the

⁴⁴³ José María Morelos, "Sentiments of the Nation," in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 190.

valorization of the mestizo. Mestizaje held the promise of not only homogenizing the diverse population, but also harmonizing a nation born of conquest. Though they celebrated the indigenous past, they encouraged contemporary indigenous peoples to abandon their tradition, and instead urged them incorporate into the mestizo mainstream. Modernity was viewed as a panacea for the nation's troubles.

Indigenista scholars celebrated the mestizo to the exclusion of cultural diversity and supported the extension of the state into the countryside, thereby extending its authority. Under Cárdenas, *indigenismo* shifted. Indigenous peoples themselves employed official language to make demands on the state, to talk back. Later iterations of *indigenismo* recognized the present as an important moment of indigenous consciousness, not just the past.⁴⁴⁴ Additionally, despite academic historians – most notably Aguirre Beltrán in his 1946 work *La población negra de México*, noting the contributions of Afro-Mexicans, mestizaje remained the dominant ideal of mexicanness.⁴⁴⁵

Multiculturalism's emergence as a discourse of recognition in the 1980s and 1990s challenged notions of national unity and assimilation. Multiculturalism has a distinct meaning in Mexico, and Latin America more generally, than it does elsewhere. For example, in Canada, where multiculturalism was adopted as official policy in the 1970s and 1980s, it claimed to promote and preserve cultural diversity within a shared

⁴⁴⁴ See for example Luis Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1950).

⁴⁴⁵ Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: estudio etnohistórico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946).

and unified national identity.⁴⁴⁶ In Mexico, the legacy of indigenismo influenced understandings of multiculturalism, steering it away from cultural multiplicity to an embrace of the indigenous roots of all Mexicans (“deep Mexico”).⁴⁴⁷ Therefore, in Mexico as elsewhere in Latin America, multiculturalism is a recognition of indigenous difference. With the exception of the Programa Universitario México Nación Multicultural (University Program Mexico Multicultural Nation) at the UNAM, which conducts and promotes research on the study of multiculturalism and liaises between academics and civil society to foster greater intercultural communication, I have seen few uses of the term “multicultural” in Spanish-language media or academic work.⁴⁴⁸ Instead, the term “pluricultural” is used, most notably in the 1992 constitutional amendment that redefined Mexico as a pluricultural nation. In Mexico, it disrupted the centrality of mestizaje in Mexican identity, while it also fit within a tradition of attempts to bring indigenous peoples back into the national community, particularly different iterations of indigenismo starting in the 1920s.

This section explores the intersections between the crisis of Mexican identity that occurred simultaneously with the crisis of political power that the PRI faced in the 1990s.⁴⁴⁹ In *Mexico, from Mestizo to Multicultural: National Identity and Recent Representations of the Conquest*, Carrie Chorba argues that it was this “moment of

⁴⁴⁶ For an excellent, though dated, critique of multiculturalism in Canada, see Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2000).

⁴⁴⁷ Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez, *Folkloric Poverty: Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), 17.

⁴⁴⁸ For more on the UNAM’s Programa Universitario México Nación Multicultural, see their website <<http://www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx>>. Accessed July 4, 2012.

⁴⁴⁹ See chapter 3 for details on the 1985 earthquake, the electoral fraud in 1988, and the economic crises of the period.

weakened nationalism” that “spurred Mexican intellectuals to rewrite themselves as a nation,” by transitioning from mestizaje to multiculturalism.⁴⁵⁰ This shift is germane to my argument, though I do not agree with Chorba’s assertion that multiculturalism was the project solely of intellectuals. In the following discussion, I note the role of indigenous groups, state actors, and intellectuals and recognize the extent to which these categories intersect. In Mexico, where mestizaje was tied directly to revolutionary nationalism, and therefore political and cultural legitimacy, the transition from mestizaje to multiculturalism had distinct ramifications, although similar transitions occurred across the Americas.

In the 1990s indigenous peoples in Mexico and across the continent gained considerable momentum in their fight for representation and rights: the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the first international legal instrument to define the rights of indigenous peoples, was signed by ten Latin American nations, including Mexico in September 1990; and in 1992 Guatemalan indigenous activist Rigoberta Menchú Tum won the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1982 Spain commenced long-term planning for massive quincentenary celebrations to mark the five hundred year anniversary of Columbus’ 1492 voyage and sparked global debate. In particular, it catalyzed indigenous organization across the Americas. Mobilized around the quincentenary, the indigenous movement launched “500 Years of Resistance” not only to protest the celebrations, but also to bring public and political attention to the economic and social injustices they still endured.

⁴⁵⁰ Chorba, *Mexico, from Mestizo to Multicultural*, 5.

In Mexico, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's 1987 *Mexico profundo* was significantly influential on the growing indigenous movement in Mexico.⁴⁵¹ He argued that there were two Mexicos: a deep Mexico deeply rooted in indigenous civilization that was the true heart of the nation, and an imaginary Mexico that sought to deny this true Mexico and construct an imaginary Mexican culture by emulating foreign (Western) cultures. Bonfil Batalla's characterization of Mexico as a clash of these two cultures was both essentialist and reductive, but he did challenge Mexicans to understand themselves in the global language of plurality, insisting "in a society that recognizes itself as plural and wants to be so, thinking about a national culture means abandoning the idea that it be uniform."⁴⁵²

By the 1990s, the international discourse of multiculturalism had started to challenge and erode Mexico's postrevolutionary nationalism based on mestizophile and indigenist ideologies.⁴⁵³ In 1992 President Salinas reformed Article 2 of the Constitution, following similar reforms in Argentina, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Brazil, to recognize the pluricultural nature of the nation.⁴⁵⁴ Salinas altered Article 2 to recognize Mexico as a nation with "a multicultural composition originally based on its indigenous peoples, who are those who descend from the populations which inhabited the present territory of the country at the beginning of colonization, and who maintain their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or part of them."⁴⁵⁵ The amendment

⁴⁵¹ Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo: una civilización negada*. Translated by Philip Adams Dennis as *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁵³ Natividad Gutiérrez, *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 3.

⁴⁵⁴ Overmyer-Velázquez, *Folkloric Poverty*, 15.

⁴⁵⁵ "una composición pluricultural sustentada originalmente en sus pueblos indígenas, que son aquellos que descienden de poblaciones que habitaban en el territorio actual del país al iniciarse la colonización y que conservan sus propias instituciones sociales, económicas, culturales y políticas, o parte de ellas." "Artículo

signaled an official shift in the state's view of Mexico's ethnic and cultural makeup and suggested that they were open to renegotiating indigenous rights. The change extended a guarantee of protection and promotion of these cultures by the Mexican state. The San Andres Accords – signed in 1996, two years after the Zapatista uprising – reflects the new view of Mexico as pluricultural and establishes indigenous culture and identity as explicitly national: “It is necessary to elevate to constitutional status the right of all Mexicans to a pluricultural education that recognizes, disseminates, and promotes the history, customs, traditions and, in general, the culture of indigenous peoples, the root of our national identity.”⁴⁵⁶ Ultimately, though pluralism and multiculturalism in Mexico are centrally tied to demands for indigenous self-determination and autonomy, in reality the constitutional change did not confer political rights, but rather vague cultural rights.

Neoliberal Multiculturalism

The kinds of cultural rights recognized by the constitutional amendment of Article 2 and Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples do not, at first glance, appear compatible with the kinds of neoliberal restructuring discussed in the previous chapter. In an influential essay, Charles R. Hale challenges the prevailing assumption that indigenous struggles and neoliberal ideology are opposed, arguing instead for neoliberal multiculturalism, “whereby proponents of neoliberal doctrine pro-actively endorse a substantive, if limited, version of the indigenous cultural rights, as a means to resolve

2 - Constitución Política De Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” *Instituto De Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM*, n.d., <<http://info4.juridicas.unam.mx/ijure/fed/9/3.htm?s=>>.

⁴⁵⁶ Overmyer-Velázquez, *Folkloric Poverty*, 1.

their own problems and advance their own political agendas.”⁴⁵⁷ So while multiculturalism was in part a response to demands for the rights of the oppressed and represents gains in the politics of recognition, neoliberal multiculturalism sets the terms in which indigenous groups can organize: the scope of their demands, the forms of political action they can exercise, and the spaces they can occupy.

In Mexico, the limits of these pro-indigenous amendments are immediately evident in the 1992 Constitutional reform. Along with the amendment of Article 2, Salinas also amended Article 27, lauded as one of the most important legacies of the revolution, and the cornerstone of agrarian reform. Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution established the *ejido* as the modern form of communal land ownership:

The population centers which *de facto* or *de jure* retain the communal form, shall have the capacity to exploit in common the land, woodlands and waters which belong to them or have been, or shall be, restored to them...Population centers which have no communal land [*ejidos*]...or which cannot have it restored because they lack the title-deeds or are unable to identify the land in question or have legally alienated it, shall be endowed with sufficient land and waters to constitute such communal property, in accordance with the requirements of the population.⁴⁵⁸

Salinas altered the article to allow for private ownership and the sale, sharecropping, or rental of communally held *ejido* lands. He did this in order to secure support for NAFTA, in order to quell US and Canadian concerns about land expropriation and to attract foreign investment. This clear rejection of the PRI's historic (rhetorical) alliance with the peasantry marks a significant divestiture of the agrarian myth and tradition in favor of economic growth.

⁴⁵⁷ Charles R. Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 487.

⁴⁵⁸ Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution: A People's History*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: The New Press, 2005), 234.

Rebecca Overmyer-Velasquez argues that NAFTA was designed and negotiated explicitly to reinforce a complex of reforms aimed at draining the rural population: “It was the lock that would seal these changes. Luis Tellez, a man who played a key role in the Salinas agriculture reforms, announced [in 1991] that the treaty would expel around half of the rural population from its lands in a period of 10 or 20 years.”⁴⁵⁹ In the final decades of the twentieth century, it was increasingly evident to Mexicans that the PRI’s claim to be the legitimate heirs of the Mexican Revolution was bankrupt, not unlike the country and many of its citizens. According to Roderic Camp, even though the percentage of Mexicans who were not poor remained steady at 57 percent between 1984 and 1990, between 1992 and 1999 the number of Mexicans who slipped into category of “extreme poverty” nearly doubled – rising from 16 percent in 1992 to 28 percent in 1999.⁴⁶⁰

How did the state reconcile its desertion of land rights with an official shift to multiculturalism, which at least rhetorically celebrated and recognized Indigenous diversity? The answer lies in the link between neoliberalism and individualism. According Charles R. Hale, neoliberalism favored “resolution of social problems through the application of quasi-market principles revolving around the primacy of the individual, such as assessment based on individual merit, emphasis on individual responsibility and the exercise of individual choice.”⁴⁶¹ The neoliberal emphasis on autonomy, choice, and

⁴⁵⁹ Luis Hernández Navarro, “TLC: lo Menos por lo Más,” *La Jornada*, January 3, 2003 in Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez, “The Populist Dilemma: Indian, Nation, and State in Neoliberal Mexico,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 2007): 36.

⁴⁶⁰ Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 5.

⁴⁶¹ C. R. Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala,” 486.

“rights” complemented the emerging indigenous movement’s demands for self-determination in a way that simultaneously made no demands of a welfare state.

Programs like Salinas’s National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), popularly known as Solidarity, appropriated popular discourses on autonomy and *autogestión* (self-help), using the language of community initiative and participation. The program offered funding for local development projects to communities willing to undertake joint responsibility for financing and implementation. PRONASOL was pitched as an effort to transform state-society relations.⁴⁶² On a regional level, the program specifically targeted Indigenous communities with significant funding, treating indigenous peasants as independent entrepreneurs. In this schema, the PRI’s postrevolutionary tradition of alignment with peasants shifted, and the significance of indigenous peoples in the national imagination became more important. Of course, this new neoliberal populism emphasized a particular kind of indigenous person, one who was “the legitimate bearer of citizenship rights and embrac[ed] rather than reject[ed], the official nationalist discourses.”⁴⁶³ The program echoed Bonfil Batalla’s notion of a “deep Mexico,” stating “it is the original Mexico, the other Mexico with the great culture of its people, the communitarian Mexico, with which Solidarity is working.”⁴⁶⁴ By 1993, the government had spent 33 billion pesos on Solidarity. Evidently, Salinas was more committed to

⁴⁶² Rob Aitken, “Neoliberalism and Identity: Redefining State and Society in Mexico,” in *Dismantling the Mexican State?*, ed. Rob Aitken et al. (London: Macmillan, 1996), 26.

⁴⁶³ Overmyer-Velázquez, “The Populist Dilemma: Indian, Nation, and State in Neoliberal Mexico,” 30–1; For more on the links between populism and neoliberalism, see Denise Dresser, *Neopopulist Solutions to Neoliberal Problems: Mexico’s National Solidarity Program* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1991); and Overmyer-Velázquez, “The Populist Dilemma.”

⁴⁶⁴ Mariane Braig, “Continuity and Change in Mexican Political Culture: The Case of PRONASOL,” in *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture*, ed. Wil G. Pansters (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1997), 253.

economic liberalization than political liberalization. As a new articulation of the PRI's clientelism, Solidarity effectively regenerated political legitimacy. Salinas's tight control over the program allowed him to channel resources and foster clientelistic relationships with communities who had supported Cardenas in the 1988 election, earning him far greater support than when he took office.⁴⁶⁵

Independence and the Democratic Opening

La antorcha encendida's characters stage a remembrance of concerns about what it meant to be a legitimate member of New Spain and the newly independent nation of Mexico. As illustrated above, this debate was highly gendered and racialized. Though the series covers the entire period of struggle, from 1785 to 1821, it focuses on the first phase when the insurgents were led by those now remembered as national heroes: Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos. These leaders underscored the corruption and disintegration of Spanish power. Hidalgo's charges of *mal gobierno* (bad government) at the colonial Spanish government are embodied in the character of de Soto and in the cracks in his paternalistic hold on the telenovela's main characters. In conformance with melodramatic convention, *La antorcha encendida* resolves the battle between good and evil: the Spaniards are defeated by the insurgents; Pedro de Soto is defeated; and Mariano and Teresa are united. The series closes with the day Mariano dreamt of as a young boy, promising Teresa he would love her forever.

⁴⁶⁵ Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 248–9.

Mexico's experience with democracy has not had the same fairytale ending. For much of the twentieth century, the PRI held virtually unlimited control of the federal Chamber of Deputies. The party maintained the façade of democracy by controlling party registration and the institutions that governed elections. While some opposition parties were permitted, they were a "loyal opposition," meaning they worked with the government in exchange for rewards. These included the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) and the Socialist Popular Party (PPS). Even the PAN offered little more than a token opposition between 1940 and the 1970s, although growing electoral success at the local level started to translate into a more effective challenge to the ruling party by the 1980s.

Because the PRI legitimized its monopoly on political power by claiming itself as the architect of the "Mexican miracle," they also paid a political cost for the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s outlined in chapters two and three. When the government of López Portillo expropriated Mexico's banks in the wake of the 1982 peso devaluation, he destabilized and alienated the nation's wealthiest investors, causing divisions within the party that severely fractured their political power. Small and mid-sized business owners shifted their support to the PAN and unionized urban and industrial workers were angered by the austerity measures imposed in the wake of the crisis. One of the greatest fractures was the leftist contingent led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, which separated and formed a new party, the Partido Revolucionario Democrática (PRD).⁴⁶⁶

Historians Stephen Haber, Herbert Klein, Noel Maurer, and Kevin Middlebrook have recently argued that the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s shifted the PRI's

⁴⁶⁶ See chapter three for details on the formation of the PRD and the campaign of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

concern for political legitimacy to simply attempting to curtail the growth of opposition parties as significant numbers of voters turned away from the PRI.⁴⁶⁷ Ironically, “Mexican neoliberal reform immediately prompted a calibrated set of democratic concessions.”⁴⁶⁸ In order to appease some disgruntled voters, the PRI conceded to recognizing some of the PAN’s local-level electoral victories in the 1983 elections. Nevertheless, the PRI moved away from this opening in 1986 by committing blatant fraud in the gubernatorial election in Chihuahua and then undertaking regressive electoral reforms in 1987. This new legislation introduced a “governability clause” – which was intended to ensure that the PRI would continue to maintain control of the executive and legislative branches. Following the fraudulent presidential election of Carlos Salinas in 1988, the PRI was again forced to guarantee it would respect the PAN’s subsequent victories in gubernatorial, mayoral, and municipal elections and to institutionalize their democratic demands in a new federal electoral code in exchange for the PAN’s support for efforts to certify the election results that brought Salinas to power. Again, the PRI reneged, this time in the resulting electoral code adopted in 1990 because of their fear of potential opposition growth. Nevertheless, the new code strengthened the federal electoral court and established an independently funded and operated agency to oversee elections, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). It also revised the previously reformed rules for the allocation of proportional representation, making it easier for the PRI to secure a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and blocking coalition building, like the one forged by Cárdenas in 1988. Electoral reforms in 1996 mark a significant break in

⁴⁶⁷ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 129–30.

⁴⁶⁸ Lomnitz, “Narrating the Neoliberal Moment: History, Journalism, Historicity,” 51.

the PRI's authoritarian past.⁴⁶⁹ These reforms made it possible for the PRI to lose its majority in the Chamber of Deputies in the 1997 election, and eventually the presidency in 2000.

The Last of its Kind

Despite some miscalculations, historical telenovelas had evolved considerably from the first modest productions of the 1960s to a dedicated unit within Televisa and large budgets to fund massive casts and on location shooting. They even evolved as multifaceted consumer goods that encompassed the sale of books, video tapes, and later DVDs.⁴⁷⁰ Nevertheless, *La antorcha* was the last historical telenovela produced by Televisa. It was not intended to be the last; Ernesto Alonso was working on two other historical telenovelas, one based on the life of Sor Juana de la Cruz and another on the Spanish conquest.⁴⁷¹ However, when Alonso died in 2007 the projects were abandoned. That *La antorcha* was the last historical telenovela (at least to date) is puzzling because, in many ways, Televisa had finally struck the careful balance between melodramatic fiction and historical fact. If historical telenovelas could be popular among audiences, avoid political missteps, consistently earn awards for best acting and best telenovela, and be profitably sold as collector's items, why did Televisa stop making them?⁴⁷² The answer, it would seem, was financial. The following section posits several financial

⁴⁶⁹ Haber et al., *Mexico Since 1980*, 3.

⁴⁷⁰ Jose Alberto Castro, "Zeron-Medina: Ha permitido el acceso a la historia en forma amena," *Proceso*, 8 March 1997.

⁴⁷¹ Dan último adiós al 'Señor telenovela,' *El Porvenir*, 8 August 2007.

⁴⁷² *La antorcha*, for example, was nominated for *TVyNovelas* Awards for Best Telenovela, Best Protagonist Actor and Best Protagonist Actress, Best Scene Director, and won the special award for Best Actor. See *TVyNovelas*, January 1997.

factors that were likely influential in making *La antorcha encendida* the last of its kind; for in a neoliberal era, it was the bottom line that mattered.

According to accomplished telenovela writers, Carlos Romero and Tere Medina, historical telenovelas simply did not generate the profits that conventional commercial telenovelas did.⁴⁷³ Medina, who co-wrote *El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*, believes that the costs of historical telenovelas ran three times the costs of normal telenovelas.⁴⁷⁴ Historical telenovelas were particularly expensive to produce because they required large casts, filming in locations across the country, and historical consultants. Recall that *Senda de gloria*, at five million pesos, was the most expensive telenovela ever produced in Mexico when it first aired in 1987.

Although Emilio Azcárraga Milmo openly supported Salinas' presidential candidacy, donating millions of pesos to his campaign and even declaring himself "a soldier of the PRI and of the president," thanks to Salinas' neoliberal privatization policies, Televisa faced competition in the television industry for the first time.⁴⁷⁵ In 1993 President Salinas opened up bidding on several components of El Instituto Mexicano de la Televisión (Imevisión), the government owned and operated television network. Founded in 1983, at its height the network comprised channels 7, 13, and 22 in Mexico City and others outside the capital. Since it already held a monopoly on private channels, Televisa was not permitted to bid. The final package included two national

⁴⁷³ Carlos Romero, interviewed by author, digital recording, Mexico City, México, August 25, 2009.

⁴⁷⁴ Tere Medina, interviewed by author, email, Mexico City, Mexico, October 21, 2009. According to Medina, the first female telenovela director in Mexico, at the time of the interview the average cost for a half hour episode of a telenovela was between 600,000.00 to a million pesos.

⁴⁷⁵ Don M. Coerver, Suzanne B. Pasztor, and Robert M. Buffington, *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary History and Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 492.

television channels (7 and 13), 169 stations, and television and theatre assets, valued at approximately US\$500 million. Ricardo Salinas Priego (no relation to the president) won with a bid of US\$640 million, US\$145 million above the next bidder, and created Television Azteca. It was the first time that Televisa faced any real competition in the industry. Though TV Azteca was “David” in competition with a media “Goliath,” it fared remarkably well; by 1997 TV Azteca had captured twenty-five percent of viewers, with just two stations to Televisa’s four.⁴⁷⁶ And by the following year, 1998, it controlled one-third of Mexico’s television advertising market.⁴⁷⁷

The privatization of public television was part of a series of divestments including national banks and government-owned corporations such as Teléfonos de México (Telmex), and Mexicana Airlines. According to Roderic Camp, between 1987 and 1992, the government retained control of only 20 percent of its former industrial holdings.⁴⁷⁸ These sell-offs were accompanied by neoliberal reforms that altered state regulation of the media industries including deregulation of audiovisual markets and diminished state intervention into the production and distribution of audiovisual products. In addition, Article 28 of the 1917 Constitution was modified just a year after NAFTA went into effect, allowing up to 49 percent foreign investment in Mexican media companies.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Omar Hernández and Emile G. McAnany, “Culture Industries in the Free Trade Age: A Look at Mexican Television,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Anne Rubenstein et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 396.

⁴⁷⁷ Sergio Munoz, “Ricardo Salinas Pliego: Investing in Mexico’s Future – and Reaping Millions in Profit,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 July 1998, <<http://articles.latimes.com/1998/jul/12/opinion/op-2966>>, Accessed 12 April 2013.

⁴⁷⁸ Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 247.

⁴⁷⁹ Hernan Galperin, “Cultural Industries in the Age of Free-Trade Agreements,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 24, no. 1 (1999), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1082>.

It was also part of an uneven process of state withdrawal from cultural funding, including, for example, the privatization of archeological and artistic patrimony.⁴⁸⁰ Of course, worldwide scholars of neoliberal reforms have identified a common feature of neoliberal reform as the shifting of funding for cultural projects from the public to the private sector. Though this process was certainly carried out in Mexico, the historical telenovelas demonstrate how this process was uneven and not always linear, perhaps because of the integral role of the state's cultural projects to its legitimacy and because of its close ties to the private culture industries. While it was not a complete privatization per se, the state did concentrate subsidies and contracts within a select group of "intellectual 'stars'" like Enrique Krauze, as discussed in chapter three.⁴⁸¹ For Televisa, this may have made co-sponsorship with a government ministry or department unlikely, leaving it alone to shoulder the high production costs of historical telenovelas.

The financial crisis wrought by the peso devaluation in late 1994 and 1995 created an economic climate that demonstrated how the neoliberal opening of national economy could also be perilous for businesses and corporations, not just individual Mexicans.⁴⁸² At least a portion of *La antorcha* was produced amidst this economic uncertainty. Though Alonso, as producer, claimed that the production's largest expenses – like costume design and scenery – had already been paid out, he also expressed concern

⁴⁸⁰ For more on neoliberal reforms to archeological and artistic patrimony, see respectively Lisa Catherine Breglia, "Docile Descendants and Illegitimate Heirs: Privatization of Cultural Patrimony in Mexico" (Doctoral dissertation, Rice University, 2003), <http://hdl.handle.net/1911/18589>; Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, "Art and Possibility: From Nationalism to Neoliberalism. The Cultural Interventions of Banamex and Televisa" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2007), <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/31348>.

⁴⁸¹ Lomnitz, "Narrating the Neoliberal Moment," 45, 55.

⁴⁸² Hernández and McAnany, "Culture Industries in the Free Trade Age: A Look at Mexican Television," 393.

about the impact that the devaluation might have on the series.⁴⁸³ Initially the series was to have one hundred fifty episodes, but in the end it had only eighty, suggesting that the economic situation did have an impact.⁴⁸⁴ Though the corps of actors required to stage the battles for independence was costly for Televisa, the work was a relief for the actors in the production, as paid acting opportunities had grown scarce in the economic crisis.

Televisa's unwillingness to gamble on historical telenovelas after *La antorcha* must also be understood within the company's financial portfolio. By 1996 almost half of Televisa's revenue was derived from foreign sales, including not only all of Latin America, but 125 non-Spanish speaking countries as well. Telenovelas were the bedrock of this export revenue. Though historical telenovelas were exported to Spanish and English markets, among others, it is doubtful that they had the same revenue-generating potential as normal commercial telenovelas, which broke audience records internationally in places such as Russia, Indonesia, Morocco, and the Philippines.⁴⁸⁵

In 1997 Televisa owner Emilio Azcárraga Milmo died of cancer and left control of the company to his twenty-nine-year-old son, Emilio Azcárraga Jean.⁴⁸⁶ Furthermore, even before Azcárraga Milmo died, Televisa faced a massive debt burden of more than US\$1 billion, forcing internal restructuring. Azcárraga Jean continued this effort by trimming more than thirty percent of Televisa's employees, some of whom were likely

⁴⁸³ "Ernesto Alonso Enciende la 'Antorcha' de los insurgentes."

⁴⁸⁴ "Será una dama curiosa," *El Porvenir*, November 19, 1993, 6.

⁴⁸⁵ *La tormenta*, for example, was exported to Ecuador and *El vuelo* was pitched to English markets. Guillermo Carnero Hoke, "Obra de incendio: *La Tormenta*," *Impacto*, 22 November 1967, p. 36; Edgar Betancourt Cárdenas, "Vuelve Beatriz a la vida," *El Porvenir*, 13 July 1993, p. 4; Hernández and McAnany, "Culture Industries in the Free Trade Age: A Look at Mexican Television," 395–6, 401.

⁴⁸⁶ Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 93.

actors tied to exclusive contracts with Televisa.⁴⁸⁷ Tere Medina believes the end of historical telenovelas was also tied to this generational regime shift, that Azcárraga Jean had no interest in making them.⁴⁸⁸ While his father had considered himself a “guardian of national culture,” establishing the Cultural Centre of Contemporary Art/Televisa in 1986, Azcárraga Jean distanced himself from this mission when he shut its doors in 1998.⁴⁸⁹ This signaled a retreat from serving as a major cultural promoter in Mexico; perhaps Televisa’s divestment of historical telenovelas was part of this retreat. Media scholars Omar Hernández and Emile McAnany conclude, “We may be coming to the end of an era in Mexico when a single institution like Televisa could establish the cultural context for national consciousness.”⁴⁹⁰ It may no longer have been possible, and it may have also been that internally Televisa no longer sought that role.

In contrast to his father who was explicit about his support for the PRI, Azcárraga Jean moved away from political alignment with the PRI. In an interview with *Proceso* a month after his father died, Azcárraga-Jean commented:

I am not a politician – what’s more, I don’t understand politics...I am a businessman. I like entertainment, I like to make television; that’s what I do...More than that, I don’t believe that having a good relationship with political figures is going to benefit us in terms of what matters. I believe in the ratings. I don’t think that having a good or bad relationship with the Interior Minister is going to change my rating, which in the end is what I care about – getting the best rating possible...I can vote for the PRD; nevertheless, the PRI and the PAN are still news and still have things to say. I don’t mix my ideology with the screen.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁷ Hernández and McAnany, “Culture Industries in the Free Trade Age: A Look at Mexican Television,” 409–10.

⁴⁸⁸ Interview with Tere Medina, email, October 21, 2009.

⁴⁸⁹ Fernández and Paxman, *El tigre*, 242; Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, “Art and Possibility,” 37.

⁴⁹⁰ Hernández and McAnany, “Culture Industries in the Free Trade Age: A Look at Mexican Television,” 409.

⁴⁹¹ Carlos Puig, “Azcárraga Jean: ‘Yo soy empresario; no creo que tener buenas o malas relaciones con el secretario de Gobernación vaya a alterar mi rating,’” *Proceso*, 16 March 1997, 31 in Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate*, 109.

With greater expenses and a concerted shift away from political engagement, the pay out for historical telenovelas may have been too great. Of course, despite Azcárraga Jean's claim to be uninterested in politics, critics maintained that the network remained aligned with the PRI, even in the most recent election, July 2012, which saw the re-election of the PRI with Enrique Peña Nieto.⁴⁹² Furthermore, while *La antorcha encendida* was the last historical telenovela Televisa produced, it did go on to create a miniseries – a shorter and less expensive alternative – on Independence for the 2010 bicentennial, called *Gritos de muerte y libertad*.⁴⁹³

Conclusion

La antorcha encendida illuminates some of the gendered and racialized nature of legitimacy. Of course, as we have seen in previous chapters, historical telenovelas are discursive products of the period in which they were produced, and in the case of *La antorcha*, this was the mid- to late 1990s. For contemporary Mexicans, legitimacy had multiple meanings deriving from the breakdown of the PRI's domination of Mexican politics as well as its attempts to create an official interpretation of history. In a political sense, legitimacy increasingly came to mean democratic governance and a questioning of the myth of mestizaje. Thus, legitimacy also serves as a lens for understanding the

⁴⁹² For more on Televisa's support for PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto, see for example, *Proceso*, 1861, 2 July 2012.

⁴⁹³ *Gritos de muerte y libertad*, DVD, directed by Gerardo Tort and Maria Fernanda Suarez (Mexico City: Televisa, 2010). This miniseries, along with other historically-themed popular culture produced for the bicentennial/centennial, is discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

economic, political, and cultural changes afoot in the period, including an official shift from mestizaje to multiculturalism, neoliberal reform policies and measures (as discussed in chapter three), and a democratic opening.

After decades of refining the formula, Televisa finally got it right. The trials of the Foncerrada family and the almost impossible love of Mariano and Teresa kept audiences entertained, and the Asesoría Histórica attended to the minute details that signaled historical accuracy. Televisa also had the foresight to postpone the debut of the series when the Zapatista uprising threatened to encourage viewers to make unwanted connections with the continued abuses of indigenous rights. Nevertheless, though *La antorcha* aired to great acclaim, it was also the last historical telenovela that has been produced. This may reflect economic changes afoot in the 1990s, state retreat from cultural funding, a high debt load for Televisa combined with increased competition, and a generational change in power at Televisa that altered their traditional support for cultural projects.

Conclusion

In 2010 Mexico celebrated its bicentennial and centennial anniversaries of Independence and the Revolution, respectively, and the country was flooded with all manner of historically themed goods, including entertainment and education.⁴⁹⁴ I am interested in two particular products, as they serve as a kind of corollary to the case studies discussed here. The first is a graphic novel adaptation of *Nueva historia mínima de México* (New Minimal History of Mexico), which was originally edited by Daniel Cosío Villegas and intended to provide the minimum historical knowledge needed by all Mexicans. According to one of the scriptwriters, Francisco de la Mora, the comics are more accessible than the 200-page original.⁴⁹⁵ Like the SEP's historical comic books, the graphic novels seek to engage a wider audience in national history; in contrast, however, they are targeted principally at children and adolescents. Two volumes were published for the celebrations, one on independence and the other on the Revolution, with another to follow on ancient Mexico. The series was co-published by the Colegio de México and Turner (a Spanish press). Higher production values than those of *Historia de un pueblo* and *Episodios Mexicanos* (and other commercial comics) immediately apparent: volumes

⁴⁹⁴ For example, I purchased a box of Marian "Libertad" Cookies. The packaging mixes references to Independence with those to the Revolution; the commemorative box features well-known photographs of Porfirio Díaz, Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Caranza, Álvaro Obregón, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata. The lettering on the box reads "Revolución Mexicana, 1810-2010," while a decorative cardboard sleeve is cut in the shape of a bell, likely in reference to the bell Hidalgo rang.

⁴⁹⁵ Diego Castillo, "Presentan el comic 'La nueva historia mínima de México' en Pachuca," *Milenio*, March 29, 2011.

are quite large, the paper is thick, glossy, and in color, they are bound with hard covers, and they sell for 180 pesos.⁴⁹⁶

In each of the volumes, the historical narrative is recounted by an elderly bookstore owner to his grandson, Pascual. The young boy is eager to hear about the heroes of independence, but his grandfather repeatedly urges him to be patient and listen to the whole tale, which spans from 1808 to 1821. This chronology effectively displaces Hidalgo as the father of Independence, which is not surprising given that it is based on a scholarly work written by one of the nation's foremost historians, Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, and therefore the narrative is more nuanced than to simply apotheosize Hidalgo. Furthermore, the volume's chronology also reasserts the role of Iturbide, who had been villainized by priísta narratives, but was viewed more favorably by the panísta government of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012).

The Revolution volume is based on the work of Javier Garcíadiego, a historian serving as president of Colegio de Mexico. In an interview with *La Jornada*, Garcíadiego observe the significance of Colmex's decision to publish the graphic novels, given their "very conservative" publishing tradition of only producing serious scholarly works. Ultimately the scholarly press braced the risks in order to reach broader audiences. The publishers might also have had financial considerations in mind, as an increasingly common trend among scholarly publishers in the United States was to offset

⁴⁹⁶ Josefina Vázquez Zoraida et al., *Nueva Historia Mínima de México: La Independencia, Adaptación Gráfica* (Madrid: Turner, 2010); Javier Garcíadiego, Francisco de la Mora Mauer, and José Cárdenas Torres, *Nueva Historia Mínima de México: La Revolución, Adaptación Gráfica* (Madrid: Turner, 2010). Another volume was published after the bi/centennial, this time on ancient Mexico. Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo, *Nueva Historia Mínima de México: México Antiguo, Adaptación Gráfica* (Madrid: Turner, 2011). Turner's website lists the volumes at 15 euros, which suggests that the series was also sold in Spain.

the costs of monographs with limited markets by selling children's histories, cookbooks, and other popular works.⁴⁹⁷ Garciadiego also noted that the series, as does all history, responds to questions of the present. Indeed, the case studies examined in this dissertation demonstrate the ways in which the present informs interpretations of the past.

A second popular culture work released for the bicentennial was Televisa's historical docudrama miniseries, entitled *Gritos de muerte y libertad*.⁴⁹⁸ Sixteen episodes were broadcast Monday to Friday evenings between August 30 and September 16, 2010 and sold on DVD in Mexico. Broadcasts were also planned for the United States and across Latin America.⁴⁹⁹ In Mexico, it earned remarkably high audience ratings, even though the series lacked the lure of forbidden love affairs.⁵⁰⁰ Like its melodramatic predecessors, *Gritos* was also advised by a team of historical consultants, including such distinguished scholars as Enrique Krauze, Héctor Aguilar Camín, Enrique Florescano, Rafael Rojas and Gabriel Garciadiego. *Gritos* shares with the graphic novels, an emphasis on the long durée of the struggle for independence and includes Iturbide in a more balanced view than was common among liberal or revolutionary propaganda of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, the representation of Hidalgo differs strikingly from *Los caudillos* and *La antorcha encendida*, instead portraying him as a harsh unsympathetic figure. Interestingly, the actor who played Iturbide, Daniel Giménez Cacho, noted that the part was a good opportunity to rethink national history "less

⁴⁹⁷ Fabiola Palapa Quijas, "Nueva historia mínima de México en comic, 'una aventura editorial' del Colmex," *La Jornada*, Sept. 19, 2010, 6.

⁴⁹⁸ *Gritos de muerte y libertad*, DVD.

⁴⁹⁹ "El Bicentenario inspira series filmes y obras," *El Universal*, August 18, 2010.

⁵⁰⁰ It scored an average of 28.5 points (Nielsen audience measurement system). "Teleserie se saca 10 con serie histórica," *El Universal*, Sept. 5, 2010.

ideologically charged than we were accustomed to with our priísta governments.”⁵⁰¹ His comment underscores a skepticism about PRI-official history, while it also fails to recognize the bicentennial production as another form of official history. More research is needed on popular reactions to the series, but it is clear that not all viewers applauded the new historical narrative. The Guerrero State Commission on Human Rights, for example, declared the series “a grotesque distortion and infamy” for suggesting that the independence movement was headed by criollos like Iturbide and minimizing the role of popular heroes such as Guerrero.⁵⁰² Popular culture historical representations clearly remained as politicized under the PAN as they had been in the waning days of PRI rule in the late twentieth century.

The dissertation employs historically themed comic books and telenovelas as case studies to demonstrate continuity in the political currency of history during a period of crisis for the ruling party. The case studies selected were massively popular media forms that offered the party a way to reach new potential supporters and to regenerate political legitimacy. Three main themes link case studies and analyses in the dissertation: the interplay between historiography and the politics of history; the learning curve needed to balance edutainment and propaganda; and the changing nexus between public and private sectors that ultimately undermined both the hegemonic official history and the ruling party itself.

⁵⁰¹ “menos carga ideológica de la que nuestros gobiernos priístas nos tenían acostumbrados.” Gustavo Silva G. “El Iturbide de Giménez Cacho no está esculpido en bronce,” *El Universal*, Sept. 14, 2010.

⁵⁰² “una distorsión grotesca y una infamia.” “Televisa distorsiona la historia: CEDH,” *El Universal*, Sept. 15, 2010. Sergio Ocampo, “Difama serie de Televisa a varios héroes: historiador,” *La Jornada*, Sept. 18, 2010, 14.

Chapter one focuses on the first decade of historical telenovelas, particularly the second and third series, *Carlota y Maximiliano* and *La tormenta*. The chapter examines the development of the television industry, and the growth of Telesistema Mexicano (later Televisa). The ruling party's close ties to industry are particularly evident in IMSS's co-sponsorship of *La tormenta*, and later *Los caudillos*, *El carruaje*, and *Senda de Gloria*. The chapter situates the two series in the context of the creation of the myth of Juárez and the diverse ways it has been evoked by political groups, particularly by the ruling party in the twentieth century. The centrality of the myth of Juárez to the ruling party's legitimacy helps to explain why it was ruling party bureaucrats, and even the president himself, who weighed in on *Carlota y Maximiliano*'s representation of history.

Chapter two examines a different learning curve, the SEP's foray into the creation of comic books as means to encourage literacy, the habit of reading, and knowledge of the nation's history. Though they were concerned that the medium's low-brow reputation would sully their own, ultimately, the two series they published were successful. Produced during a period of perceived prosperity, the SEP chose to forgo partnership with the public sector and produced their own comics. For *México: historia de un pueblo* the SEP chose to produce a more expensive product, with thicker paper and multi-color printing. *Episodios mexicanos*, in contrast, was produced far more economically, allowing the SEP to offer issues at a lower cost. Perhaps the SEP's decision to produce their own series allowed them to determine the production level of their product and alleviated some of the pressure to ensure profits from the series. Indeed, *Episodios mexicanos* sold so inexpensively that street vendors complained that they were not

making sufficient profit to continue selling issues. Wisely, they made use of industry experts such as artists and writers, who made use of genre conventions such as melodramatic and suspenseful storylines that kept readers wanting more from their “to be continued” conclusions.

It was on the issue of historical professionalism that tension with the series turned, namely between the two coordinators, Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach - one was a leftist activist and writer and the other a London-trained professional historian. These divergences are examined in depth in each series’ representation of the Spanish conquest. Both series employ romantic plotlines to encourage readers to relate to historical figures – *Historia de un pueblo* with the Mexica and *Episodios Mexicanos* with both the Spanish and indigenous peoples.

In chapter three, Televisa and IMSS strike the careful balance of education and entertainment with a hit, *Senda de gloria*. The series was the last collaboration for the two entities, probably because of reduced government funding for cultural programming. The epic culminated in Cárdenas’ expropriation of oil and represented an official version of history that eschewed a more nuanced analysis that historians had been writing for decades. When a rebroadcast coincided with a hotly debated presidential election, they quickly cut the series short. What Televisa failed to anticipate was the fallout of cutting the series. Collaborators on the series, authors, audience members, and historians weighed in with accusations of “mutilation” and quickly linked the series’ hero, Cárdenas to the fraudulent election in 1988. Televisa was more careful with its next historical telenovela, *El vuelo del águila*, and postponed its debut to avoid connection with the

Zapatista uprising. Of all the case studies examined here, *El vuelo del águila* reflects the most significant shift in the official historical narrative. Díaz had been positioned as a one-dimensional villain for much of the twentieth-century, but Salinas' neoliberal turn necessitated a revision of the image of Díaz. *El vuelo's* producers attempted this resuscitation by humanizing Díaz, particularly by highlighting his tender relationships with his family.

As chapter four shows, after decades of refining the formula, Televisa finally got it right: audiences tuned in, and there was no significant critique from scholars or bureaucrats, suggesting that the new Asesoría Histórica had sufficiently attended to both the broad interpretations and the minute details that signaled historical accuracy for differing audiences. Nevertheless, having perfected the formula, the network promptly abandoned the historically themed telenovela. The neoliberal state simply would no longer fund such cultural spectacles, nor did Televisa have an interest in paying the extravagant costs alone when facing increased competition from TV Azteca, a high debt load, and a generational change in power.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore two other significant contributions the dissertation makes to scholarship on Mexico, neoliberalism, and public and private culture industries. First, the historical telenovelas and comic books at the center of my study illustrate the changing relationship between the ruling party and Televisa that accompanied the neoliberal turn. Worldwide scholars of neoliberal reforms have identified a common feature of neoliberal reform as the shifting of funding for cultural projects from the public to the private sector. Though this process was certainly carried

out in Mexico, my case studies demonstrate how this process was uneven and not always linear, perhaps because of the integral role of the state's cultural projects to its legitimacy and because of its close ties to the private culture industries. As with so many neoliberal projects, this privatization was neither complete nor impartial, for as, chapter three demonstrates, the state concentrated subsidies and contracts within a select group of “intellectual ‘stars’”, such as Enrique Krauze. Second, the dissertation draws on Mexican cultural history’s concern with popular culture and political power and extends it by asking how the PRI employed popular culture and history as its grasp on power faltered. It finds that the PRI and Televisa attempted to use the past to generate political legitimacy, but ultimately it was unable to resolve the contradictions of their transition from corporatism to neoliberalism. By examining conflicts between media producers, historical advisors, politicians, and the public from the 1960s to the 1990s, this dissertation tells the inside story of the demise of the hegemonic official history that had helped the PRI retain power until the end of the twentieth century.

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