ARTICLES

Authenticity, hybridity, and difference: debating national identity in twentieth-century Mexico

Wil G. Pansters

Abstract: This article studies the transformation of the debate about national culture in twentieth-century Mexico by looking at the complex relationship between discourses of authenticity and *mestizaje*. The article firstly demonstrates how in the first half of the twentieth century, Mexican national identity was constructed out of a state-led program of *mestizaje*, thereby supposedly giving rise to a new and authentic identity, the *mestizo* (nation). Secondly, it is argued that the authentication project around *mestizaje* is riddled with paradoxes that require explanation. Thirdly, the article studies the political dimension of the authenticity discourse and demonstrates how the homogenizing and unifying forces that spring from the process of authentication played an important role in buttressing an authoritarian regime. Fourthly, the article looks at two recent developments: indigenous cultural politics and transnationalism. Here it is shown how discourses of difference, pluralism, and transnationalism are challenging the central tenets of Mexican post-revolutionary national culture and the boundaries of the national Self.

Keywords: authenticity, *mestizaje*, national culture, nationalism

"If you can read this, you are NOT a TRUE MEXICAN!" read the recent headline (in English) on the cover of the well-known Mexican literary magazine *Nexos*. The magazine contained several 'satires against the fatherland' and argued with the fragile beliefs of Mexican nationalism. This and other recent publications (e.g., Béjar and Rosales 2002; Gutiérrez 1999; Valenzuela Arce 2000) about the issue of national identity try to deal with widespread feelings that a once powerful identity marker is adrift. In an age of indigenous movements actively engaged in the politics of difference, an internationalizing economy and culture, massive migration, and the decline of old political dogmas, institutions, and ideologies it is not surprising that people are increasingly confronted with the need to redefine their place in the social and cultural world (Beck, Giddens, and Lasch 1995; Sieder 2002). Some feel that the prevailing conceptualization of the relation between *place* and *culture* has been overtaken by changes in society, and that theoretical innovation is thus called for (Olwig 1997). Others turn the notion of cultural roots into a topic of debate (Ghorashi 1997; Malkki 1992). Due to the erosion of the traditionally meaningful frameworks of state, church, and national community, people are looking for new

sources of identity. In some cases, this pursuit manifests itself as a renewed interest in old cultural identities, imagined or otherwise. The current interest in the concept of authenticity should also be viewed in this context. After all, authenticity is considered an articulation of the 'proper' identity of an individual or a collectivity.

In philosophy, the concept has recently attracted attention due to publications of scholars like Taylor (1991) and Ferrera (1998). The latter attempts to develop criteria for contemporary moral and political questions through a normative understanding of authenticity.[1] In anthropology and political science, the concept has been related to identity politics and the yearning for originality, bonding, and purity by particular groups and movements in a world often perceived as turbid, superficial, and erratic. Yet philosophers, anthropologists, and political scientists alike employ the concept of authenticity against the background of current debates about globalization, individualization, and the moral grounds for collective action.

In this article I place the discussion about authenticity in the context of the search for national identity, an issue that appears to have become a "pervasive characteristic of our time" (Huntington 2004: 12). While far from unique, looking at the case of Mexico is particularly instructive, since few people have so intensely debated the issue of national identity and its meaning as the Mexicans have (Morris 1999: 363). My approach is guided by the constructivist view of identity and authenticity that regards them as the outcome of particular historical circumstances, institutional arrangements, power relations, and discursive contexts. They are the product of the demarcation of difference and not of the conscious articulation of essences that exist in themselves (Hall 1996:4). Hence, it seems essential to dedicate attention to the process of *authentication* rather than to authenticity. Constructivism shifts attention from what is authentic to how something is *made* authentic.

In this article I make several related points. First, I will demonstrate how in the twentieth century, Mexican national identity was constructed out of a state-led program of *mestizaje*, that is, a process of racial and/or cultural mixing and hybridization, which projects a national identity that combines the Spanish legacy with Mexico's prehispanic indigenous heritage, thereby supposedly giving rise to a new and authentic identity, the *mestizo* (nation). I will look at the emergence and nature of *mestizo* authenticity discourses on 'Mexico' and 'the Mexican' through the interventions of different actors, who have defined the content and legitimacy of the distinctive and homogeneous elements of a national culture (Williams 1990: 128).[2] I will concentrate on the work of intellectuals who took part in the construction of the discourse of national identity and *mestizaje* in the period from 1920 to 1940[3] but start by briefly outlining the social context in which they worked. I disagree with Miller's contention that "the formation of Mexican national identity after the revolution resulted primarily not from the involvement of intellectuals, but instead from early state intervention in the process" (1999: 151) and show in stead how most of these intellectuals were heavily involved in the project of the state itself, both as scholars and as state operators.

My second argument is that the authentication project around *mestizaje* is riddled with paradoxes that require explanation. After all, authenticity is linked to such concepts as homogeneity (versus heterogeneity), unity (versus fragmentation), uniformity (versus pluralism), and purity (versus mixing and hybridization). In Hall's terminology, an authentic identity can only result from "[its] capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside'" (1996: 5), i.e., by 'resolving' difference. Difference is, however, central to the definition of hybridization: as Nederveen Pieterse (1998: 104–5) notes, hybridization refers to an amalgamation of phenomena that are different and separate. In his view, some authors nostalgically define hybridization as a loss of purity, totality, and authenticity. In poststructuralist thinking, however, hybridization is cherished for its ability to counteract essentialist conceptions of identity and authenticity. Angie Chabram Dernersesian, for example, sees herself as a Chicana-Riqueña, but this hybrid identity was not appreciated by a

colleague at the Chicano Research Center, who felt that Chabram should be either one or the other, but not both—"certainly not a hybrid, hybrids aren't authentic, they have no claim to a fixed set of ethnic categories" (Chabram Dernersesian 1995: 271).[4] Against the general view of authenticity and *mestizaje*/hybridity as mutually exclusive categories, I will show how in the case of the discursive construction of the Mexican nation-state they do not necessarily oppose but suppose each other.

My third point refers to the political dimension of the authenticity discourse about national identity. Here I demonstrate how the process of authentication played an important role in buttressing an authoritarian regime. I briefly look at a shift in the discourses about national identity from *mestizaje* toward more social-psychological theories of *mexicanidad*, occurring the 1940s and 1950s when postrevolutionary power structures (corporatism, strong presidency) became firmly entrenched and combined with economic growth and profound social changes, such as urbanization, industrialization, the strengthening of the middle classes, and the improvement of education. Discourses of national identity are deeply shaped by power relations.

This point is emphasized in the last part of the article where I look at two key developments in the past decades that undermine discourses of national culture. The first refers to contemporary indigenous cultural politics: indigenous movements questioning the idea of Latin American 'nation-states without Indians' (Stavenhagen 2002). A second refers to the consequences of international migration and transnationalism. Both developments show how contemporary Mexicans "inhabit a symbolic ruin" and combine rowdy outbursts of nationalist zeal with profound doubts about national identity (Aguilar Rivera 2003: 36). My final point then is to describe how discourses of difference, pluralism, and transnationalism are challenging central tenets of postrevolutionary national culture in Mexico, especially the centrality of the *mestizo* as the subject of nationhood and the boundaries of the national Self. I argue that the success of the dismantling of the previous authenticity discourse may partly depend on alternative processes of authentication. In the conclusion, I will briefly relate my findings about Mexico to debates about national identity and the dilemmas of cultural pluralism in other parts of the world.

Revolution and nation building

The world's first great social revolution of the twentieth century took place in Mexico. From 1910 to 1917, Mexico was the site of an armed struggle between peasant armies and government troops, and especially between rival revolutionary factions, about social, economic, and political reforms. After the bloody civil war, the country was characterized by thorough fragmentation in every societal domain. In 1917 the pronouncement of a new constitution, one that was extremely progressive at the time, marked the end of the civil war and the start of a period of approximately twenty-five years during which repeated efforts were made to overcome the deeply felt fragmentation and to construct a new unity and consensus. The need for reconstruction also "triggered a search for criteria by which Mexicans could measure their worth and restructure their values to match Revolutionary [ones]", i.e., "a preoccupation with the meaning of Mexico" (Schmidt 1978: 98). But after years of revolutionary struggle, the transformation of military, political, and ideological power relations into a new social order was no simple matter. In an arena of this kind, there are always winners and losers. Actors who did their best to reinforce the centralist tendencies did so in defiance of the groups who took cover behind their local or regional domains of power.

Especially in the 1930s, the administrative competence and legal jurisdiction of the central state and the presidency were reinforced at the expense of the provinces and the towns. The nationalization of the oil industry at the end of the 1930s gave the federal state a powerful economic base that was further expanded in the decades to come. In politics, an important step toward unification was taken in 1928

when one large national party was founded that was to expand in the following years into the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which ruled Mexico at the national level until 2000. The party was modeled along corporatist lines in the 1930s, as was manifested in the huge organizational efforts to unite into one party as many social groups as possible, ranging from cattle farmers, Indians, and students, to *mariachi* musicians, electricity workers, and housewives. Without underestimating persistent counter-forces, there was clearly an ample movement to think and act in terms of unity, with the "implication that a cultural pluralism was to be amalgamated into a monolithic ideal of nationhood" (Schmidt 1978: 108). This was not entirely devoid of coercion. Dissidents were not tolerated. After the outbreak of World War II and in the face of new threats from abroad, this trend was converted into the policy of *unidad nacional* (Niblo 1999).

What possibilities were there for developing a binding identity that could erase the fresh memory of the fragmentation of the revolution, and so allow people to move beyond the social heterogeneity and diversity inside and outside the dominant party? It is easy to guess the answer: *the nation*. The developments described above can also be viewed as part and parcel of a process of nation building and state formation. Education policies, for example, were not only used to support peasants and persuade them to take part in land reform operations; they were also used, and perhaps to an even greater extent, to promote national integration and cultural homogeneity (Vaughan 1997). The importance of the nation as a category that helped provide a shared identity was articulated in the emergence of a nationalist ideology. Since it was largely the result of the revolutionary upheaval, it came to be known unsurprisingly as *nacionalismo revolucionario*. This revolutionary nationalism became the ideological adhesive of the Mexican political system, at least up until the end of the 1980s.

But what is the subject of Mexican nationalism? The obvious answer is *the Mexican*. But this does not really solve the problem, since heated discussions raged in the first half of the twentieth century about who or what exactly a Mexican is, and about the underlying essence of Mexicanness, or *mexicanidad*. A key theme in the debate on national culture has been the relations between racial groups, such as *criollos*, *mestizo*s, and Indians.[5] Although the revolution did not produce an explicit and self-conscious Indian project, if compared to the explicit *campesino* identity and project (cf. Boyer 2003), many Indians nevertheless had taken part in the battle. As a result, there was now a greater variety of interrelatons between the various segments of the population. After the armed struggle had ended, the 'Indian question'—i.e., the position and integration of the Indian community into society and nation, which is referred to below as *indigenismo*[6]—was incorporated into the official discourse of the state.

The mission of the *mestizo*

The need to resolve the strong divisiveness resulting from the revolution greatly stimulated the process of nation building. In 1937, revolutionary Ramón Beteta notes that "with the Revolution, our greatest force, we have discovered ourselves; analyzing the Revolution, we have understood our heterogeneity, our lack of unity" (quoted in Benjamin 1990: 321). The Indians constituted a major challenge for the nationalist project. They were generally viewed as passive subjects to be transformed into active Mexican citizens "by changing their lifestyles and value systems" (Dawson 2004: xix). The desire to give substance and form to this new nationalism is evident in the writings of thinkers as Manuel Gamio, José Vasconcelos, Luis Cabrera, and Andrés Molina Enríquez. The aim in mind was to integrate the multifarious Mexicos and shape a new unity where the Indian community would also be given a proper place, and not simply be relegated into separate corporative spaces or onto reservations. The fact that there was space in the new nationalism for Indian symbols, myths, and history did not necessarily mean anyone was denying the importance of 'European' culture in Mexico. On the

contrary, it was the process of cultural mixing that was emphasized. This is how a break was made with the Eurocentric ethos of the nineteenth-century ancien régime. English historian Knight has made the following comment on this important change: "According to the emerging orthodoxy of the Revolution, the old Indian/European thesis/antithesis had now given rise to a higher synthesis, the *mestizo*, who was neither Indian nor European, but *quintessentially* Mexican" (1990: 84–5; italics added). The response given by several important thinkers to the question regarding the subject of the new Mexican nationalism was unambiguous: the authentic Mexican is a *mestizo* (or ought to be). An effort was thus made to construct an *authenticity* (Knight's quintessence) based on a *hybrid* identity. In the following pages I will analyze the different components of this process.

One of the most influential authors in this regard is Andrés Molina Enríquez (1868–1940). A lawyer, journalist, author, and historian Molina received most of his intellectual and political education during the heyday of the ancien régime of dictator Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910). For the most part, however, he gained fame in the period just after the end of the revolution. His main work, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, was published a year before the revolution broke out in 1910. All his life, Molina wrote about the nature of the relationship between nationality and race. The core of his thinking was the idea that the struggle between different racial groups is the engine of history. When he engaged in diagnosing Mexico's problems at the turn of the century, Molina was not just an armchair scholar who was influenced by Spencer. He was also a devoted activist who incessantly warned against the damaging consequences of sharp inequalities. Socioeconomic inequalities, political coalitions, ideological projects, property relations, class formation—to Molina they all resulted from how racial groups interacted with and fought against each other. In turn, social inequalities were at the root of the instability and heterogeneity so typical of nineteenth-century Mexico, and did not serve as a good foundation for a viable nation. Even an authoritarian form of government—applauded by Molina as a necessary evil—was not forceful enough to end the continuing instability and turmoil. In his view, only the elimination of racial differences would be effective.

In *Los grandes problemas nacionales* these views are systematically elaborated and linked to the social problems at the time. In Molina's view, in the course of the Mexican history a racial and socioeconomic stratification emerged with the following features: a concentration of wealth in the hands of a (*criollo*) minority, inefficient large land ownership, the oppression of the peasants, and industrial stagnation due to a limited internal market. Using the metaphor so common of social Darwinists of society as a body, Molina depicts the situation as follows:

"At the moment our social body is disproportional and deformed. From the chest up it is a giant, and from the chest down a child. The upper part weighs so much the body can hardly stand erect. There is even the danger of it falling over; the feet are growing weaker every day" (Molina Enríquez 1999: 305; orig. 1909).

One remedy for this objectionable situation might be to form a new balance by way of racial integration and mixing. According to Molina, the *mestizo* is the progeny of all the Indian races modified by Spanish blood. Since the Mexican Indian lived in isolation for so long, he has learned to adapt to his natural environment.[7] This explains his enormous forcefulness and perseverance and ability to bear and cope with injustice. This forcefulness is passed down to the *mestizo* because in his veins he has, after all, a drop of Spanish and an abundance of Indian blood. What is more, the mixing process has continued between *mestizo*s and Indians.

The *mestizo* is thus destined to exercise power. In Molina's view, this only really began in the mid-nineteenth century, when progressive groups (i.e., *mestizo*s) convincingly seized power for the first time. The political influence of the *mestizo* was consolidated by the rise to power of Porfirio Díaz in 1876. During the lengthy mandate of Díaz, who was not driven out until

1911, certain processes and government policies impeded, at least in Molina's view, further racial unification and socioeconomic development. The main problem was that Díaz continued to protect the large land ownership of the *criollo* elite at the expense of the Indians and the *mestizo*s. Molina's conclusion, then, was that the large haciendas had to be dismantled and subdivided. He also proposed introducing a credit system that would increase the purchasing power of the *mestizo*s and enable the launching of irrigation projects to improve agricultural productivity. With small-scale land ownership, credit and water, the *mestizo* could take control of the land and the nation, thereby forming a solid basis for his political power. Even so, Molina holds that if there was to truly be a nation or fatherland, it required racial, cultural, and moral unity. This is why he called for steps in various social fields to create homogeneity via the process of *mestizaje*. The common roots, frames of references, and aspirations to be generated in that way were to serve as the basis for "a true nationality, strong and powerful, with one life and one soul" (Molina Enríquez 1999: 424).

The political and scientific program Molina had in mind would lead to the banishment of difference and the reduction of racial plurality and multiculturality. Mexico could only become a nation-state by means of *mestizaje*, i.e., hybridization. In the words of his biographer, Molina perceived "racial unification as the demiurge of all homogeneity necessary for a just and cohesive nation, from which a very own culture will emerge" (Basave Benítez 1992: 84; translation by the author). The agrarian reform he propagated and his espousal of a strong regime (that is, a powerful presidency or an authoritarian form of government) were no more and no less than *conditions* for forging the *México mestizo*. While Molina was best known for his sociological and historical studies and his agenda for agrarian reform, his *mestizophilia* also echoed in postrevolutionary cultural life, especially in the development of a new nationalist élan in the arts. There was growing interest in the roots of Mexican identity and the place of the Indian and the *mestizo* in history and society. These themes featured in the murals of Rivera, Orozco, Siquieros, and others, filling the walls of public buildings. By its very nature this art became accessible for the large public and contained clear political and cultural meanings, which matched the agendas of the postrevolutionary elites.

The emancipation of the Indian

However, in the 1920s and 1930s the theoretical views behind Molina's ideas were steadily replaced by new ways of thinking. The ethno-essentialist and evolutionist *mestizophilia* of the late nineteenth century was undermined by the rise of modern anthropology in Mexico. Manuel Gamio (1883–1960), who obtained his PhD in New York under Franz Boas, played a key role, particularly with his *Forjando patria* (1916). The very title of the book (Forging a fatherland) evokes a powerful image:

"It is this struggle [between various ethnic groups, WP] for the creation of a fatherland and a national identity that has now been going on for a century.… Now it is the Mexican revolutionaries' turn to pick up the hammer and don the garb of the smith so that on the magnificent anvil the new fatherland can result from a mixture of iron and bronze" (Gamio 1982: 5–6; orig. 1916).

The metaphor he used suggests that Gamio cannot completely let go of racial essentialism but does take a few important steps toward cultural relativism (Dawson 2004: 9ff.). Referring explicitly to Boas, Gamio refutes the idea that certain ethnic groups are inferior to others, although he did consider Mexico's indigenous people at the time 'culturally retarded', especially in the area of technology (Swarthout 2004: 100). Differences between groups are no longer explained in racial terms, but are now approached using historical, sociological, and geographic characteristics. Nor is it feasible to speak of a superior culture, and aesthetic criteria are not made absolute. In Gamio's view indigenous art can be a worthy counterpart (and perhaps even precursor) of European art forms:

"Rodin's expressionism can also be found in the statues of Teotihuacán of twelve centuries ago" (1982: 106). There is no room in this view for Eurocentric standards or linear development as regards morality, art, wealth, or democracy. Judgments of the Indian, whether negative or positive (*bon sauvage*), according to Gamio, are both based upon nonscientific prejudices: "The Indian has the same capacity for progress as the White man, he is neither superior nor inferior" (1982: 24).

So there is evidence in Gamio's work of a shift from a racial to a cultural focus. In so far as the aspiration of *mestizaje* is involved, it is essentially cultural (Dawson 2004: 18). Gamio's formulation of his own variant of *mestizophilia* has to do with what he sees as the inadequate social and cultural homogeneity of Mexico. A truly national society can only emerge after several conditions have been met: ethnic homogeneity, a common language, shared aspirations, aesthetic and moral standpoints, and a common historical consciousness. Deep socioeconomic inequality between Indians and European descendants only reinforces the absence of unity. The remedy to this situation would be to mix the groups. Being an urban *mestizo*, Gamio acted as the champion of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural emancipation of the Indian. The Indian should not be simply left to his fate, as had been the case ever since Mexican independence in 1821. Instead, he should be involved in the national enterprise.[8] It should be the *mestizo*s themselves who take the initiative. "You will not simply wake up spontaneously. Friendly hearts will have to make an effort to work towards your liberation", Gamio paternalistically informed the Indians (1982: 22). The Indian communities in Mexico did produce some significant cultural works, but in the twentieth century they exhibited an enormous developmental lag vis-à-vis the rest of the society.[9] The various civilization offensives of the past had failed because they were enforced from above. Gamio consequently made a rather unprecedented proposal: "Let's become a bit more Indian and show him a civilization that is 'diluted' with his own which he shall therefore no longer consider exotic, cruel, bitter and incomprehensible" (1982: 96). It was the *mestizo* who ought to take responsibility for this approach to the 'pure Indian'. If they wanted to partake of the 'banquet of modernity', the Indians would have to don the mask of the *mestizo* (Basave Benítez 1992: 126).

In *Forjando patria,* Gamio outlines his project of unification by way of mixing. He believes the conditions were favorable for this at the end of the armed stage of the Mexican revolution (1910–1917). As he wrote the book, new power relations and ideas were emerging that brought a solution to some of Mexico's historical problems closer. The innovative powers of the revolution would clear away the obstacles to national well-being and development (1982: 79–83, 168–70).[10]

To promote this development, a thorough knowledge was necessary of the Mexican people and the processes unfolding in Mexican society. Social sciences had to be professionalized, an official agency for anthropology established, reliable statistical material accumulated, and used for policy development (1982: 15–19, 27–36).[11] Gamio's plea quite soon materialized into the founding of the Anthropology Division at the Ministry of Agriculture. Gamio himself was appointed director, a position he would hold until 1925 when he became assistant secretary of education.[12]

Mexican unity could only be built if steps were taken toward that end in various social fields. In the field of art, the aesthetic criteria of the Indians and the middle classes could come together in such a way that 'a national art' could emerge that would be 'one of the main cornerstones of nationalism'. In literature each sociocultural group had its own genre, but the European oriented literary tradition was the only one to be acknowledged as such. Gamio consequently proposed improving the production and distribution of other literary forms such as the oral traditions of poor Indians and *mestizo*s. Only thus could a literature be born that would 'nourish the national soul'. The school system, imbued with the diversity of languages and cultures, would have to be comprehensively reformed: literacy campaigns, new pedagogical

academies, and an increase in university budgets had to lead to an 'integral nationalist education'. In politics, adequately representation of subordinate social groups in the legislative bodies had to be ensured. In the economic field, the preferential treatment of foreign products and production processes would have to be reduced and efforts made to combine local traditions of craftsmanship with foreign technology (1982: 37–40, 113–18, 159–61, 75–8, 143–8).[13]

Gamio's pursuit of homogeneity ultimately manifested itself in the form of a huge project of *mestizaje*. Eliminating 'difference' by mixing native and European influence was to lead on the one hand to a strong nation-state, and on the other to the abolition of inequalities that particularly affected the Indian population. This was the motivation behind the forceful words at the end of *Forjando patria*:

"RACIAL MIXING, CONVERGENCE AND FUSION OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS, LINGUISTIC UNIFICATION AND ECONOMIC EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN THE SOCIAL ELEMENTS … are concepts … that ought to characterize the Mexican people so that the people will found and embody a powerful Fatherland and a coherent and clearly defined Nationality" (Gamio 1982: 183; capital letters in original).

Mestizaje as liberation

While Manuel Gamio may have got his inspiration from the social inequality mainly affecting the Indian population, the controversial work by José Vasconcelos (1882–1959) was rooted in philosophical and mystical studies. This does not mean that Vasconcelos was a scholarly recluse. On the contrary, from the very start Vasconcelos was active in the political and later the military resistance to dictator Díaz, and he was a close friend to the first great revolutionary leader, Francisco Madero. Vasconcelos spent various periods in forced exile in the United States, a country he was extremely critical of his entire life. When he returned to Mexico in 1918, he was appointed the first vice-chancellor of the National University. He achieved his greatest fame as Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924. He has gone down in history as an extremely active minister with a great deal of expertise and with a "drive and commitment to launch a postrevolutionary project of social engineering in education" (Miller 1999: 47). He also stimulated and protected the arts in Mexico. Partly as a result of his active support, the murals by Rivera and other artists flourished. In 1929 he ran for the presidency, which turned out to be an unfortunate fiasco. During his numerous trips and periods in exile, Vasconcelos wrote a sizable oeuvre consisting of a series of philosophical studies, political essays, novels, and studies on the culture and history of India.

For the analysis of the ideology of *mestizaje*, his essay *La raza cósmica* (1925) is of main importance.[14] Its central thesis is that the various peoples and races of the world will gradually mix more and more so that a new type of human being will emerge—the *cosmic race*. The continent where this racial and cultural *mestizaje* will first unfold is Latin America. In keeping with this line of thought, Vasconcelos tried to revitalize Pan-Ibero-Americanism. The notion of a struggle between Latin and Anglo-Saxon culture on the American continent is a major element in his reasoning, with the Anglo-Saxon unification strategy serving as an example for the parochialism of the Ibero-Americans. The influence and power of the United States symbolize one of the peaks of the civilization of the Whites, one of the four races that, according to Vasconcelos, have shaped world history.[15] Each of these groups has a mission, and the mission of the Whites has almost been played out. With their expansionist drive, they have laid the foundation for a new era, an era of the mixing of all peoples that will generate a fifth race. Vasconcelos explains why Ibero-America is the ideal spot for this development by alluding to its history and its experience of *mestizaje*. Since they decimated the Indian population and developed a monoculture, White North Americans will taste defeat (1997: 56–62; orig. 1925).

His analysis of the process of *mestizaje* is very different from Gamio's or Molina's. While

Gamio makes little effort to conceal his paternalistic sympathy for the Indian, Vasconcelos leans more toward the Spanish element.[16] Barely any references are made in *La raza cósmica* to the situation of the Indian. Nor is there much appreciation for the culture and the level of development of pre-Columbian society. In an effort nonetheless to give the continent a place in world history, Vasconcelos alludes in one of the most striking passages of the essay to the myth of Atlantis, which he situates in America: "The Aztec and Inca empires are scanty remains and completely unworthy of the ancient and superior culture [of Atlantis]" (1997: 49). Vasconcelos's *mestizophilia* is based on the pragmatic observation that most of the people are already *mestizo*s. According to Basave (1992: 134), Vasconcelos tries to give this empirical fact a mythical dimension, partially in an effort to promote Latin American integration.

Another important principle in the essay, and perhaps the major structuring one, is the idea of the three stages in the evolution of mankind. The first stage entails material necessity and warfare; the second is the stage of reason and politics; and the third involves spirituality and aesthetics. The criticism Vasconcelos formulates of the second stage bears an unexpected resemblance to the postmodern criticism of the modernity project: "Reason prevails in this stage … its main feature is the belief in the formula … all this period does is standardize intelligence, reduce freedom to act, restrict the nation and suppress the emotions. Rules and regulations, norms and tyranny, that is the law of the second period we are imprisoned in and must escape from" (1997: 69). The last period, however, which coincides with the creation of the fifth race, will be ruled by good taste, beauty, and freedom. A society that has proved via *mestizaje* that it is characterized by openness and pluralism will serve as the home base for spiritual and sexual liberation. His support for the notion of *mestizaje* is a strategy to escape from what Nederveen Pieterse calls an "inward directed conception of culture" (1998: 119) and what Vasconcelos himself refers to as 'ethnic closure'.[17] *La raza cósmica* plays an important role in the ideology of the Mexican national identity.

Vasconcelos's work can be viewed as the culmination of ethnicity-oriented *mestizophilia*. The odd mixture of pragmatism, metaphysical thinking, and a visionary view on hybrid Latin America, could hardly be anything else (Basave Benítez 1992: 136). Together with the efforts of others, the most important of which are analyzed here, it stimulated Mexicans to focus on their uniqueness and their own worth and continue to expand upon them. Molina, Gamio, and Vasconcelos were all skeptical of an outward-directed perspective (Spain, France, and the United States) that usually amounted to an imitation of foreign ideas, political ideologies, and development models. The unproblematic application of models of this kind—like republican federalism and democracy—to their own reality only generated numerous new problems. These ideas have been very prominent in Mexico and Latin America. For example, leading intellectual Antonio Caso noted that an effectively functioning democracy required ethnic unity and social uniformity, which were definitely not in evidence in Mexico (1955: 28—1924).[18]

The politics of *mexicanidad*

Since the publication of *La raza cósmica*, the discourse on the *mestizo* as the authentic embodiment of national identity and the vanguard of the nationalist ideology has undergone important changes. The search for the characteristics and core values of the 'true Mexican' has gone on ever since the 1930s, but has taken a different route. Ethnocentric *mestizophilia* gradually made way for social-psychological analyses. The programmatic aspects still in evidence in the work of Molina and Gamio in connection with promoting the *mestizo* largely disappeared at the start of the 1930s. This is why a group of younger thinkers focused so intensely on the 'soul' of the mixed Mexican. While the key concept for the older generation was *mestizaje*, the younger generation became more interested in *mexicanidad*, a concept that covers the whole gamut of images and metaphors thought to characterize the essence of the (*mestizo*) Mexican. *El perfíl del*

hombre y la cultura en México (1965; orig. 1934) by philosopher Samuel Ramos heralds the start of this new stage.[19] Ramos, who was strongly influenced by European scholars as Jung, Adler, Simmel, and Ortega as well as by the attempts of the previous generation of Mexican scholars to make sense of the Mexican predicament after the revolution, wanted to integrate theories of social psychology, history, and politics into a comprehensive analysis of *lo mexicano* (Schmidt 1978: 146–9). In his most influential writing he holds that the Mexican has an inferiority complex going back to the traumatic experience of the *conquista*, when the native population was subjugated and humiliated, and therefore the mixed descendants of the conquistadors feel humiliated by their lowly position vis-à-vis Europeans. The Mexican who is still young tries to compensate for the sense of inferiority by way of compulsive behavior. *Machismo* is an example of this kind of behavior. It is time for the frustrated young man to grow up, and according to Ramos he can best do so by viewing himself as a branch of the European race. Ramos does not think much of the Indian people and their culture. In the following years, other comparable books were published such as *El mexicano: su dinámica psicosocial* (1961) by Francisco González Pineda, using concepts from the field of psychoanalysis, and *El mexicano: psicología de sus motivaciones* by Santiago Ramírez, both published at the end of the 1950s. *El laberinto de la soledad* (1967) by Octavio Paz deserves separate mention as this essay later became world famous and one of the most quoted works on Mexican culture. Paz differs from Ramos in that he notes that the Mexican does not hide behind masks, for he himself is the mask. Behind the mask lies only solitude. In his book, Paz tries to break through the Mexican solitude by abandoning the strongly inward-directed perspective and looking for links to Western culture.[20]

These literary and scientific (or semiscientific) publications yield a set of images that are supposed to sketch the Mexican (national) 'character': a culture of an easy death, a 'typical' and 'slow' sense of time, of the violent lumpenproletariat (the *pelado*), the macho, and of *México bronco*, the rough and tough Mexico associated with the countryside and the unfathomable Indian soul. From the perspective of the urban middle classes and elites, this Mexico is sinister and menacing.[21] These images and stereotypes can also be observed in Mexican movies of the 1950s and 1960s and in other forms of art and folk art, and have gradually expanded into a whole mythology of *lo mexicano* in Mexico and abroad. Even a quick analysis of the depiction of Mexico and Mexicans in American mass culture products reveals a one-sided picture of violence and corruption, but also of a leaning toward the noble savage.

The crystallization of the contours of the *homo mexicanus*, especially in the 1950s, cannot be viewed as a purely literary matter. At the beginning of this article I noted the important role played by nationalism in consolidating and legitimating the postrevolutionary regime. Although memories of the divisiveness of the revolution ebbed after World War II, the rapid and comprehensive process of socioeconomic and demographic change that mainly manifested itself in impressive industrialization and urbanization generated new forms of inequality, divisions, and grievances. In the political field, state and economic elites were by now entrenched in a one-party system, a corporatist apparatus, a sizable governmental bureaucracy, and above all an extremely powerful presidency. Democratic practices appeared to be mainly of a formalist nature. The *dramatis personae* and its character traits from the myth of Mexican national identity were given meaning now against the backdrop of the numerous imperfections and injustices of modernity (Niblo 1999). The discourse of *la mexicanidad* is consequently a political one. The definition of 'the' Mexican is predominantly a description of how he is dominated. According to Roger Bartra, the subject of the studies about Mexico's national character is an imaginary construction by the authors themselves. They are biting their own tails (1987: 16). The perceptive and pertinent criticism of Bartra reveals the arbitrary and sometimes absurd nature of the stereotypes from the gallery of national culture. In Bartra's view, the discourse

of Mexican-ness is a crucial component of the dominant political culture.

In the postrevolutionary period the *mestizo* became the official protagonist of Mexican history, while there was a certain extent of appreciation for indigenous culture and history. This interpretation of national identity had an anti-imperialist connotation and legitimated the formation of a strong national state that could serve as a buffer against foreign political and economic influences, while at the same time redefining Eurocentric development aims. It also propagated an active state role in regulating the market so as to favor the national community, which could best be served by an all-powerful party that represented the various social sectors in a hierarchical and corporatist fashion. The ruling elites have touted a strong and unified federal state as critical for the well being of the nation (Morris 1999: 379–80). In short, the core of the ideology of the revolution was a combination of social reform and nationalism, particularly *mestizo* nationalism. This ideology supported the strong state and the corporatist party (PRI), whose aim was to include the entire society and represent it as one entity. There is not much room for pluralism in a mind-set of this kind. The cultural logic of homogeneity and 'imposed unity' (Morris 1999: 395) corresponds with the political logic of the one-party state.

Subverting unity and the return of difference

In February 1994 a remarkable encounter took place in the cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the southeastern state of Chiapas. After the outbreak of the armed uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional earlier that year, the first meeting between a delegation of masked rebels and an emissary from the President took place under the watchful eye of the local bishop. It marked the beginning of a long and tortuous process of negotiations. After the first dialog, Zapatista spokesman *subcomandante* Marcos handed the presidential delegate a national flag, which they then unfolded together in front of an army of national and foreign journalists. With this symbolic act the Zapatistas expressed one of their most fundamental objectives: to gain full-fledged membership of the Mexican nation and state. By taking this initiative, the Zapatistas had not only taken away from the government a powerful symbolic weapon (the propaganda machine of the Interior Ministry had already attempted to discredit the uprising as being the work of foreign infiltrators), they had also taken steps to redefine the terms of the relationship between Indians and the nation-state.

Neo-indigenous movements in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America have brought the homogenizing and unifying project of *mestizo*-nationalism up for discussion by emphasizing ethnicity and indigenous cultural identities. In their view the nationalist discourse has served to conceal social inequality, injustice, cultural domination, and discrimination. These movements strategically mobilize their indigenous otherness to safeguard existing rights and put new demands on the agenda. The Zapatistas thus no longer accept to be subsumed under a *mestizo*-identity (see also Morris 1999: 374–5). This development has a broader significance. During the 1980s, the Zapotecs in the state of Oaxaca were involved in remarkable political experiments, in which they combined a new cultural self-consciousness with radical political activism (Campbell 1994; Rubin 1997).

The alternative discourse of the neo-indigenous movements is about a pluricultural Mexican nation. The debate about cultural pluralism is to a large extent about the 'right to culture', which materializes in the choice and freedom to exercise particular cultural practices. A broad understanding of cultural practices implies that the project of pluricultural nationhood will also touch on the problem of democracy. The discourse and project of *mestizaje* of the first half of the twentieth century sought to establish (political) participation on the basis of legal and substantial sameness. In contrast, the pluralist project recognizes cultural diversity and claims of full participation on the basis of difference. To accomplish this some conditions would have

to be fulfilled, such as decentralizing certain administrative powers, granting particular territorial or political rights, and authorizing education in indigenous languages (Bonfil Batalla 1991: 107–116; Kymlicka 1995; Taylor 1995). Within such a conceptual framework national culture can no longer be a uniform and shared total of symbols, but rather a place for difference and diversity. Seen from the dominant monocultural perspective of the national elites, a true pluricultural nation contains the seeds of separatism.

The articulation of neo-indigenous identities in contemporary Mexico should, however, not be confused with the restoration of long suppressed but pure identities. Just as in the case of the *mestizo*-identity, this involves the active construction of identity and 'authenticity', a process that includes negotiations, strategic decisions, and contingencies. In a similar way, Canessa has pointed out that the 'deterritorialized' Aymara-speaking migrants in the urban centers of Bolivia, at the 'forefront of modernization', where they are confronted with exclusion and racism, have been developing a political and cultural project that challenges the principles of a hybridized *mestizo* nation-state. Their Aymara nationalism rejects cultural and racial *mestizaje*, asserts difference by constructing "essentialist categories of identity" (Canessa 2000: 120). In this manner, "the ideology of *mestizaje* has given way to the ideology of multiculturalism; hybridity has been replaced by heterogeneity" (ibid.: 130). Sieder and Witchell have demonstrated for the case of Guatemala, that these processes are fraught with ambiguities as indigenous activists are encouraged to present "an essentialized vision of a harmonious and millenarian Mayan culture as a means of securing greater autonomy and representation" (2001: 217). Moreover, the construction of these so-called authentic indigenous identities takes place in a field of transnational connections. Rivera-Salgado has argued for the case of the Mixtecs from southern Mexico that long-term transnational migration is not reducing the significance of ethnicity but instead is causing it to emerge and intensify (1999: 1455). Similarly, the unprecedented exposure and influence of the Zapatista uprising in Mexico and elsewhere cannot be disconnected from the use of modern communication technologies and the role they played in the emergence of transnational solidarity networks, even though the powerful image of *subcomandante* Marcos working online on his laptop in the Lacandón jungle is incorrect (Olesen 2003; Ponsioen 1997). Nelson (1996) has described the activists who struggle for Guatemalan indigenous cultural rights as 'Maya-hackers'. Similar to computer hackers, who though technically highly skilled operate in systems they do not control, these Maya activists appropriate modern technology and knowledge and refuse to be dissolved into a *mestizo*-society. Local demands and movements for indigenous rights are increasingly framed by global discourses about multiculturalism and international institutions and thus convert them into transnationalized phenomena (Sieder and Witchell 2001: 218). In sum, neo-indigenous movements and claims and the ways they are embedded in transnational networks are phenomena that subvert the unifying and homogenizing drives so characteristic of the classic discourse of *mestizaje*.

The issues of globalization and transnationalism are relevant to the debate about Mexico's national culture in more general ways too. Large-scale migration from Mexico to the US, the consolidation of transnational ties and migrant communities, and the process of economic integration with NAFTA are unleashing social, political, economic and cultural forces that affect the discourses of national identity and culture. A recent study by Morris about the dynamics of nationalism has shown that the debates about Mexican national identity have long been shaped by juxtaposition and opposition to the US (think of Vasconcelos's work discussed before): "in many ways being Mexican means not being *gringo*" (1999: 371). Just as the claims of the Zapatistas are undermining traditional views about the place of the Indian in de nation, so are the growing economic integration under NAFTA and the consolidation of transnational communities raising fundamental questions about the Mexican Self and its relation to the US. During much of the twentieth century, the

discourse of *mestizo* national identity strongly centered, as I have shown, on the revolution and the state, was transmitted through state-controlled means of communication and, especially, the public school, one of the key projects of the postrevolutionary regime. As Lajous has ironically observed, "the culture that arose from the Revolution made every Mexican into a moral *Mestizo* … [and] … the new gospel was spread by teachers" (1995: 112). However, in recent decades the predominant role of the state in controlling the transmission of nationalist values, symbols, and identity markers has lost terrain to other political and cultural spaces. Private schools and, perhaps more importantly, the electronic media have opened up opportunities for alternative means of the symbolic imagination of belonging and identity. The importance of US-based communication and entertainment industries has tended to privilege more 'cosmopolitan' images, values, and notions. The result has not only been "an erosion of national identity", but also the emergence of more syncretic and flexible identities, e.g., in the domain of popular culture (Gutiérrez and Gutiérrez 1993: 93). At the same time, Lajous is right to point out that powerful Mexican media companies have made important inroads into the large Spanish-speaking market in the US. The net result is that the "Americanization of Mexico and the Mexicanization of the United States are evident aspects of reality in both countries" (1995: 107). Despite the fact that this assertion ignores the profound asymmetry in the relationship between the countries, the fact remains that increasing cultural interpenetration effectively undermines the idea of developing a Mexican national identity in contradistinction to US culture.

The erosion of Mexican national identity and nationalism is also conditioned by the diminishing belief among large parts of the population in the capacity of the state—the most important embodiment and transmitter of revolutionary *mestizo* nationalism—to deliver tangible economic goods and material progress. The series of profound economic crisis that hit Mexico since the early 1980s have undermined the credibility of the nation-state. This trend is strengthened by the decision of Mexico's political and economic elites to dismantle the inward-looking state-centered development model in exchange for a model of export-oriented development and global integration, most importantly exemplified by NAFTA. As a consequence, the metanarrative of the Mexican revolution, that, as we have seen, encompasses the discourse of *mestizo* nationalism, is increasingly being disputed as the only meaningful framework with which to debate Mexico's past, present, and national identity (Morales Moreno 1997).

A key element in the shifting politics of national identity in contemporary Mexico is the changing relationship to the US and Mexican migrants there. The intensification of movements of capital, merchandise and labor in the framework of NAFTA has accentuated some Mexicans' fears over the meanings of national identity. In a clear departure of previous views on Mexican-American communities in the US, Mexican authorities have come to consider them as economic and cultural bridgeheads (Goldring 2002: 65–70). As a consequence, the nation is increasingly disconnected from the state, formal citizenship, and territorial boundaries. Instead, the US-based communities are seen as part of a 'transnational' Mexican nation. In the second half of the 1990s, then President Zedillo elaborated the project of the *Nación Mexicana*, "which includes a wide and complex array of (neo)nationalistic economic, cultural and political programs intended to formalize the inclusion of migrants and people of Mexican origin (abroad) into a grand Mexican transnational project" (quoted in Shain 1999: 667). The government also initiated the Mexican Communities Abroad project, which underscores the importance granted to these groups. It also started to pamper the leaders of the Mexican-American community. At the beginning of his term, current President Fox stated that Mexican migrants were among the constituencies he wanted to privilege during his government.[22]

Strengthening ties between Mexico and Mexican-American communities imply that the distinctive cultural characteristics and the growing economic and political clout of these

groups have pluralizing effects on the meanings of Mexicanness. This is partly explained by the cultural consciousness within these communities themselves. Shain has suggested that "the American diaspora exercises greater cultural influence on Mexico than Mexico on the Mexican Americans, meaning that the homeland's national identity is affected more by its diaspora than the other way around" (1999: 691). I will illustrate this by briefly looking at cultural and political connections. An insightful example of the influence of the transnationalization of cultural meanings is the popularity of the *corrido* in Mexico, a musical style that despite its long history dating back to colonial times, has particularly developed in the US-Mexican border region. During the 1980s and 1990s, a specific branch of the *corrido*-style, the so-called *narcocorrido* that sings of drug traffickers and their experiences with violence and treason, became immensely popular on both sides of the border, and from there conquered the rest of Mexico as well. The role of transnational migrant communities cannot be underestimated in this process. With the largest population of Mexican immigrants in the US, Los Angeles has become the 'hot spot' and '*corrido* frontier' of this genre, with prominent recording studios and distribution companies engaged in the corrido-business (Edberg 2004: 26; Wald 2001: 131–2). In fact, many songwriters and bands originally from Mexico have moved to the US metropolis, from where they serve a transnational audience, often following the trails of migrants and drug-trafficking.[23] The *corrido* has become so popular that it is displacing the officially promoted musical emblem of Mexican national identity, the *mariachi*, from the charts.

Cosmopolitan and transnational practices that affect Mexican identity, find their corollary in the ever more important connections in the domain of migrant politics. They have contributed to the reconfiguration of the terrain of politics and the boundaries of the nation-state. The recent literature on transnationalism emphasizes the implications for the conceptualization of the nation-state as a historically unique way of territorializing notions of identity and order, by which a shared and homogeneous identity was 'grounded' in particular territories (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton 1994). This became so entrenched as to give rise to what has been called "methodological nationalism", whereby "the social sciences too have been captured by the apparent naturalness and givenness of a world divided into societies along the lines of nation states" (Wimmer 2002: 5). Since the nation-state is loosing part of its steering capacity to the growing power of transnational companies, institutions, as well as to migrants and communication flows, there is increasing talk of the crisis of the nation-state, understood as a 'container model' that mutually defines social cohesion, cultural belonging, and political participation within the geographical and administrative boundaries of the state (Vertovec 2001: 5). The emergence of transnational communities and the efforts of the state to include migrants in its sphere of influence contribute to a crisis of 'the hyphen', "on the one hand by the de-territorialization of the national space and on the other by the de-nationalization of the territorial state" (Mazzucato 2004: 143). The case of the political relations between the Mexican state and society and Mexican migrant communities in the US illustrates the transformation of the nation-state as a modern social, cultural, and political form.

Two aspects stand out in this respect: the debate on dual citizenship and the phenomenon of homeland politics (Vertovec 2001: 12–15). In 1996, Mexican Congress approved a constitutional reform that granted Mexican citizens living abroad the right to vote in presidential elections, thereby reaching out to approximately nine million Mexicans. At the time, the Chamber of Deputies was controlled by two major opposition parties (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD, and Partido Acción Nacional, PAN), while the PRI was still in control of the federal government. A year later, Mexico accepted dual citizenship, whereby migrants who adopted US citizenship could retain Mexican citizenship as well, thereby promoting cultural, economic and political loyalties toward the homeland.[24] These changes triggered

a fierce debate among the main political players in Mexico as well as among migrant communities about the terms of the inclusion of Mexican migrants in the nation-state. Ever since the successful intrusion of the major opposition candidate (Cárdenas) during the 1988 presidential election campaign in Mexican migrant communities in the US, the debate about dual citizenship and voting rights obtained overtly political meanings. However, this debate also centered on the broader issues of the limits of the traditional nation-state in the age of globalization and transnational connections, in which the existence and claims of a vast migrant population redefines national belonging and sovereignty. The issue of voting rights acquired special importance because it symbolically constructed the nature of the links (inclusion or not) between the Mexican migrants in the US and the Mexican nation (Calderón Chelius and Martínez Saldaña 2002: 112–13). At the end of the day, political considerations determined the outcome of the debate, as the PRI-controlled Senate rejected the proposal in 1999 to allow for extraterritorial voting in presidential elections. The combined outcome of the acceptance of dual citizenship and the denial of political rights has brought Mexicans abroad "into the national imaginary more explicitly and universalistically", but not substantially: "[I]n practical terms, the non-loss of nationality has meant that Mexicans living abroad have the property rights of nationals without the property rights of citizens" (Goldring 2002: 69).

The above-mentioned state-led transnational processes are thus fraught with ambivalence. An analysis of transmigrant-led transnational processes, which refer to the distinct roles of transmigrant networks and agency in producing transnational communities, opens up a picture of consistent and institutionalized efforts by migrant communities in the US to participate actively in Mexican politics and society.[25] In recent years, home-land politics by the Mexican migrant communities have intensified. Its most tangible expression is the foundation of numerous Mexican hometown and home state associations in the US, sometimes with official representatives in the sending areas in Mexico. These associations raise funds for financing a wide range of cultural, educational, infrastructural, and social 'development' projects in the home communities. Since the investments were complemented by government funds (by the federal, state, and municipal authorities) in the early 1990s, representatives of these associations became actively involved in political and budgetary negotiation processes with state actors.[26] As such they provide migrants with political leverage in the towns and states they originally come from. In time, some of these associations have come to incorporate an agenda that focuses on the situation of migrants themselves. In the Los Angeles area alone, there were more than 170 hometown associations in 1998. In general terms, the activities of hometown associations "have become a common vehicle for giving collective and focused expressions to their claims of substantive membership in their place and country of origin" (Goldring 2002: 64).

The active engagement of migrant communities in their home-land also takes the form of more direct political interventions, the outcome of which are mediated by specific political relations at the subnational level. Rivera-Salgado (1999) has analyzed an interesting case of binational political mobilization of Mixtec indigenous farm workers in the US. At the beginning of 1997, their organization simultaneously staged a rally in front of the Mexican consulate in Fresno, California, organized a press conference in the border city of Tijuana, and led a march from the Mixtec town of Juxtlahuaca to the provincial capital of the southern state of Oaxaca. All manifestations were urging the Mexican government to implement the agreements reached previously between the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation about indigenous culture and autonomy, as well as to push for specific demands of Mixtec communities. Mixtec organizations typically combine issues of ethnic identity, culture, and class as they "promote and defend the human rights of indigenous migrants and improve living conditions … on both sides of the border" (Rivera-Salgado 1999: 1449–50).

In doing so, the Mixtecs themselves, and not the Mexican state, redefine the boundaries and contours of community and citizenship through their political practices and cultural exchanges, creating a vigorous transnational space.

Although Rivera-Salgado suggests that indigenous migrants do better than *mestizo* migrants in developing binational organizations, because they can mobilize specific cultural and social resources, the experiences of the *mestizo* migrants from the northern state of Zacatecas seem to deny this. Goldring (2002: 88–91) has studied the transnationalization and politicization of state-migrant relations by looking at how very well-organized *mestizo* migrants from Zacatecas in Los Angeles became involved in crucial state elections in Mexico, which brought Ricardo Monreal, the first non-PRI governor of the state, to power. A close look at this case is useful, because it brings to the fore the complex interactions between the politics of migrant organizations and regional politics in Mexico. In the years before Monreal came to power, Zacatecas migrants in Los Angeles had managed to build a large and active hometown umbrella organization that worked closely with the state government of Zacatecas that was keen on building a new corporatist constituency. Eventually, this gave rise to a factional dispute within the migrant organization, in which one group wanted to continue the collaboration with the Zacatecas authorities and a dissident faction argued for greater autonomy. The disputes centered on who would control the funds raised by the migrants, the decision-making process about the allocation of these funds, and government's insistence to involve the migrant organization in negotiations with municipal authorities. When Monreal started to campaign for the governorship, first within the PRI and then for the social-democratic PRD when he was denied the candidacy for the first party, he sought the support of Mexicans in the US. Despite the fact that the migrants did not have voting rights, he made several trips to California and courted migrant leaders.[27] This exacerbated the tensions between the factions and transnationalized the gubernatorial race, leading the dissident faction to found a new migrant organization once Monreal left the PRI and started to campaign on a PRD ticket. As the new migrant organization wanted to change their relationship with the Zacatecas authorities and looked for an opportunity to obtain support for their agenda, it openly backed Monreal, who, as Goldring suggests, "behaved as if migrant support was important to his successful candidacy"(2002: 90). In other words, the attempts of a dissident group of migrants to redefine the terms of their inclusion in the Mexican nation-state (more leverage and autonomy) dovetailed with the political agenda of a dissident Mexican political leader. After Monreal assumed office, he destined a considerable amount of money for the continuation of joint migrant-government projects (mostly ceased elsewhere) and appointed a leader of the once dissident migrant group to his cabinet, responsible for maintaining relations with the Zacatecanos in the US.[28] Unsurprisingly, Goldring concludes that even without formal political rights, transmigrants are now players in the Zacatecas political arena and that state-migrant relations are best understood as an "iterative set of negotiations over the meanings and privileges attached to 'membership' in the national and subnational community" (2002: 93). By claiming a new position within the Mexican nation, these and other transmigrants cast serious doubt about the whole idea of the 'TRUE MEXICAN'.

Conclusions

The politics of cultural pluralism has recently come to play a prominent role in public and academic debates in postindustrial societies. The future of migrant communities and their place in the nation-state have been the subject of intense political and cultural struggles in most European countries and the US (Benhabib 2002; Huntington 2004). Most of these countries have witnessed the formation of exclusionary, homogenizing, and sometimes straightforwardly assimilationist discourses, that are partly based

on a perceived endangering of traditional and authentic national identities and social cohesion. Although there are crucial differences between migrant populations and indigenous peoples and their relationships to dominant majorities and the state in Latin America, the analysis of the Mexican experience generates at least two useful insights. First, it can warn against current European discussions from becoming narrow-minded and Eurocentric. A lot can be learned from the way in which other, often postcolonial, societies and polities have been dealing with the political and moral dimensions of cultural pluralism and their relationship to national identity. Moreover, migrant communities in core countries often maintain strong ties with these same postcolonial societies.

The case of Mexico is instructive. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexico's limited social and cultural homogeneity was regarded an obstacle to building a viable nation. The devastating effects of the revolution reinforced the longing for a new and shared national identity. In the first decades of the twentieth century, this endeavor led to the construction of an authenticity discourse focused on the *mestizo*. Paradoxically enough, the Mexican interpretation of authenticity was rooted in a project of hybridization, thereby giving rise to an 'authentic hybrid'.[29] Although authenticity and hybridization are generally viewed as necessarily opposed, the Mexican experience clearly repudiates this. In the Mexican authenticity discourse, the tension between the two is partly eliminated because the pursuit of purity—linked to the idea of an authentic identity—is attained by *including* and dissipating existing heterogeneity and difference. The discourse of *mestizaje* and national identity transformed *mestizo*hood from a "stigma of impurity … into the hallmark of a chosen people combining the best of all civilizations" (Wimmer 2002: 138). Revolutionary nationalism was indeed, in the words of Aguilar, "a blinker that impeded seeing the real heterogeneity of Mexican society" (2003: 38). In other historical circumstances, however, authenticity and purity are sought and attained by *excluding* heterogeneity and difference. This is what might be referred to as the 'Balkan solution'. Whereas in the Mexican case, authenticity is the result of assimilating or inclusive—albeit asymmetrical—hybridization, in the Balkan there is evidence of exclusionary authentication. Despite this crucial difference, in both cases there is evidence of the 'invention of purity', which suppresses whatever difference there might be (Ballinger 2004).

The second insight that derives from the Mexican case concerns the fact that debating national identity is profoundly shaped by broader political and discursive dynamics. In this contribution I have distinguished three phases in the construction of the discourse of national identity, each using different core concepts and conceptual frameworks (race, culture, and national character). All three share a common pursuit of sameness, uniformity and purity. By doing so, the resulting discourses came to play a key role in the consolidation of the postrevolutionary regime in Mexico. The cultural politics of *mexicanidad* became inextricably entangled with the political culture of monistic authoritarianism.[30] In recent decades, the canon of *mestizo* national culture has been undermined by a new politics of difference and pluralism, mainly set in motion by various neo-indigenous movements, the overall outcomes of Mexico's changing position in the global economy and transnational migration and the persistent claims for democracy. Their combined effect collides fundamentally with the essentializing and homogenizing discourse of authenticity centered on the *mestizo*. This is exactly what novelist and essayist Ruy-Sánchez hoped for when he wrote that "in the more complex, pluralistic Mexico of today, more than ever before we must reject attempts to locate an essentialist identity, whether based on core values or *mestizaje* or on a shared sense of collective lessons from the past" (1995: 55). The debate about Mexico's national identity has entered a new phase, one in which "the recognition and endorsement of the pluricultural nature of the nation" is at stake (Acuerdos 1996: 141). Could this also be the future of current assimilationist discourses in Europe and the US?

Wil G. Pansters is associate professor at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Utrecht University. He specializes in Latin America, especially Mexico. He has published widely in the areas of political anthropology, regional history, and development. In 2005, he will publish an edited volume together with Alan Knight about *caciquismo* in twentieth-century Mexico.
E-mail: W.G.Pansters@fss.uu.nl

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Notes

1. For an analysis of the concept of authenticity in Arab philosophy and its relation to Islamist revivalism, see Aziz Al-Azmel (1993: 80–100).
2. In her study on the discussion pertaining to the authenticity of a cultural festival in British Guyana at the beginning of the twentieth century, Williams also very emphatically refers to the positioning and evaluation of national individuality in a field where international forces interact. The international is also a significant factor in the case of Mexico—one should bear in mind its complex relations with the United States—but I am not in a position to go into that question in detail here.
3. I am well aware that with this approach I am deviating from the usual modern-day analyses of processes of nation building and cultural politics in Mexico. There the attention is not focused so much on the big story of the state and the nation and the role that certain thinkers and key texts play in it as on how the discourse on the nation is embedded in local daily practices and contexts and the way these local practices play a role in constituting the nation. Some extremely interesting and important studies have been conducted on the negotiations by, for example, peasants, Indians, and Catholics on the contents and the meaning of the postrevolutionary state and nation from a local and regional perspective. One important publication in this connection is Joseph et al. (1994). See also Aitken (1999) and Bantjes (1997, 1998). However, in developing my own approach to the central theme in this article, I enjoy good company. See e.g., the comparative work of Nicola Miller (1999) that is one of the most important studies of the role of intellectuals in the construction of national identity in Latin America.
4. 'Chicana' refers to Mexican or Central American roots, whereas 'Riqueña' refers to Puerto Rican ones.
5. In Mexico the term *criollo* is not used to refer to a mixed identity, but to someone of Spanish descent who was born in Mexico. The criteria that were and still are used to determine whether an individual or a community is categorized as Indian are extremely diverse. Some people view the language as the predominant criterion, whereas others prefer indicators that might be more comprehensive but are also more unclear such as clothing, customs, and social and religious modes of organization. In the administration practice of colonial Latin America, the 'Indian' was already far more of a fiscal than a racial or ethnic category. From a biological as well as a cultural perspective, after centuries of Spanish rule and racial mixing, a 'pure Indian' is rare in Mexico if not totally nonexistent. The racial idiom has nonetheless continued to play a role of importance, even among the authors and thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century whose stance as regards these groups was positive and benevolent. As Knight (1990: 87) concludes, "these theorists could have dropped the use of 'race' altogether or at least they could have made it clear that for them 'race' denoted a social category. Instead, they remained prisoners of the preceding racist discourse, and continued to scatter references to 'race' among their ostensibly antiracist *indigenista* writings".
6. In Spanish *indígena* roughly means indigenous inhabitant, which in Latin America is equivalent to Indian. The Spanish word *indio* has a pejorative connotation. The most important recent book on this subject is Dawson (2004).
7. Here Molina shows that he is indebted to Haeckel, who defines a race in terms of the relations with its physical environment.
8. According to Gamio, the Indian population was better off in colonial times than in independent

Mexico. This has to do with various factors, such as the abolition of the colonial legislation that allowed the Indian communities to have autonomous regions. Afterwards, in particular the liberal reforms of the mid-nineteenth century greatly harmed the survival chances of the Indian communities.

9. Gamio's main focus is on scientific progress in this connection. This is evident, for example, from his repeated emphasis on the importance of collecting scientific knowledge for the purpose of policy development.
10. Basave (1992: 128–9) has noted the ill reputed differences between this work and *Hacia un México Nuevo*, which was published in 1935. This book evokes an atmosphere of disappointment. Twenty years after the end of the revolution, a new elite was in power that proved to be just as corrupt as the leaders of the ancien régime.
11. Gamio's belief in the science as a key instrument transforming the nation was most importantly expressed in his commitment to institutionalize anthropology and archeology as academic disciplines in Mexico. Moreover, he saw 'the construction of Mexico's new *mestizo* culture as one firmly grounded in the secular, scientific tradition' (Swarthout 2004: 103).
12. Gamio was also active for what he believed in, in any number of other ways. He was the director of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano from 1939 to 1960 and the director of Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnologia and founder of the journal *Ethnos* (Basave Benítez 1992: 125).
13. It is striking that no mention is made of religion in this list. Gamio holds that there was a nonproblematic merging in the colonial era in this field between Catholic and pre-Columbian religious practices because there was a strong analogy between the two. He holds however that Protestantism differed greatly from the pre-Columbian 'paganism' (1982: 85–88).
14. This essay has attracted a great deal of attention ever since. A new bilingual edition was recently published in the United States with an extensive introduction.
15. The other races are the Blacks, the Indians, and the Mongolians.
16. Vasconcelos himself was more of a *criollo*, i.e., someone of direct European descent but born in America.
17. The author uses this metaphor to describe the attitude of northerners and compare it to the *sympathy* of the southerners. Could he have had a premonition that seven decades later, the northern neighbors would indeed start building a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico?
18. This not only holds true for Mexico or even Latin America. The same comment was recently made by Paul Scheffer (1999) in a bibliographic analysis of the situation in the Balkans: "Ethnically more homogeneous countries such as Poland, Hungary or Slovenia have more of a chance of becoming a stable democracy … than ethnically divided countries like Slovakia and Serbia. The minority issue … appears to serve as a stepping stone towards nationalism and an authoritarian form of rule."
19. Schmidt (1978) sees the work of Ramos as the culmination of the work and ideas developed of the most significant Mexican intellectuals of the 1910s and 1920s, some of whom I have dealt with in the previous sections.
20. This goes back to the work of Ramos who attempted to overcome the static opposition between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. According to Schmidt, he suggested "that Mexico could be understood only by means of a directing idea derived from European thought. Yet a knowledge of the Mexican mind was essential if European culture was to be cleansed of elements unassimilable to the Mexican experience" (1978: 159). As a consequence, he attacked those "who thought *lo mexicano* was manifested only in local color … [and] maintained that the ideal was to unite the national with the universal" (Schmidt, 1978: 160).
21. The occupation of the large cities by the triumphant armies of peasants led by Zapata and Villa in the Mexican revolution are often cited in this connection as an example of the mobilization of *México bronco*. The short-lived occupation of San Cristóbal de las Casas by the neo-Zapatistas in 1994 evoked similar fears among the local elites.
22. Unfortunately for Fox, a major setback for his plans to reach a new a broad agreement with the US government about securing a place for migrants in the US, while maintaining their ties to the homeland followed the events of 9/11.
23. In this context, the popularity of the *(narco)corrido* in the state of Michoacán in west Mexico is no coincidence, since that state has a

long history of migration to the US and, more recently, of drug-related activities. For an analysis of the *narco-corrido* in Michoacán, see Wald (2001: 266–84).

24. This is precisely what has worried Huntington (2004: 204–19).
25. The distinction between these two dimensions of transnational processes is from Goldring (2002: 64).
26. In the early 1990s, the Mexican government established a federal program that matched every dollar raised by US based hometown associations with two dollars, one from the federal government and one from the corresponding state government, hence its name the *Dos por Uno* program.
27. After all, migrants can always suggest to their kin in Mexico whom to vote for (Goldring 2002: 90).
28. Despite the fact that the migrants achieved more independence from the Mexican state, Goldring readily qualifies this by stating that 'these concessions, however, were granted in a highly personalistic manner' (2002: 91).
29. While this article was under review by two anonymous readers, Pamela Ballinger published an article in *Current Anthropology* with the title 'Authentic hybrids' in the Balkan borderlands. In this sophisticated text, Ballinger analyzes discourses of identity in the region of Istria, on the border between Italy and the former Republic of Yugoslavia. She examines the "mutual constitution of discourses of purity and hybridity within the context of historical state-building projects" (2004: 31). Istrian regionalists have developed a discourse on the region's long history of *mescolanza* or intermixture between Italian, German, and Slav peoples, thereby giving rise to a particular regional identity. In opposition to the essentialist logics of Croatian national identity, and, more in general, to the 'Orientalism' of the Balkan, Istrian regionalists privilege the hybrid subject. This hybrid Istrian is considered to be the quintessential and authentic embodiment of Istrian regionalism, hence the term 'authentic hybrid'. Interestingly, the author notes that the claim of opposition between Istrian authentic hybridity and Slav exclusive ethno-nationalistic identities cannot account for what she calls the history of 'dialogic relationship between purity and hybridity' in the region. Moreover, the Istrian regionalist discourse of hybridity paradoxically reproduces notions of purity and exclusiveness, "because of the continued emphasis on autochthony and metaphors of rootedness" (2004: 48–9). In similar terms, the Latin American discourse of *mestizaje* appears to have "left in place narrower understandings of identity", such as Indianness (Ballinger 2004: 48). For obvious reasons I have not been able to fully incorporate Ballinger's complex arguments in this article.
30. For an analysis of Mexican political culture, see Pansters (2002: 301). For a reflection of the idea of monism, see Dealy (1974).

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