

Claudio Lomnitz**Nationalism's Dirty Linen: 'Contact Zones' and the Topography of National Identity.**

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Introduction. The production of knowledge, the narrative strategies and the psychology of colonial and post-colonial relations have been the topic of a body of writing that has come to be known in the anglophone world as 'post-colonial theory.' Within this broad field, there is an area of sociological inquiry that is of central importance, which is the systemic aspect of national identity production. Until recently, nationalist narratives were predominant, and they portrayed national identity and national consciousness as processes of 'self-awakening.' National identity was portrayed as emerging out of a dialectic that was internal to the national community.

In the past twenty years or so this approach has itself been shown to be an instrument of national identity production. Instead of looking for the secret of national identity within the 'soul' or 'spirit' of each nation, contemporary analysts have looked at the history of nationalism as an aspect of transnational relations. Local innovations to nationalist imagery, discourse and technique are communicated between politicians, experts and intellectuals the world over, in a complex history that leads to the standardization of various strands of nationalism. This history implicates scientific theories and measurements, narrative strategies in fiction and non-fiction, and aesthetic solutions to shaping the national image in art, architecture, and urban planning.¹

¹ This interest in the international networks of national identity production has produced an exciting corpus of works on the history of mapping, of censuses, of standardization of scientific measurements, of world expositions, of nationalist strategies in a number of literary forms and genres, in architecture, and urbanism and on the history of transnational scientific and artistic networks. Perhaps the finest methodological exemplar of this line of research is Daniel Rogers' *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge MA, 1998), but this tradition has also produced a number of more general and theoretically inclined works, such as Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis, 1998), Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation. In *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha Ed. (New York, 1990), 291-322, Nestor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and*

National identity has thus been shown to be fashioned in transnational networks of specialists, intellectuals and politicians, many of whom proceed to cover their tracks and to tell their tales as if they were strictly local inventions. Moreover, the denial of interdependency between nations has been shown to have a variety of political uses. Thus, intellectuals from colonized areas have criticized the ways in which their countries' material and intellectual contributions have been appropriated by the great powers, whose nationalism is thus easily identified with 'rationality' and 'civilization.' The nationalism of weak nations is, as a result, in constant need of self-assertion, and it tends to mirror the nationalism of these powers by claiming independent or prior invention of civilization for itself.²

The shift from internal accounts of the origins of national identity to accounts that understand nationalism as a cultural product that is generated in a web of transnational connections is thus of great consequence. Nevertheless, this development has not yet provided all of the elements that are required for a systematic account of the contexts in which national identity actually emerges. Nationalism, as Benedict Anderson argued, is not a coherent ideology but rather a broad cultural frame in which a variety of contradictory claims are made.³ We know that states put forth their proposals for a national image and implement them in schools, museums and public squares, but at

Leaving Modernity (Minneapolis, 1995), Gyan Prakash, Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India (Princeton, 1999), Doris Sommers, Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America (Berkeley, 1991), and Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York, 1993), to name a few prominent examples.

² In the recent anglophone literature, Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism is a wide-ranging exploration of the ways in which the colonial world was both critically important to the development of 'Western civilization' and systematically diminished or denied by it. The poor nations' reaction to these practices is outlined by Katherine Verdery, who explores what she calls 'protochronism' amongst Romanian nationalist intellectuals, which is a tendency to assert that key inventions of civilization were invented their country first. Both of these aspects of nationalism have been long recognized by writers and politicians in the colonial and post-colonial world. As early as the seventeenth century, indigenous intellectuals such as Guaman Poma and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl argued for a kind of 'protochronism' with regards to Christianity, claiming that their ancestors recognized the true God before the arrival of the Spaniards. This tactic underlies much of Latin America's indigenista thinking since at least the nineteenth century, and was given playfully ironic treatment in early 1900s by the Brazilian writer Lima Barreto through the tragicomic nationalist hero Policarpio Cuaresma.

³ Imagined Communities, 5.

which points, in which social relations, is national identity pertinent, underlined or referred to by other actors?

It is quite easy to produce lists of disparate contexts and relationships in which national identity 'naturally' emerges: in the exclusion of an upwardly mobile urban Aymara teenager from an afternoon social by her 'white' Bolivian classmates; in the negotiation of a business deal in broken English; or in the film that features an exotic woman who is made to represent the bounties of her country to potential foreign investors... The list of identity-producing social relationships is limitless, and placing its diverse items in the frame of a broader political economy is a challenge. I seek here to put order in the various sorts of contexts in which national identity 'naturally' emerges. The matter is of some importance to the general project of this book, which is to understand the conditions for the production of "Mexico" as a polity, as national identity, and as national culture.

These conditions have often been precarious.⁴ Like many peripheral nations, Mexico emerged as the result of the collapse of an empire more than because of an overwhelming popular desire for national independence. Nationalism was thus not widely shared at the time of the national revolutions. Moreover, like most Spanish-American countries, Mexico achieved statehood long before its territory was bound together in a "national market" or by a "national bourgeoisie." As a result, the territorial consolidation of the country was a long, conflict-ridden process involving secessions, annexations, and civil wars and foreign interventions. National consolidation came a half a century after independence, and was still called into question on several later occasions. As a result, understanding the process of identity formation in Mexico is both an historical and a sociological challenge. It is an historical challenge because it has been such an uneven and differentiated process. It is sociologically demanding because identities are always relational; the

⁴ So much so that Roger Bartra's most recent book is a collection of essays on "the post-Mexican condition," La sangre y la tinta: Ensayos sobre la condición postmexicana (Mexico, 1999).

specification of the relationships that generate national identity implies a sociology of national identity.

The case is thus a paradigmatic context for what I have called 'grounded theory': the confrontation of an historical and a political problem that requires sociological innovation. The theoretical requirement here is constrained by the historical object (Mexico), an object that is generally believed to be provincial. The knowledge that stems from that which is provincial is usually thought to be parochial and prosaic. As opposed to England, France, Germany or the United States, the Latin American countries have generally not been held up to be the cradle of anything in particular that is of world-historical significance.⁵ Moreover, even Latin America's status as 'Western' or 'non-Western' is ambiguous, and it thus falls short in providing a radical sense of alterity for Europeans. Thus, the continent has not usually been cast in the role that 'the orient', Africa or Oceania have played in the Western imaginary, at least it has not often done so for the past couple of centuries. Mexico and Latin America have much more often been portrayed by Europeans and Americans as 'backward' than as radically different.⁶

On a theoretical plane the continent would thus appear to be destined to play Sancho Panza to North Atlantic's Don Quixote: not a radical other, but rather a common, backward, and yet pragmatic and resourceful companion. An inferior with a point of view. A repository of customs and relations past, where universalizing theories that were built to explain world-historical phenomena are constantly applied, and yet are often too high and disengaged from immediate

⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued for the need to 'provincialize' Europe in the realm of theory and history. If his call to arms succeeds then perhaps the sort of 'grounded theory' that I espouse here will in some respects be more universal and social thought may go through a phase that is parallel to the one that religion was said to have had in antiquity: "The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful." Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (London, 2000), 35.

⁶ European travelers to Mexico usually collected pre-Columbian objects. Contemporary products that attracted their attention were generally seen as curious exemplars of crafts that were distinctly European in origin, made quaint because of their indigenous twist. Thus, in the 1850s, a Mexican spur was sent to Britain by Henry Christy and E.B. Tylor where, due to its extravagance and size, it

interest. Even now, when the very notion of an historical vanguard has been so thoroughly questioned, the social thought emerging from these provinces is somewhat cumbersome when it is put to work elsewhere, usually requiring further extension and translation. 'Grounded theory' is a kind of theory that flies more like a chicken than like a hawk.

My aim in this chapter is to propose a simple generative principle for national identity production in peripheral post-colonial societies. From this general principle I derive four classes of social dynamics that generate particular frames of identity production. Each of these is then referred to and illustrated with historical examples from Mexico.

National Identity in the World System (Sancho's Version). Weak national communities adrift in the international system constantly run the risk of indecent exposure, of involuntarily revealing the tenuous connections between national imagery and everyday practice. Quite simply, a country's weakness in the international system undermines the basic tenets of modern nationalism and thereby calls national identity into question. These basic principles are, firstly, that the national state is a vehicle for the modernization of a people that shares a set of values and traditions, secondly, that this process of modernization chiefly serves the interests of national community and not those of foreigners, and thirdly, that nationalism is a sign of progressive modernity and not of backwardness. The peripheral post-colonial condition poses constant challenges to the most fundamental dogmas of nationalism. This is my general structural principle.

To this we should add one general historical principle, which is that peripheral nations generally develop in a force-field that is shaped by two contradictory impulses: the desire to appropriate for the nation the power and might of the empires that they have broken away from, and the impulse to shape modern national communities based on an idealized bond of fraternity between citizens. These two principles can be thought of as a tension between liberalism and ('internal') colonialism, a tension that is heightened by weakness in the international arena. Maintaining the system of internal differences inherited from the colonial world, the hierarchical differences of race, sex and

was exhibited in the medieval section of the museum, see Anahúac, or Mexico and the Mexicans,

ethnicity that are used to organize exploitation, can be seen as antagonistic to the ideal of the nation. A charge that can be levied not only by the lower classes of the country, but also by foreigners who can use the charge to raise their own claims. It is in relation to these principles that one can develop a sociology and a topography of the frames of identity production in which national identity is generated.

National Identity. Our subject is the interactions that generate an awareness of differences of ascription among actors, contacts between actors who identify as 'national' in contrast to others that are portrayed as 'foreign.' This specification is necessary because many contacts between persons, or between persons and objects that represent other persons, are not marked in this way, even when differences in nationality exist.

So, for example, the on-going implementation of so-called 'neo-liberal' policies in Mexico has led some people to 'foreignize' the government officials who have furthered these policies. From their point of view, neo-liberal officials are serving the interests of US-controlled institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and they are following teachings of their equally American professors at Harvard, Chicago, Stanford, or MIT. When this powerful movement of reform began, however, there were a number of intellectuals and politicians who had been calling for a 'return' to the liberal policies of Benito Juárez and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, Mexican national heroes of the 19th century. The same set of policies and relationships were 'indigenized' by some and marked 'foreign' by others. Thus 'neoliberalism' in Mexico is an ideological tendency that involves questions of national identity for some, and not for others. For a cultural contact to be considered under the definition that interests us here, it must serve to construct a difference in national identity between actors.

Frames of contact: The concept of "contact frame" refers to the relational contexts in which national identity production occurs. We can identify classes or types of such contexts from the dynamics of nation building and transnational interactions that can be isolated on the analytic plane.

Ancient and Modern (London, 1861), 295-296..

Contact frames are thus the minimal analytic units of a vast topography of national identity. For example, there is an entire class of contact frames that is produced by the logic of commodity production and consumption under capitalism, which is an international system that national communities can never completely encompass or regulate: a shop that sells foreign goods in La Paz, Bolivia is called 'Miamiquito' (and so provides a frame that marks both the foreign-ness of its wares and the nationality of its customers); during the 1970s the Latin American Left referred to Coca Cola as 'the sewage (las aguas negras) of Yankee imperialism, and thereby framed its distribution and consumption as so many episodes in the national struggle. We shall identify several such classes of contact frames.

"Contact Zones" and the Topography of National Identity: In traditional geography there is a distinction between the concept of "zone" (an internally homogeneous space) and "region" (the functional integration of different kinds of zones). I shall call an internally homogeneous class of contact frames a contact zone. Contact zones are integrated into a broader 'region' of national identity production that includes a zone of state institutions that define rights and obligations for citizens and produce images and narratives of nationality, and zones of local and class identity production that are equally critical.⁷ Thus contact zones are part of the 'region' of national identity production which is the national space, complete with the cultural production of the state and the internal idioms of distinction that give shape to national culture. These national spaces are, in their turn, part of global system of identity production. A typology of zones of contact like the one we

⁷ In an earlier work I developed some elements of this cultural geography, above all those having to do with the construction of cultural regions within a national space. To that end, I proposed a series of concepts including "intimate cultures"--cultural zones forged by social classes in specific interactive contexts--and "culture of social relations"--culture generated in the framework of interactions between different social classes and identity groups within the national space. The topography of zones of contact, which I did not develop in Exits from the Labyrinth, is an important part of the task of producing a geography of national identity. This is because national space is in itself an aspect of an international system, so frames of contact with the foreign have to be understood as a feature of production of national culture and identity and not as an element external to nationality.

are proposing here thus forms part of a broader project, which can be conceived of as a topography of national identity.

In this chapter I distinguish among four classes of frames of contact in the topography of national identity. They are generated by: 1) the material culture of capitalism; 2) the ideological tension between tradition and modernity which is necessary to the founding of nation-states; 3) the entropy of modernization, which is intrinsic to the development process; and 4) the international field of ideas and models of civilization, science and development, that forms part of what could be called the civilizing horizon of nation-states. I now describe each of these frames of contact using Mexican examples in order to understand how the contact frame challenges the stability of national regimes.

International business and imported material culture. The four types of contact zones that I discuss are abstractly related to an intrinsic quality of nation-states: they are political communities within a world system of communities, but they are part of an economy that cannot be contained by national borders. This quality of nation-states means that economic modernization (and its agents) can generate spaces of national identification and confrontation. This is especially the case in 'peripheral' nations, for which technological innovation and capital often come from abroad. In these contexts especially, consuming commodities or adopting productive techniques of foreign origin can be understood in relation to national identity.

For example, if we look at the history of Mexico, a number of anti-foreign manifestations have centered on commerce: anti-Spanish sentiment in the first republic led to the sacking of Mexico City's Parian market in 1829. This in turn preceded the expulsion of the Spaniards, who only eight years earlier had been proclaimed to be fellow Mexicans by the triumphant leaders of independence. Some of the most acutely xenophobic movements in Mexican history associate foreigners' supposedly pernicious influence with their position as businessmen. This was true of the anti-Chinese movements in Sonora during the revolution and of journalists' complaints against itinerant commerce by Jews and Arabs in Mexico City during the 1930s. Moreover, there are

numerous occasions when the products themselves have been seen as transporting a pernicious foreign influence. Thus, much of the activity of the Mexico's Interior Ministry's censorship commissions in the 1950s and 60s were geared to this. For years these commissions were in charge of censoring comics, films and other products of mass culture when it was judged that they conspired against basic Mexican values. That is, anti-Spanish, anti-Semitic, anti-Chinese and anti-American discourses have been constructed around the space of commerce and imported material culture.⁸

This is significant because the causes of each of these xenophobic movements were in fact different from each other. The anti-Spanish movement at the dawn of the republican era was related to the competition between England and the United States for political hegemony in Mexico and to power struggles between local parties; the anti-Chinese riots were spurred by members of regional political elites who saw the Chinese as easy targets; the identification of itinerant commerce as "foreign" in the 1920s and 1930s was a strategy to diminish an activity that affected established businesses. However, despite these different motivations, the identification of foreign businessmen and products as a danger to national integrity is a viable political argument because they do not conform to Mexican national customs and interests.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Mexican press emphasized that the trade in narcotics in Mexico's northern states was in the hands of foreigners: Chinese, Americans and Russians. Vice was being brought in from abroad. During the Díaz Ordaz presidency in the 1960s, an attempt was made to restrict the importation of films and records that promoted the hippies' "effeminate decadence."

⁸ For the case of the censorship commissions, see Ann Rubenstein, Bad language, naked ladies, and other threats to the nation : a political history of comic books in Mexico (Durham NC, 1998), chapter 4. For anti-semitism in the movements against itinerant salesmen during the Great Depression, see Gary Gordon, Peddlers, Pesos and Power : The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City (Chicago, 1997), 47 and Moisés González Navarro, Los extranjeros en México y los mexicanos en el extranjero, 1821-1970, 3 vols. (Mexico, 1994), 133-4. For the case of the Chinese, see Juan Puig, Entre el río Perla y el Nazas: la China decimonónica y sus braceros emigrantes, la colonia china de Teorreón y la matanza de 1911 (Mexico, 1992), 173-228; for the sacking of the Parián market see Romeo Flores Caballero, Counterrevolution: The role of the Spaniards in the Independence of Mexico, 1804-38 (Lincoln, 1974), 119-121.

Díaz Ordaz's crusade against American pop-culture went hand in hand with his repression of a number of middle class social movements. More recently, a proposal before Congress sought to ban the cartoon show, "Beavis and Butthead" from Mexican television because it perverted the nation's values, especially as regards to proper adolescent behavior.⁹

International business constantly produces national identity because businessmen can be credibly portrayed as furthering foreign or private interests at the expense of the national community. Also, the exogenous material culture of modernization can be perceived as corrupting morals or of subverting the ruling forms of cultural distinction that can easily be nationalized. Thus, the fact that national communities do not successfully encompass and control the national economy generates a zone of contact that is manifested in an open-ended number of contact frames. In each of these frames, a social actor identifies a product or an agent as 'foreign' and as opposed to the 'national' collective interest. This way of framing the national interest usually advances more particular interests that are un-named and fused into the national collective.

The tension between tradition and modernity. The second type of contact zone arises from the very logic of nationalism as an ideological construct. It is known that in different ways, nationalism depends on ideological constructs that tie "tradition" to "modernity." This dependency is necessary because modern nation-states are supposed to be vehicles for the modernization of collectivities (nations) that are, in their turn, defined in a genealogical relation to a "tradition".¹⁰ This ideal relationship can be precarious, however, especially in the case of weaker nations. When

⁹ For the case of drugs in the 1930s, see Luis Astorga, *Traficantes de drogas, políticos y policías en el siglo veinte mexicano*, in *Vicios públicos, virtudes privadas: la corrupción en México*, Claudio Lomnitz Ed. (México, 2000). The Díaz Ordaz regime's hostility to the disorder of Mexican pop culture is succinctly addressed in Carlos Monsivais, *Mexican Post-Cards* (New York, 1997), 23-27; for a more detailed and wide-ranging discussion see Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley, 1999). The discussion of Beavis and Butthead appeared in the national press in 1993.

¹⁰ This is also the argument that runs through Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger Eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983). Any Herderian view of nationality involves a dialectic between tradition and modernity.

national tradition is perceived to be divorced from or opposed to modernization, a contact zone emerges.

In Mexico, post-independence nationalism appropriated the pre-Hispanic world in a way analogous to the European appropriation of classical antiquity, but with a twist. The Aztecs were the forerunners of independent Mexico; the colonial period was a parenthesis that served to bring Christianity and certain traits of civilization, but it also barbarously degraded the condition of the indigenous peoples. Therefore, in principle the glorification of the pre-Hispanic past did not imply claims on behalf of the contemporaneous Indians because their habits and condition were seen to be the result of colonial degradation. Thus in the early post-independent era modernization could readily be made to trample over indigenous traditions without challenging national identity. The same was not true, however, with respect to the preservation of Catholicism and of a number of the mores of the Spanish colonial world.

Thus, modernization in the first half of the 19th century produced deep rifts between national versions, one of which sought to preserve the Catholic and Hispanicist traditions, while the other sought to found nationality squarely on liberal principles, and was fervently anti-Spanish and anti-clerical. These two national versions even honored two distinct heroes of independence and two different dates for national independence.¹¹ Each side accused the other of lack of patriotism and of collusion with foreign interests.

This situation changed with the end of the civil wars that followed the French Intervention (1867), a peace that involved a pragmatic arrangement between liberal and conservative factions under a universally acknowledged liberal hegemony. The peace also allowed Mexico to make a concerted effort to gain international respect and to attract foreign investment. This involved displaying the individuality of its culture to foreigners, an aim that was more readily achieved with tequila than with whisky and with indigenous huipils before manufactured shirts. Since that time,

the official construction of tradition necessarily visited certain features of Mexico's rural and artisan life, not only the pre-Columbian past.

At the same time, the relationship that the state was trying to create between tradition and modernity continued to hold. In some cases, the existence of a "Mexican tradition" made it possible for Mexico to claim a particular modernity, but it never denied the nation-state's fundamental and eternal aspiration: modernity and modernization.¹² Therefore, the great official points of pride could not and still cannot reside principally in the world called "traditional": the modern must be granted a privileged place in the national utopia. Thus, some of the crown jewels of Mexican state nationalism have been President Santa Anna's theater, Emperor Maximilian's boulevards, Don Porfirio's trains, Lázaro Cárdenas' nationalized petroleum industry, Miguel Alemán's Acapulco and National University campus, López Mateos' National Museum of Anthropology, Díaz Ordaz's subway and Olympics, and Echeverría's highways, Cancún and nationalized industries. Of these examples, the National Anthropology Museum is exemplary in that it combines traditional aesthetics with an avant-garde architecture that relies heavily on state-of-the-art technology. In this formulation, tradition is like the country's spiritual dimension, which is incorporated as an aesthetic to a unique modernity that is the country's present and, above all, its future.

¹¹ Liberals honored Hidalgo and celebrated Independence on September 15; conservatives honored Iturbide and celebrated independence on September 27. A detailed catalogue of ideas representing both sides of this rift can be found in *La dominación española* (Mexico, 1878).

¹² This relationship between tradition and modernity is not exclusively Mexican. In 19th century England, Matthew Arnold argued that the British national spirit was composed of three elements: the Saxon, which lent it its seriousness and tenacity; the Roman, which lent it its energy; and the Celtic, which lent it its spirit and sentiment: "[The English genius] is characterized, I have repeatedly said, by energy with honesty. Take away some of the energy which comes to us, I believe, in part from Celtic and Roman sources; instead of energy, say rather steadiness; and you have the Germanic genius: steadiness with honesty... the danger for a national spirit thus composed is the humdrum, the plain and ugly, the ignoble: in a word, das Gemeine, die gemeinheit, that curse of Germany, against which Goethe was all his life fighting." "On the Study of Celtic Literature,; in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* (Ann Arbor, 1962), v.3, 341. In this same essay, Arnold argues for the full assimilation of the Celtic peoples into British society and for the annihilation of Celtic as a living language. The assimilation of these defeated peoples into the national genius is thus an identical move to the one made by Mexican indigenistas.

However, Mexico's position as a relatively poor country in the international order threatened the ideal relationship that nationalism constructs between tradition and modernity, making it into a fissure where zones of transnational contact could endanger that very nationalism. Tourists, travelers, scientists and other inquisitive foreigners have generally tended to turn toward the traditional sector, and yet the state's capacity to get visitors to appreciate the alleged connection between the traditional and the modern has always been limited. For example, Eric Zolov describes the history of the hippie movement in Mexico as a case of cultural production in the context of transnational communication. Among his sources, Zolov cites the People's Guide to Mexico travel guide, which began to be published in the 1960s especially for countercultural tourists. In its heyday, this book served to orient the hippie to countercultural pilgrimage centers and to avoid friction with official Mexico. Thus, in a passage dedicated to the problems that hippies suffer when they cross the border, the guide points out that, to beat the system, "we look like small town teachers of college students from the early Sixties [when we cross]... The border officials love it."¹³

In this case, the foreign visitor is disguising herself as the Mexican government's ideal of an American visitor, a clean-cut student or teacher eager to visit the Mexico that the government was interested in exhibiting. Once this tourist crossed the border, however, she presumably removed her bra, put the beads back on, and then moved across the national territory with greater interest in Mexico's 'backward' areas and more suspicion of its 'progressive' sector than was desirable.

The contact frames that tourism and scientific study open up between the traditional and modern worlds had its first problematic moments long before the hippie movement. The US and European travelers who came to Mexico in the 1920s, 30s and 40s frequently felt more attracted to the rural, indigenous world than to the modern, urban one, which generally was less modern than their own cities. However, at that time the attraction that the foreign intellectual felt for the indigenous world went hand-in-hand with the state's own renewed interest in identifying with that world: the Mexican

¹³ Refried Elvis, 145.

revolution had reconfigured the ties between the indigenous and modern worlds in some respects. Also, even many official Mexican indigenistas of the period frequently sought inspiration for the modern in the indigenous.¹⁴ On the other hand, as the revolutionary order became more routinized and Mexico entered a modernizing era with ever more tenuous ties to the agrarian and popular world of the revolution, the relationship with the traditional world became more propagandistic, and foreign visitors' and intellectuals' lack of interest in modern Mexico could become irritating.

The countercultural hippie movement was the most conflictive moment in the recent history of this contact zone because it coincided with a phase of national development spurred by a strong, closed state that wanted to transform the country's position in the international scene. While President Díaz Ordaz sought to show the world a Mexico that was capable of hosting the Olympics--a Mexico with a recently inaugurated subway system, an Olympic Village built expressly for the event, and an architecturally impressive new gym, pool, and stadium--a number of people who rejected the labor and very idea of progress looked for mushrooms in Huautla, walked around in peasant sandals and changed the very image of Mexican youth.

The contact zone that inverts the hierarchy of tradition and modernity also touches the history of anthropology. This discipline's fieldwork methodology made middle and upper-class Mexicans and foreigners privilege the peasant over the local schoolteacher or the village merchant. Anthropological fieldwork gave cultural authority to people who in their own regions had been disdained or even silenced for their supposed backwardness, a practice that would be repeated and reinforced by travelers who were attracted to Mexico's indigenous people and peasantry.

The search for the authentic, both in science and travel, sometimes inverted the scale of prestige; by showing little interest in Mexico's modern sector, travelers interested in authenticity exposed its lack of distinctiveness. The sector that was paraded internally as the vanguard and latest cry of modernity was old hat to the foreigner. By revealing that the country was not on the cutting

¹⁴ Examples of how government indigenistas sought to reconfigure this relationship can be found in Alexander Dawson, Indigenismo and the Paradox of the Nation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico

edge of modernity and by nonetheless exalting its traditional sector, foreign visitors and scientists could de-stabilize the ideal relationship between tradition and modernity that is so essential to all nationalism. Thus foreigners in the traditional world generate a contact zone that produces nationalist reactions.

The famous educator José Vasconcelos discussed the politics of this contact zone in his autobiography, where he describes his childhood on the Mexican/American border. Vasconcelos recounts that as a Mexican child who crossed into the United States every day to go to school, he was impressed by the fact that the US school textbooks shared his sympathy with Mexican Indians and rejected the Spaniards. However, as an adult Vasconcelos viewed the love that Americans professed for the Mexican Indian as a thinly veiled desire to replace the Mexican Creole with an American. By denying the ties between Mexico's modernizing elite and its indigenous traditions, the country was defenseless against US imperialism.¹⁵ Other active agents in this contact zone do not necessarily seek to strengthen an imperial center against Mexico's government and official culture. However, these agents can create doubts about the government's efficacy or even the legitimacy of its modernizing goals.

The disorder of modernization . Modernization, as we have seen repeatedly, is critical to the legitimation of the national state. When modernization destroys an aspect of the status quo that can be claimed as a national tradition, a contact zone emerges in which the modernizing agent is assimilated with 'foreignness.' When traditional sectors of the country are portrayed by foreigners as more accomplished than the modern sector, or as being in an unhealthy competition with it, a contact zone emerges. There is yet a third related source of national identity production, which is the entropy of modernization. Our third type of contact zone is generated by the difficulties that nationalists face when the disorder that is produced by modernization is exposed. In order to understand the

(Stony Brook, 1997).

¹⁵ "And it was quite singular that those Americans who so guarded the privilege of their white caste, when it came to Mexico always sympathized with the Indians, and never with the Spaniards." Ulises criollo, in Memorias v.1 (Mexico, 1983), 34.

contours of this contact zone, we need to review the place that modernizing projects have in the cultural production of the state.

The culture that states produce has diverse purposes. On one hand is what Arjun Appadurai has called the “ethnographic state.”¹⁶ This is the form country’s supposed of state cultural production that describes the national population—which is the alleged subject of the state--by manufacturing censuses, questionnaires, histories and statistics. Alongside the ethnographic state is the “modernizing state”--the form of official cultural production that seeks to lay out the task of development. Once “the population” is described, the ethnographic state’s scales and measures serve to define lacks or scarcities such as “poverty”, “illiteracy” and “unhealthy conditions” as well as a series of growth and progress-oriented measures that define the efficacy of governments.¹⁷

Together with these two aspects of state cultural production is a third, which is the production of the country’s image for both international and domestic consumption. This includes cultural production for attracting tourism, international sports events, international congresses, national museums, television stations, and schools. All institutions that are presented as national dedicate at least some effort to shaping or conforming to the national image. A fundamental difficulty for this third aspect of state cultural production is that the national image is not at all easy to manage.

Erving Goffman’s theatrical metaphor of ‘front stage’ and ‘backstage’ describes the relationship between a subject’s public presentation and what he or she wants to hide or protect.¹⁸ The state production of nationalism seeks to construct spaces where the official image of the national takes material form and can be displayed to insiders and outsiders. That is, states seek to

¹⁶ “The Culture of the State,” lecture notes, University of Chicago, 1997.

¹⁷ Arturo Escobar’s Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World (Princeton, 1995) is a critique of development as it has been organized since the Second World War. The role of development discourse (not only at the general ideological level but, more importantly, as a set of categories and measurements) is central to this story.

¹⁸ The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York, 1959), 106-134.

create a “front stage” (public) image characterized by an ideal combination of modern and traditional components. They usually seek to show a booming country that marches inexorably toward progress and modernity.

However, the very creation of this public image leaves disorder in its wake: the history of tourism is the supreme example of this. In Mexico, Cuernavaca was probably the first modern tourist destination, developed during the 1920s and 30s. Cuernavaca's main attraction was its stupendous climate, its proximity to Mexico City, and the fact that both the nation's jefe supremo, Don Plutarco Elías Calles, and the US ambassador, Dwight Morrow, built residences there. This attracted both the Mexican political class and an important contingent of American retirees. In addition to the climate was the Casino de la Selva, which offered distractions to tourists who might otherwise get bored by the quaint and the picturesque. However, the casino was also seen as a bad influence on the population, presenting an undesirable image of Mexico as a place where foreigners could shed the moral strictures they faced in their own countries. Reflecting on this, President Lázaro Cárdenas judged that the casinos created undesirable frames of contact: a form of tourism based on the promotion of public vices.

However, the “ugly” side of tourism is not easy to root out, and around tourist centers the differences between foreign tourists and national workers in terms of their consumption and purchasing power became apparent. Therefore, beginning with Acapulco and continuing with Cancún, Ixtapa and others, the cities constructed for tourism are “twin cities”: a “front stage” coast and hotel zone is exposed to the tourist and “backstage” zones combine poverty, prostitution and so on. This relationship between the presentable side and its hidden consequences makes a number of politically volatile frames of contact possible. For example, in her work on prostitution in Mexico City during the 1920s and 30s, Katherine Bliss describes the discussion that took place in the capital city government about the creation of a red-light district near the La Merced market. The neighbors organized themselves to protest against the project. Among the arguments they employed was that the red-light district should not be authorized because it would be located on the

route between the Mexico City international airport and downtown, and so would be one of the first images that visitors would have of the city.¹⁹

In the same way that a housewife tries to make sure that her visitors stay in the parlor and do not see the mess in the bedrooms or kitchen, the government, tourist industry and a good number of patriots seek to display an image of order and cleanliness to foreigners, and the strain involved in these efforts easily turns into a political liability. In a 1910 essay titled 'Two Patriotisms,' Luis Cabrera, who would be one of the principal ideologues of the Mexican Revolution, described how the Porfirian elite organized a spectacular celebration of the independence centennial for the benefit mainly of foreign investors. The festivities were so concerned with managing the national image that when a ragged group of women workers organized their own celebratory march, it was brutally dispersed by the police. The national image is difficult to control not only because it is difficult to keep the ragged workers from the view of the investors, but also because the very occasion of a national show is a tempting occasion for union leaders to display them. A better-known example of a similar political context is the violence of the Mexican '68, which was tied to upholding the national image during the Olympics. Indeed, President Díaz Ordaz and the anti-student social sectors spoke insistently of evil foreign influences that goaded the innocent Mexican student: only a foreigner would seek to dirty Mexico's public image before the world.

There are other cases, like the border cities of northern Mexico, that present the same problem in a more routine fashion. These cities are all part of bicephalous urban sets often called "twins," though if they are twins they are clearly of the fraternal kind, since even though they develop in tandem with one another, they are not identical: one part of the urban zone is located in the United States and the other in Mexico. The relationship between the Mexican and US parts of

¹⁹ "We don't think it is necessary to underline the disastrous impression that the arriving tourist will form upon seeing the spectacle of immorality that the brothels, in open air and established in an important city artery, an obligatory path, offer." Cited in Katherine Bliss, Prostitution, Revolution and Social Reform in Mexico City, 1918-1940, (Chicago, 1996), 196.

the urban border zone has not been symmetrical but rather symbiotic, and in many senses the cities on the Mexican side have generally been a “backstage” for the US cities. The Mexican border town’s prosperity has depended on abortion clinics, divorce lawyers and judges, bars, prostitutes, sweatshops, garbage dumps and so on. The fact that Mexican cities constitute the backstage of US cities threatens nationalism’s foundational credo: modernity is for the nation’s own benefit and not for foreign outsiders.

The frames of contact created by the entropy of modernization can generate extreme nationalist reactions. This was the case in Cuba, where the image of Havana as a brothel was an important motivation for many revolutionaries to rise against the Batista regime. In the case of Mexico’s northern border, the very concept of a “border zone”, which for many years occupied a marginal position with respect to the rest of the country, was supposed to resolve the contradictions of this contact zone. The inhabitants of that liminal zone were said to have a dubious sense of belonging or even of loyalty to the country, a fact that was reflected in their impure pocho language, zoot-suit clothing and other marks of cultural impurity. Controlling the ‘border zone’ proved to be impossible for the Mexican government, however, and the incorporation of ever-greater proportions of Mexico to the ‘backstage’ of US economic interests has been an inexorable process. Peasant villages from all over the country have been turned into the seasonal equivalent of dormitory communities whose inhabitants travel to work in inferior conditions, as ‘illegal migrants,’ in the United States, while maquiladora assembly plants can now set up shop on any portion of the territory. Cultural impurity can no longer be contained at the border, and the dark side of modernization is harder to hide than ever.

The scientific horizon as a contact frame. The final type of contact exists because nation-states are supposed to march together toward progress. Without this ideal, there would be no obsession with national history, since modern history as we know it is only understood in terms of the dogma of progress. The universal importance that all nation-states attribute to progress implies that there is always a civilizing horizon or vanguard of progress on the international level. This civilizing

horizon is identified in terms of technological development, scientific advances and the techniques used to govern the population. The civilizing horizon serves to measure a country's individual progress as well as different countries' relative progress. The parameters used tend to be produced in countries with robust cultural and scientific infrastructures. Therefore, science, art and fashion can destabilize the nation's dominant models.

The recent work of Alexandra Stern on Mexican eugenics provides a good example of the ways in which scientific development constitutes a zone of contact.²⁰ Between 1920 and 1950 a number of medical doctors and anthropologists participated in international eugenics congresses, read international journals in that discipline, and formulated ideas about the Mexican racial and genetic inheritance. Their work served two ends: on one hand, it strengthened the "mestizophilic" Mexican Revolution's anti-racist arguments; on the other hand, it tended to characterize Mexico's various poor populations (from rural Indians to urban workers) as comparatively deficient. Eugenic's racial relativism (each race was supposed to be adapted to a specific environment and so was in some respects superior and in others inferior to the rest) and its simultaneous characterization of the Mexican majority in terms of a series of relative lacks offered hope for eventual equality between Mexico and European peoples. It also offered ample justification for a kind of 'internal colonialism.' Eugenics offered a way to objectify and quantify differences between poor Mexicans and ideal norms represented by the elite. This in turn permitted the state's development mission to be defined while the poor national majority could remain scientifically devalued. On the other hand, the potential uses of race science to undercut the imagined potential of Mexico's 'half-breed' race is well known and was always a potential liability for the nationalists.

The introduction of new ideas and theories always presents challenges and opportunities to governments and to processes of national identity formation. The ideas of "scientific socialism"

²⁰ Eugenics Beyond Borders : Science and Medicalization in Mexico and the U.S. West, 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1999), and "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-buildings on the U.S.-Mexico border, 1910-1930," Hispanic American Historical Review, 79,1 (1999), 41-81.

allowed opposition movements like the guerilla movement led by Genaro Vázquez in southern Mexico in the 1960s to refer to the Mexican government as the “dis-government” and to propose a series of demands to the state in name not only of Marx and Lenin, but also in that of the heroes of national independence. The monetarist ideas of the Chicago school of economics allowed a group of technicians to take control of the Mexican state, accuse the previous governing elite of backwardness, and describe the Mexican state as “obese”. The scientific ideas of Darwin, Freud and Marx were at the center of a schism in the Mexican educational establishment in the 1920s and 30s, and they were used to re-think nationality. The Lamarckian notion that acquired characteristics are inherited led some members of the Porfirian elite to advocate an aggressive policy of European immigration before reforming the Indian through education.

Each of these movements has had implications for national identity and the precepts of nationalism. The scientific contact frame produced by the international civilizing horizon destabilizes dominant formulas of nationality and good government; it presents growth opportunities for certain sectors and threatens others.

Reflections on the four types of contact zones. I have identified four types of contact zones. All are related to the nexus between modernization and nationalism as it develops in weak or peripheral nations. In the first case, there is a contact zone created by the instances in which foreign business concerns or imports unsettle local arrangements or mores. This is a zone that may appear whenever there are technological innovations, changes in the intensity of foreign investment, or internal political factionalism that can profit from assimilating economic competitors to foreign-ness.

The second and third types of contact zones are produced by the difficulties that weak nations have in managing the national image. Thus, the first of these contact zones emerges as a result of the comparative weakness of these nation's modern sector. This situation allows foreigners or opponents to the dominant nationalist scheme to attribute greater value to the ‘backward’ than to the ‘modern’ sector, and even to portray the modern sector as antagonistic to tradition, and therefore as failing to develop a true or successful nationalism. The third class of contact zones emerges as a

result of the difficulty that these same governments face in controlling the modernization process, and in successfully sweeping the adverse aspects of modernization under the carpet.

Finally, our fourth type of contact zone is produced by the instability that is generated by the (international) civilizing horizon. This contact zone, which is produced through the mediation of scientists, professionals and artists can de-stabilize the national image by portraying it as old fashioned and out of tune with modernization. Conversely, nationalists can try to reject a development in these fields by portraying it as alien to the national interest, to the national aesthetic, or to custom. Like each of the other contact zones, this fourth type t lends itself to shrewd political usage and can respond equally to internal factionalism and to important changes emerging from abroad.

I have extended Mary Pratt's term "contact zone" to refer to transnational spaces of national identity formation.²¹ However, as we have seen, the concept of "zone" implies a geography of regions: a zone is a kind of place within a system of functionally related places. What position do these contact zones occupy in a broader geography? The frames of contact that we have analyzed are relationships that emerge from the tension between the nation-state as a certain type of political and cultural community and the fact that modernization neither begins nor ends in such a community. This fact is problematic for nationalism because nation-states are erected as forms of social organization for coordinating modernization: zones of contact with the transnational dimension of capitalism and progress can therefore call into question some of the basic precepts of any particular nationalism. Moreover, the very process of shaping and extending nationalism opens a country up to foreign interests and forms of consumption that can undermine the nationalism that made room for them.

²¹ Pratt coins the term "contact zone" "to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict... 'contact zone' in my discussion is often synonymous with 'colonial frontier'." Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York, 1992), 6. My own

This is the case with frames of contact that open because of the relationship that nationalism postulates between tradition and modernity. This relationship existed because each country forms part of an international system and so must attain a sense of specificity. Moreover, in the case of post-colonial or backward countries, national singularity is more readily built out of their traditional sectors than from their modern sectors. In the Mexican case, it has proved easier to construct a national singularity on the basis of pulque, folk dancing, woven serapes and beef tacos than on the basis of whiskey, rock'n'roll, tuxedos and French cuisine, even when the latter may also be local products. At the same time, the identification of the nation's soul with the traditional world and its body with the modern world is an unstable formulation because the world called "traditional" persists as underdevelopment and in a series of relationships of domination that are generally understood to be continuous with colonial domination. Foreigners pursue their own relationships with those modern and traditional worlds, creating a zone of contact that can challenge nationalist narratives.

In addition, I showed that the scenic presentation of national achievements mobilizes resources that can in turn spoil the presentation. Just as Brasilia, the model city of Brazilian modernity, provided the material conditions for the growth of shantytowns that could never embody the supreme rationality of nationality, so were all the great tourist projects and grand international macro projects born with their own dirty twins. On the other hand, even the most avant-garde example of national modernity ages, thus creating new challenges to national identity and the state.²²

In each of these cases, contact zones frame relationships in which the logic of national development clashes with the transnational logic of modernization, and they exist because the

usage leaves the question of domination and of the nature of inequalities in transnational contact zones open, since the relationships of contact are of multiple sorts.

²² The case of architectural modernism's decrepitude in Brazil has been analyzed by Beatriz Jaguaribe, "Modernist Ruins," Public Culture 10,4 (1998), 294-317. The challenges that Brasilia's poor suburbs pose for the nationalist utopia that the city was meant to embody are treated

production and consumption of commodities is a transnational process, because people can cross national borders for work or recreation, and because there is an international horizon of scientific and technological progress. Therefore, contact zones are border areas between the logic of the nation-state and of capitalist progress that exist within the national space.

Conclusions. I conclude with some thoughts on the implications that these frames of contact have for the construction of internal frontiers between social groups in the national framework. It is clear enough that frames of contact created by commercial and tourist relationships, labor migration, and scientific and artistic production produce instability in the internal forms of social distinction. This instability is reflected both in fashion cycles and in the reconfiguration and reproduction of social classes.

For example, when the Mexican state assigned itself the task of modernizing national elites immediately took on the cosmopolitan role par excellence: they were the official agents of foreign contact because their patriotism, their resources and educated taste gave them greater access to the civilizing horizon. Thus, the “comprador elites” of Mexico’s 19th century inhabited a contact zone that ideally served to discriminate between the aspects of modernity that were desirable and those that were undesirable to the nation. Their maturity and special role gave them license to fashions and affectations that they would then try to bar from general consumption in their countries. Only a strong cultural elite could design the ticket that a weak and backward country needs to be allowed into the ‘concert of nations.’

However, Mexican elites have not always been able to maintain a privileged position in the area of foreign contacts. The migrant who manages to become the owner of an auto repair shop in Los Angeles can return to his village with more money, prestige and knowledge of the modern than the old political boss there. An Indian from Zinacantán, Chiapas, may converse more extensively and gain more information from an American anthropologist than the mestizo rancher who oppresses him. Moreover, the spectacular growth of the middle class in the second half of the

in James Holston, “Alternative Modernities: Statecraft and Religious Imagination in the Valley of

twentieth century also made the political brokerage of the 'civilizing horizon' increasingly difficult to sustain. Thus neither the government, nor the political class has full control over the national image.

Here, it seems to me, is a key to understanding the internal dynamic of the frontiers of social distinction and even of violence. A social movement that can cast doubts on the national image may become the object of state violence. At times, violence explodes when a group whose members had been designated as part of the nation's traditional residue prefers to shape its own separate political community and paths to progress. Violence also erupts when the state insists on controlling spaces where there is little possibility of establishing the ideal order in a permanent fashion but where the ideal order must nonetheless be asserted. This is the case of violence against itinerant commerce or against illegal housing settlements. It is also occasionally deployed against social movements that governments cannot assimilate as properly national because they conspire against the country's public image. This is the case of much of the repression against youth sub-cultures.

We cannot conclude from these examples, however, that patrolling the national image is only the concern of the government, of political classes or other elites, for these same contact zones are also used to denounce sectors of these very elites as strangers to the national community. Thus, elite-directed attempts to change mores and social practice can be targeted and ridiculed as Americanized, Francophile, Jewish or Oriental. Attempts to professionalize the state bureaucracy have at times been portrayed as 'technocratic' reforms, and therefore as Americanizing. Criticism of new forms of consumption, such as fast food chains or brand fetishism, are other common examples.

On the political plane, the Porfirian cultural elite, the científicos who had such a key historical role in shaping Mexico's national image, was portrayed by Mexico's revolutionaries as foreign. Marxist parties during the Cold War portrayed the Mexican government as a pawn of US interests. Harvard-trained President Carlos Salinas was often compared to the national traitor Santa

the Dawn," American Ethnologist 26, 3 (1999), 605-632.

Anna after the fall of the peso in 1995. These denunciations are thus used both in the construction of difference and in the organization of political opposition.

Nation-builders try to fashion the national image the same way that people build a house. Starting with the most modern materials and designs at their disposal, they want to have diverse, functionally and hierarchically organized interior spaces including spaces for exhibition to whoever comes in from outside. All this is ideally governed by the political equivalent of a paterfamilias who seeks the entire family's orderly modernization and regulates contacts between his home and the outside world. However, national architecture and space do not have the stability of a house and the government lacks a patriarch's security because the nation's internal order is always warped by transformations in the conditions of production, consumption and communication. Therefore, nationalism's dirty linen can be exposed by the exploited step-daughter, the disinherited son or the affronted mother if there is a window--a contact frame--that permits them to do so. This relative openness and permeability of national space becomes a dynamic factor in the production of fashions and distinctions, but it is also the root of xenophobia and violence.