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Diversity, difference and nation: Indigenous peoples on Mexican screen

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This paper draws on constructivist theories of identity that regard the self as, paradoxically, coming into existence through interaction with the other, to investigate the discursive formation of indigenous people in the forging of Mexican national identity. The aim of the essay is to show how difference has been managed and deployed in the establishment of national Mexican identities from independence until the present. This is done with reference to visual culture and film and illustrated with examples from the 'Golden Age' as well as 'the New Mexican Cinema'.

Keywords: nationalism; diversity; Mexico; film; identity.

Introduction

As the shaping and building of nation states has required a degree of standardisation and massification of culture (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992; Gellner, 2006), especially of popular culture, the present drive towards multi-culturalism at the heart of many nation-states seems puzzling. For much of the twentieth century, assimilation policies sought to produce the desired homogeneity by neutralising ethnic difference through the dissemination of a common culture. Yet in most nation-states official policies of assimilation have been abandoned and, at least at the level of discourse and political correctness, there is acceptance and sometimes even active

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embrace of diversity, to the point that it seems the unit has become inconceivable without the overt visibility of its constituting parts. Nation-states proclaim themselves multi-national states, and often this is supported by policies of affirmative action towards those identified as ethnic or other minorities.[i] Moreover, there has been a revalorisation of indigenous and other non-modern cultures. In Latin America this has been particularly evident, with Rigoberta Menchú, of Maya ancestry, receiving the Nobel peace prize in 1992 and the rise of Alejandro Toledo and Evo Morales, of Quechua and Aymara ethnicity respectively, to the presidencies of Peru and Bolivia in 2001 and 2006. In addition, as national cultures have been able to survive—and indeed, thrive—in diasporas and translocalities, their existence proves the fit between territory and culture that nationalism once strove to create is no longer a necessary condition for belonging (Appadurai, 2003).

The story of the nation-state is often told—at least from Western perspectives—in terms that would make this acknowledgement of diversity seem the natural outcome of its evolutionary process. It is told as a story of inclusion, from the aristocracy with the Magna Carta, to the bourgeoisie and the middle classes with the French Revolution, to the working classes and women with their respective movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and increasingly, to formerly disenfranchised minorities, either on the grounds of their ethnicity or their sexual preference. It is, in short, told as if it were a story of the progressive broadening of citizenship. So are we before 'the happy age' in which difference has finally been acknowledged as the foundation of (national) identity rather than as an obstacle to cast one? (Foucault, 1991, p. 141). If so, what are the new boundaries that hold the national unit together in the face of acknowledged, and even promoted, internal difference?

I shall argue here that arrival at the happy age of recognition of what Doreen Massey calls 'coeval difference' within the nation-state is far from being the case (Massey, 2005, p. 69).[ii] Not only on the grounds that what appears to be the acceptance and revalorisation of indigenous and/or traditional cultures is in fact a way of neutralising their subversive potential, absorbing them into the mainstream and continuing exerting domination on them, as with the 'chic-ethnic' vogue (Jones & Leshkowich, 2003; Wilson & Stewart, 2008). Neither on the grounds, also often raised, that the so-called multiculturalism the West so embraces is in fact limited to what we might call different versions of itself, or as put by Nikos Papastergiadis, to that which is *translatable* (Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000], p. 158). The truly Other remains forever beyond the horizon of intelligibility, branded 'fundamentalism'. Accurate as this critique obviously is, my concern here is not so much with multiculturalism among nation-states, or between the West and its others. Rather, it is on how national identities have managed the multiculturalism that is always already there, at the heart of the nation-state, by blurring the boundaries of the cultures that comprise it, themselves changeable and fluid. In short, I contend that rather than the triumph of the impetus for inclusion on which the nation-state grounds its legitimacy, we are instead witnessing a de-nationalisation of the state, and a concomitant transformation of the national identities that it had fostered.[iii]

My main premises are as follows. As regards identity, given that 'we' are never in a vacuum but always in relation to an other, an ontology of becoming (Deleuze, 2004; Lacan, 2006 [1977]) is more useful to theorise national identity under globalisation than the one of essences and continuity with which the subject is often approached. The other is thus not merely an external outsider, but actually constitutive of the self: the self only makes sense inasmuch as it differs from the other

(Derrida, 1976; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). And who the self is will in turn depend on who the other is at any one time. For instance, 'Mexico' drew from very different discourses of national identity in 1810, when the main external other was 'Spain', than in 1847, when it became 'the United States'. The key markers of national identity, namely language, religion and ethnicity were interwoven differently and highlighted in a different way each time. These general theoretical assertions are here illustrated by focusing on the changing role indigenous minorities have played in the discursive construction of Mexican identity. In particular, the ways 'Indians' have been represented on film are analysed below, as cinema was, for most of the twentieth century, a crucial arena in which national identities were put forward and negotiated (Althusser, 2006).

Mexican Identity and its Others

Independence and the aftermath

Who are the Mexican people? According to the narrative that followed independence (1810), a minority of European descendents, called *criollos*,[iv] a vast majority of *mestizos* of mixed European and indigenous ancestry and an indigenous minority. The process whereby the *criollo* elite that led the wars for independence constructed Spain, with whom they shared every single aspect of their ethnicity and culture but the place of birth, as 'the Other' has been documented in the literature about the Latin American independence (Anderson, 1991, pp. 67-82). There are several versions on the motives of the *criollo* elite to search for—and eventually achieve—independence. To some, it was their thoroughly conservative and counter-reformist affiliation, which led them to regard the Bourbon reforms as too liberal to support their privileges in the mercantilist economy of the colonies (Brading, 1971, pp. 40-42). Personal search for upward mobility and a desire to gain control over natural resources are also

mentioned on elites in postcolonial states worldwide (Gellner, 2006). To their supporters, on the contrary, it was their embrace of the ideas of freedom and humanism that derived from the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the American independence that underpinned their foundation of the new nation-states. All over Latin America, the elites that led the wars for independence—José de San Martín, Simón Bolívar, Miguel Hidalgo, José Martí—also abolished slavery. Either way, the principle for inclusion then was territorial, not ethnic, linguistic, religious or otherwise cultural. Having been born in the land we now call the Americas made *criollos*, under this discourse, equivalent to *mestizos* and 'Indians' and different from Spain. But by the end of the wars for independence, the territories that had been three viceroyalties under Spanish rule became more than ten—and eventually 16—different nation-states, all attempting to produce or emphasise some difference that could account for the new nationalities, and to downplay the common cultural background that the empire had brought. This was often achieved through centralisation, and processes whereby *the local* became re-conceptualised as *the national*, as will become clear below.

Revolutionary Nationalism and 'Mestizaje'

According to the narrative derived from the revolution (1910-1922), Mexicans were all *mestizos*, that is, as mentioned above, descendents of the Spanish conquerors and the Indians, hybridity becoming the very essence of *Mexicanity* itself.[v] To distinguish Mexicans from other Latin Americans, 'the Aztecs' are in this discourse taken as shorthand for the various indigenous peoples that inhabited the Americas in the central region of what today is Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards. Thus, a supposedly distinctive Mexican ethnicity based on the uniqueness of its indigenous and European origins, the Spanish dialects spoken there and the syncretic Catholic

religion embraced by the vast majority of the population became the key relevant identity markers in this account, and these also were what made Mexicans different from other Latin Americans that shared the same European and indigenous ethnic and cultural background.

What this construction blurs though is that 'hybridity' is always already there. It was at the heart of the supposedly pure and homogeneous 'Spaniards', which comprised not only Galicians (celts), Basques, Catalans and various other ethnicities and cultures—including their own languages—but also peoples from an Arab background, as the Iberian peninsula had long been partly populated and governed by Arabs by the time 'the Spaniards' arrived. 'The Spaniards' were thus not homogeneous either ethnically, linguistically or culturally. As for 'the Indians', at the time more than fifty different indigenous peoples populated the central region of the Americas that later became part of Mexico, among them the Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, Huastec, Tarascan, Toltec and the Aztec empire, again each with their own distinctive language and culture. But nonetheless, from the revolution until the 1990s, privileging the *mestizo* identity as both inherently hybrid and essential at the same time was the cornerstone of the national project that emerged from the revolutionary settlement, a project called 'revolutionary nationalism'.

Revolutionary nationalism would prove absolutely crucial for the stability the country enjoyed for most of the twentieth century, as it involved the creation and development of a strong welfare state whose legitimacy rested in being cast as part of the national 'we'. The welfare state included the setting in place of a centralised educational and healthcare system, a strategy for economic growth based on public sector investment and a substantial bureaucratic class whose members were allowed considerable upward mobility. The construction of the national 'we' involved the re-

negotiation of ethnicity, language and culture once again. Importantly, for the first time, a positive connotation was given to the purported hybridity of Mexicans, characterising them, following theories from the realm of biology, as the healthier, stronger product of a pool of genes instead of the 'half breed' that had been prevalent before (Minna Stern, p. 190). Indigenous peoples had a central role in this construction, as the project involved a reappraisal of their cultures and a place of pride in the forging of the identity. This stance, it was hoped, would help both incorporate them to the national 'we' while also restoring dignity to *mestizos*, as indigenous descendents, and legitimating ownership over the (home)land. The role of indigenous peoples however would be one consigned to the past, as 'ancestors', since policies of assimilation that would turn the remaining indigenous minorities into cultural *mestizos* were thoroughly pursued. In a first stage dating from the 1920s the Ministry of Education headed by José Vasconcelos engaged in a large scale attempt to produce artistic representations of Indigenous populations and the working classes, famously including the commissioning of murals by Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros (Smith, 2004, p. 217). Later, this project was consolidated with the creation of institutions and organisations. From the point of view of discourse analysis as outlined above, institutions and organisations are understood as 'sedimented' discourses, which 'despite their origins as products of hegemonic practices have become relatively permanent and durable' (Howarth, 2000, p. 120). One such institution was the National Museum of Anthropology and History, created in 1964 'to pay homage to the admirable cultures that flourished in the pre-Columbian era' and to which 800,000 square metres at the heart of the city's main avenue, Reforma, were devoted.[vi] Present-day Mexicans of the time were thus invited to take the active position of a subject and 'know' their objectified indigenous ancestors, who were

constructed, by their place in a museum, as fundamentally *past*. Importantly, this phase of development of the nation-state was brought about by a period of intensified industrialisation and urbanisation, accompanied by the standardisation and massification of popular culture that are part and parcel of modernisation.[vii] Indeed, cinema had a crucial role in this regard and ultimately became more important for the *indigenista* projects than the creation of the Anthropology museum, in that it reached audiences beyond the middle class and the intelligentsia.

The specificity of cinema as a distinctively modern medium, and thus one closely bound to the nation-state, has been well documented in the literature (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979). Cinema contributed to the cultural homogenisation of its mass audience in a variety of ways, ranging from the standardisation of the mode of reception to the creation of an alternative public sphere, more inclusive of class and gender difference than had been the case in other earlier forms of leisure (Hansen, 2002, p. 394). But beyond the institutional aspects that link it with modernity, it was cinema's narrative capabilities that made it truly crucial for the fostering of national identifications: if national identities are mostly narratives of belonging to a community of history and destiny people subscribe, what better way of putting forward representations of such 'we' than on film? In this sense cinema quickly became a key arena for the contestation and negotiation of identity.

On film, the output from this period, which later came to be known as the 'Golden Age' of Mexican cinema (1935-1958)—on account of both the quality and quantity of production—included a number of films in which characters representing Indigenous peoples were, for the first time, protagonists.[viii] Among them, *Redes* (Zinnemann, 1936), *Tizoc* (Rodríguez, 1957) and, by Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández, *Maria Candelaria* (1943), *Flor Silvestre* (1943), *La Perla* (1945), *Rio Escondido*

(1947), *Maclovia* (1948) and *Pueblerina* (1949). Most academic research on these films has been devoted to Fernández as an auteur, pointing to the way he sought to combine the progressive, committed social-realism of Sergei Eisenstein—whose *¡Que Viva México!* (1932) he acknowledged as a source—and the commercially-driven, genre-based Hollywood style Fernández had been trained in, into a style that he in fact called 'the Mexican School' (Tuñón, 2003, p. 47). In this regard, most commentators find he failed to draw sufficient attention to the precarious material conditions of indigenous communities and to interrogate the reasons underlying these. Also there is a general consensus that Fernández tended to be rather ambivalent in his depictions of 'Indians'. On the one hand, he elevated them 'to mythic stature, romanticised their lives and […] linked the character of '*lo Mexicano*' visually and narratively to Mexico's indigenous roots' (Hershfield, 1999, p. 87). On the other, indigenous communities, equated with 'tradition' and rendered as '*el populacho*' (the mob), were often shown as ignorant, backward, superstitous and dangerous (Noble, 2005, p. 89). Importantly, 'in all of Fernández's films, race and class appear to be synonymous', with Indians at the bottom (Hershfield, 1999, p. 87). This would prove to be crucial for the management of internal multiculturalism during this period, as 'Indians' were gradually recast as 'poor peasants'. While films from this period began by locating specific indigenous groups (Xochimilcas in *Maria Candelaria*, Purépechas in *Maclovia* and so on) they later depict generic 'Indians' and by the demise of the genre in the early 1950s it is peasants they focus on, as in *Pueblerina* (Village girl).

I would like to suggest however that the value of these films by Fernández and others does not primarily lie in their success or failure to render an 'accurate' representation of indigenous peoples or to politically mobilise viewers to seek

revolutionary change. The value of these films lies instead in their provision of a visual discursive realm for cross-cultural identification within the nation-state. This was pursued by two means: the casting of stars and the use of genre (melodrama) and mode (realism).

Regarding stars, attention has so far been given to the 'whitening' of Indians these films undertook, in that indigenous characters were played by *mestizo* actors like Dolores del Rio, Maria Felix and Pedro Infante (Hershfield, 1999, p. 87). But if stars are 'celebrated film performers who develop a "persona" or myth, composed of an amalgam of their screen image and private identities, which the audience recognises and expects from film to film' then attention must also be given to the meanings these stars brought to the indigenous characters they played (Vincendeau in King, 2003, p. 140). Maria Felix starred as an indigenous woman whose fiancé has been unjustly imprisoned by a *criollo* seargant that desires her in *Maclovia* and then as a *mestiza* who falls in love with an Indian, played by Pedro Infante, in *Tizoc* (see picture 1). The meanings her star persona connoted were associated not only with physical beauty, but also with modernity and cosmopolitanism, and above all with a strong will, freedom and independence. To Carlos Fuentes she was 'an independent woman in a country where women over the centuries were destined to be nuns or whores' (King, 2003, p. 149). To Octavio Paz, Felix 'has had the bravery not to conform to the macho ideals of women. She is free as the wind' (King, 2003, p. 150). Indeed, Maria Felix married four times, including some of the most popular and successful artists of the time, such as Agustín Lara and Jorge Negrete, and stirred controversy by attending the latter's funeral wearing trousers in 1953. Nick-named *La Doña*, when her estate was auctioned by Christie's in 2007, she was thus described:[ix]

> ‘Her beauty and aggressive style landed her a steady spot on best-dressed lists [...] Friends ranged from film directors Luis Buñuel and Jean Renoir to Baron Guy de Rothschild and Prince Ali Khan. Her fourth husband, a Swiss banker, owned a stable with 100 thoroughbreds. Felix’s racing silks and saddles were made by Hermes and her jewels by Cartier’ (Pollock, 2007).

Thus while the plot and narrative in *Maclovia* depicted a humble, obedient Indian woman, submitted to the patriarchal order, the casting of Felix to the role—who had made fifteen films to date and whose career as a star was already consolidated—thoroughly subverted these meanings. Point of view shots taken from a fishing harbour often show her standing high and proud at the top of a cliff. Her ‘traditional’ Indian costume, actually designed by Armando Valdéz Peza, made her more glamorous than humble. And crucially, while Maria Candelaria was stoned to death, Maclovia succeeds in eloping with her lover. The result is a rather more empowered indigenous woman than the narrative would seem to allow. As for Infante, he made his name by charismatically playing ‘ordinary’ characters from the ranks of ‘the people’—thereby, ‘enchanting’ them, as Max Weber would have it—mainly city dwellers, including a carpenter, a policeman, a boxer and a priest in some of his best known films (Dyer, 1991). His Tizoc would have then also placed ‘Indians’ within ‘the poeple’. In both cases, these were characters that a broad range of audiences could identify, and perhaps even (re)-align, with. For, from a cognitivist perspective, the main potentially emancipatory value of realism in popular film lies in its ability to cue spectators into questioning the status quo, that is, into altering received schemata for making sense of their social world (Hallam & Marshment, 2000, p. 130). Thus, while far from being revolutionary films, the schemes for ‘Indians’ and *mestizos* that had prevailed were at least interrogated, and room was made for both to overlap, and for both to mean ‘Mexicanity’.

After the North American Free Trade Area Agreement (NAFTA)

The stage of nation building through revolutionary nationalism came to a halt in the 1980s, since the onset of what David Harvey has famously termed 'flexible accumulation' of capital, what others call 'Post-Fordism' (Harvey, 1991, pp. 9-10; Ong, 2006 [1999]). In his argument, technical, financial and institutional innovations have led from the mass industrial production that prevailed for most of the twentieth century, when the nation-state was the driving engine of economic growth and the guarantor of citizenship and social life, to globalised regimes of flexible accumulation in which transnational corporations have largely taken over this role. New sectors of production have emerged, including, crucially, new markets that are no longer national in scope.

In Mexico, this phase that Harvey calls 'flexible accumulation' has been experienced mainly as a regional economic integration with the United States and Canada. Therefore, the revolutionary nationalism discourse that constructed national identity on the basis of *mestizaje* with the United States as its main other and underpinned and reinforced by a strong welfare, Keynesian state as outlined above began to lose ground in the 1980s. A new meaning for the identity was sought instead in a supra-national arrangement, the North American Free Trade Area, a discourse that I have termed elsewhere, following Derrida, of supplementarity (Derrida, 1976). The new discourse involved the re-framing of all key issues in this very complex bilateral relationship, namely the external debt, drug trafficking and crucially migration, into narratives of partnership and complementarity. Thus dependence for trade on the United States, formerly narrated as an obstacle to be overcome in order to achieve development, was instead presented as a means of access to the American market. Migration was also recast from a problem in which the United States was a

passive victim, into the result of push-pull factors in the world economy that drew the labor force to where jobs were available (Calavita, 1989). In short, some of the key signifiers that had under the revolutionary nationalism discourse given meaning to Mexicanity were re-grafted into new discourses of supplementarity. 'Dependence' was recast as 'opportunity,' 'development' as 'integration,' and national identity could now be understood as Mexican even beyond the territorial borders of the nation. The binary oppositions that define the political field were once again altered through different practices instituting different boundaries, with who 'we' are depending on who 'the other' is. In this context, similarities with the United States were highlighted, and differences not narrated. Ronald Inglehart's survey on civic culture published in 1996 as 'The North American Trajectory: Cultural, Economic and Political Ties Among the United States, Canada, and Mexico' concluded there were more similarities in terms of conservative social values between Mexico and the US than between the US and other members of 'the West' (Inglehart, 1996). In 1995 a law allowing dual nationality for Mexican citizens was passed. At the national university, the 'Centre for Research on North America' broadened its remit to include Mexico. Even CNN weather forecasts shown in Mexico included Mexican cities when telling the forecast for the US.

Several consequences have followed from these changes, among them a renewed subject-position for indigenous peoples. For the signing of NAFTA implied in effect the dismantling of most of the social security networks that the state had set in place after the revolution, with large scale privatisation and effective de-nationalisation of the economy.[x] Thus the signing of NAFTA, which crystallised many of these changes, was famously accompanied by the uprising, in the south-eastern state of Chiapas, of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional EZLN

comprising mainly indigenous peoples. For the following decade the Zapatistas became a key political actor, one that mobilised vast sectors of the population as well as international public opinion. But as Xóchitl Leyva has remarked, 'it was not until the arrival of the Zapatista movement that the inhabitants of Las Cañadas [in Chiapas] used their ethnicity as a political instrument to make their demands heard at national level' (Leyva, 1998, p. 45). In other words, it was not until the nation-state in Mexico underwent the radical transformation brought about by 'flexible accumulation' or 'Post-Fordist' capitalism that the Mexican identity in which indigenous peoples were 'poor peasants' collapsed, and they came to be seen as internal others again. Thus the multicultural state in Mexico is in fact the result of a new discursive construction of national identity, in turn brought about by the structural transformation of the nation state, as can be seen in contemporary visual representations of Mexican identity. Where the meaning of '*lo mexicano*' had before been linked to indigenous peoples, it was now visually linked to young, urban, upwardly mobile professionals leading what many regard as westernised life-styles, as in the highly successful *Sexo, Pudor y Lágrimas* (Serrano, 1999) and *Sólo con tu Pareja* (Cuarón, 1991).

After a period of about forty years during which films on indigenous peoples disappeared from Mexican cinema, they started being made again in the 1990s. Among them are *Retorno a Aztlán* (Mora Catlett, 1991), *The Other Conquest* (Carrasco: 1998) and, more recently, *Eréndira Ikikunari* (Mora Catlett, 2007). They share a revisionist project, aiming to put forward an indigenous point of view, 'an attempt at the re-writing of history' (Haddu, 2007, p. 157). Indigenous actors have been cast and the films have featured dialogues in indigenous languages rather than Spanish. Often indigenous legends have provided the basis for the scripts. They are all set at the time of the conquest or earlier.[xi] And in a significant departure from the

films made in the 1930s and 1940s, realism has been rejected or toned down in favour of a more surrealistic rendition of the stories. For indigenous peoples, Mora Catlett explained, 'horses were akin to monsters and invaders were seen as…creatures from another planet' (see image 2) (Mora Catlett in Caballero, my translation). It was this that his *Eréndira* sought to capture. But paradoxically, since the Mexican viewers that comprise most of their target audience are nearly all Spanish—or, in the US, English—speakers, or speakers of other indigenous languages, and are familiar with realist modes of narration, these features have the effect of alienating them from the indigenous characters, who easily become Others. Despite the artistic merits and highly commendable intentions of these films, it is nonetheless unclear that this sort of filmmaking has actually worked either to advance indigenous causes or to broaden audiences for this kind of cinema beyond those attending film festivals and art houses. Tellingly, the only case of a recent star-led film on a *mestiza* that would clad herself in Indian costume as part of her expression of Mexicanity in the 1930s, Frida Kahlo,[xii] was played by Salma Hayek in 2002 and harks back to Maria Felix's rendition of Maclovia. But while the couple played by Felix and Armendariz was meant to make room for the expression of Mexicanity through an indigenous ethnicity,

> 'The production company, Miramax's publicity machine, through interviews, advertisements [...] and a wealth of photographs constantly spoke of Hayek's star persona as a 'committed' Mexican beauty in a relationship [...] with a committed Anglo film star. This couple could embody [...] a myth of ethnic fusion and harmony at a time when the US Bureau of Census was predicting that by 2050, the Latino population would be half that of the 'white' inhabitants and double that of African-Americans' (King, 2003, p. 142).

Stardom and *mestizaje,* including the cultural icons of revolutionary nationalism, are thus now being deployed again, for analogous but qualitatively different purposes.

Conclusion

To the so-called modernist theorists of the nation, the nation states we inhabited until the twentieth century were the polities that resulted from modernisation, a process that entailed the passage from agrarian to industrial societies, the formation of vernacular languages, the downward-spreading of a 'high' culture and vice versa, and the various elites and intelligentsias engaging in nation and state-building through a variety of institutions, not least the media, including cinema (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992; Gellner, 2006). As regards culture, these nation-states were characterised by a tendency towards centralisation, homogenisation and standardisation. From this point of view, the present nation-states we currently inhabit, in contrast, creatures as they are of a phase of capitalism that requires flexibility rather than fixity for the accumulation of capital and in which an economic ethos pervades social relations, tend towards decentralisation, heterogenisation and atomisation of identities. The sort of national identities required by contemporary, post-national states are no longer of the committed, loyal, emotionally invested, affective sort born in the aftermath of 1848. As Saskia Sassen has noted, the polity I have referred to as post-national state does not require 'soldier citizens' anymore, but flexible, mutable, mobile subjects, who can continuously transform and retransform themselves (Sassen, 2008, p. 283). The new identities being fostered are thus overlapping, such as the bi-national Chicanos and other forms of diaspora, or fleeting, temporary, based on instrumental, utilitarian relations of trade and profit. Boundaries are therefore more permeable too: common experience, some shared interests, and ideally a common future. Where these erode too much, the nation is no longer viable because there is not enough horizontal solidarity binding the group together, and the community breaks down. The apparent embrace of multiculturalism that can be seen in many nation-states

nowadays may well be but an attempt to restore the modicum of commonality that is necessary to avoid this breakdown.

Recently, the dramatic rise of violence related to drug trafficking and organised crime that pervades Mexico has given rise to a discussion on whether it has become a failed state (Kurtzman, 2009). If the state is regarded, after Max Weber, as the set of institutions that retain control over the means for legitimate violence in society, this would seem unlikely (Weber, 1997 [1964]). I would contend however that given its ongoing inability to address the situation and the demands of indigenous peoples and its failure to provide a sound multicultural basis for the identity, at the moment it can more fairly be regarded a failed nation.

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Notes

[i] Although their rationale and efficacy is much debated, many states now enforce university and/or police quotas for members of ethnic or religious minorities. Such is the case in Canada, New Zealand, Brazil, China, Malaysia and in the UK, Northern Ireland.

[ii] To Doreen Massey 'coevalness concerns a stance of recognition and respect in situations of mutual implication', especially as regards sharing space (Massey, 2005, p. 69).

[iii] On the recent de-nationalisation of the state, see Saskia Sassen's account of the privatisation of government functions and of much of the formerly public realm in a number of countries, including Mexico, following the onset of neoliberalism (Sassen, 2008, pp. 222-271).

[iv] In Spanish *criollo* is thus different from the English *creole,* which implies hybridity.

[v] On hybridity more generally see (Bhabha, 2004) and also (Kraidy, 2005).

[vi] Inaugural speech by then President Adolfo López Mateos on September 17th, 1964.

[vii] For a detailed account on the relevance of popular culture for the formation of nation states—with examples drawn from the UK—see (Hall, 2006). And for the role of the other aspects of popular culture, such as mariachi music, in Mexico, see (Mulholland, 2007).

[viii] Along with the films depicting indigenous minorities, other films focused on Mexican immigrants to the United States, then derogatorily referred to as 'pochos' and later as 'Chicanos'. Simultaneously claiming the Mexican identity and the American identity that was, until the 1990s, its discursive opposite, Chicanos, like indigenous peoples, put into question the fit between the political and the territorial unit that nationalism struggles to create (De La Garza, 2009).

[ix] The batch included paintings of hers by Diego Rivera. One of them, commissioned for a film and significantly entitled *Mother*, cannot leave Mexico as it is regarded national heritage.

[x] For a discussion on what the reforms entailed, see (Hamnett, 1999, pp. 285-287; González Gómez, 1998, pp. 37-65).

[xi] Although the rationale provided for the making of *Eréndira* by director Juan Mora-Catlett is its relevance for present day indigenous peoples in that 'the Purépecha are a living culture…this is why I did not think it would be right to use actors from Mexico City…I came to Michoacán and filmed the landscape there' (Caballero, 2007). The film was also first shown there rather than in Mexico City.

[xii] Frida Kahlo was the daughter of German photographer, Guillermo Kahlo, and Matilde Calderón, a *mestiza* from Oaxaca.