

Introduction

According to French philosopher Paul Virilio (*War and Cinema*), the power of modern warfare lies in its capacity to captivate human perception through the media spectacle of war. The Mexican Revolution of 1910, the first major twentieth-century social revolution, was a modern war in this sense. It broke out at a time when pioneering film companies were discovering the potentiality of the newsreel to convey the drama of war on a global scale. Even before World War I and long before the Spanish Civil War, it was subject to cinematic reproduction. An immense proliferation of photographic and cinematic records characterized its armed phase (1910–1921). This feature only became exacerbated during the years of national reconstruction (1921–1940), when a myriad of national and foreign artists contributed to increase the proliferation of visual material, enhancing the revolution's iconic character. The hermeneutical possibilities of the revolution's immense visual archive have triggered cultural and political interest in and outside Mexico.

This book explores the repercussions of such archive on global revolutionary thinking during the period 1940 to 1970 by bringing to the fore fundamental concerns related to the notion of revolution in its modern form in and beyond Mexico. The waning of community in a context of biopolitical and technological development during World War II; the questioning of revolutionary purpose during the Cold War; the importance of popular culture in the shaping of revolutionary consciousness for postcolonial liberation movements; and the danger of state populism for radical social change, are among the most salient of these concerns. The book tackles these topics by examining the trajectories of a group of North American, European, and Latin American intellectuals, who refashioned iconic episodes and figures of the Mexican Revolution

through the medium of film in order to explore and debate the political, aesthetic, social, and/or economic impact of modern revolutions. Hence, the aim of this book is to address the cultural significance of an iconic revolution that inspired long-lasting concerns in other world scenarios and epochs. The book analyzes different kinds of films, including independent documentaries, Hollywood auteur films, and mass-appeal genre productions. Although each chapter focuses predominantly on one film, the book weaves together other cinematic productions and filmic material, as well as a large body of sociological, graphic, literary, philosophical, and historical works.

A large number of studies have dealt with the cultural impact of the Mexican Revolution. The bibliography is so vast that this book does not pretend to exhaust its possibilities. It certainly dialogues with recent scholarship on the cinematic representations of the Mexican Revolution and on Mexican film and visual studies by Niamh Thornton, Zuzana M. Pick, Aurelio de Los Reyes, Margarita de Orellana, Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, Emilio García Riera, Ángel Miquel, John Mraz, David Wood, and Andrea Noble, among many others. However, it takes the reader beyond the level of the film text in order to explore the relationship between culture and revolution on a wider scale by highlighting the ways in which film connects with other media and intellectual practices. As the book relies on an extensive and wide-ranging archival research, it undermines common assumptions about the films and topics studied by unraveling a complex web of ideological, intellectual, and political concerns. In this sense, the book provides novel material for future researchers, connecting the analysis of cinematic representation not only to a history of film production and reception but also, and more importantly, to broader intellectual concerns regarding the idea of revolution in contemporary critical thinking. Hence, besides engaging with scholarship on the revolution's visual culture, the book brings into discussion theoretical concerns on the relationship between intellectuals and revolution in the twentieth century. In short, this is a book on the transnational dimension of the Mexican Revolution's cultural legacy and its impact on global cinema and Western intellectual thought.

The first chapter, "The Mirage of Community: A Mexican Village in Times of War," addresses the intellectual journey of a group of "freedom fighters" motivated by an idealized view of the Cardenista welfare state (regarded as the successful outcome of the Mexican Revolution) and wary of the threat of international fascism during the disputed Mexican

presidential election of 1939 and 1940. Herbert Kline (1909–1999), John Steinbeck (1902–1968), Hanns Eisler (1898–1962), Edward F. Ricketts (1897–1948), and Alexandr Hackenschmied, aka Hammid (1907–2004) shot the documentary-style film *The Forgotten Village* (U.S., 1941) in an indigenous village in central Mexico, with the struggle for democracy as their mission. The chapter weaves together the complex and at times contradictory responses of these intellectuals to historic debates concerning biopolitics, democracy, and fascism during World War II and within the background of Mexican nationalism and *Indigenismo*. The analysis of *The Forgotten Village* brings to light the role of documentary filmmaking as a political weapon not only against international fascism but also against traditional mores in the Mexican countryside hindering the development of a modern healthcare system. Hence, the conjunction of biopolitics and technology with respect to the cinematic representation of physical pain as a site of the struggle between civilization and barbarism is central to the chapter. The film's representational procedures are analyzed in connection to intellectual concerns with broader philosophical implications. The most salient of these concerns is whether technology was destined to improve human existence or, in a more Heideggerian sense, whether it was the logical consequence of a productionist metaphysics, sustaining the frenzy of production, consumption, and destruction in the bleak panorama of global war.

The book's second chapter, "Zapata in the Presidential Chair: *Viva Zapata!*," explores why 1914 and 1915, the "ground zero" period of the Mexican Revolution,² became an important reference for director Elia Kazan (1909–2003) and writer John Steinbeck in the making of the Twentieth-Century Fox production *Viva Zapata!* (1952). In this film, Zapata's rebellion is depicted as a participatory and autonomous form of self-government opposing the formation of the state as the outcome of a successful revolution. The chapter shows how Steinbeck's in-depth research on regional Mexican history is subject to an allegorical interpretation in light of the rise of state totalitarianisms and the proliferation of anti-Marxist perspectives on revolution during the era of McCarthyism.

This critique of revolution is problematized by exploring the political context in which this film was produced. In the United States, McCarthyism also involved a strengthening of sovereign power as national security. Consequently, the debates between Kazan, Steinbeck, and the producer Darryl F. Zanuck regarding the ideological challenges posed by a film on revolution during a time of political censorship are crucial to

contextualize the film's analysis. The process whereby Steinbeck's initial screenplay was gradually modified, bringing politics into play, is also discussed, as well as Kazan's interpretation of his film as an anticommunist manifestation in his plea before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Additionally, the chapter documents the film's intellectual reception on both sides of the border and relates it to historiography of the Mexican Revolution influenced by the ideological rationale behind McCarthyism and Mexican nationalism.

The third chapter of the book, "The 'Quién Sabe' of Revolution in the Italian Western," examines the rapport between intellectual thought and popular film by focusing on Franco Solinas (1927–1982), a prolific Italian film writer who became internationally known due to his involvement with both political auteur cinema and genre film, specifically the Italian western. The chapter explores the impact of Franz Fanon's thought on major auteur films written by Solinas, notably Gillo Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri* (1966) and *Queimada* (1969), but also four Italian westerns set in revolutionary Mexico that bear Solinas's imprint: *La resa dei conti* (1966), *Il mercenario* (1968), *Tepepa* (1969), and most important, *Quien sabe? (A Bullet for the General)*, Italy, 1966). At a time when the category of social class began to be considered insufficient for explaining the explosive appearance of antisystemic movements, westerns such as *Quien sabe?* revisited this American genre in order to recall the longstanding concern with revolutionary meaning in relation to social banditry. The film's action takes place in 1915 and 1916, the bloodiest years of the Mexican Revolution, in order to evoke the brutal wars of decolonization during the 1950s and early 1960s. The study of the Italian western is framed in the context of changing paradigms of on-screen bloodshed during the 1960s and within the background of philosophical approaches to violence, particularly Fanon's. The influence of Fanon on Solinas's views of decolonizing violence is key in exploring the question of revolutionary purpose in this film. Hence, the chapter provides a general overview of the Italian western, discusses the role of radical intellectuals within the Italian film industry, situates Franco Solinas' trajectory and political thought within this context, and problematizes the encounters and displacements of mass culture, politics, and intellectuals during the 1960s. One of the questions raised by this chapter is whether the Italian western, with its formulaic cycles and standardized practices—and Solinas's blurred mix of lettered culture and popular film—could effect a radical critique of colonialism.

Chapter 4, “Resisting the Populist Temptation: *México, la revolución congelada* and Raymundo Gleyzer’s Latin Americanist Cinema,” examines *México, la revolución congelada* (*Mexico, The Frozen Revolution*, 1970, hereafter MRC), an independent documentary by Argentine filmmaker Raymundo Gleyzer (1941–1976) that had limited circulation in Mexico and abroad during this decade. The presidential campaign of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970), the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)³ candidate, is the context in which Gleyzer and his crew (Juana Sapire, Humberto Ríos, María Elena Vera, and Paul Leduc) exposed the dubious and repressive aspects of state populism. By unmasking the discursive foundations of authoritarianism behind the PRI, this documentary revisits the legacy of Lázaro Cárdenas through the figure of Echeverría, who strove to emulate Cárdenas’s benevolent political style in an attempt to hide state violence during and after the massacre of Tlatelolco (October 2, 1968).

The chapter situates the impact of MRC in the international arena, during the crudest years of the Cold War in Latin America, as an affront to the PRI’s semiotics of self-representation on the world stage. Through the study of Gleyzer’s film, the chapter reflects on the relationship between New Latin American Cinema and Latin Americanism, the latter understood as a specific trend of thought that came to the fore in Latin America after the outbreak of the Cuban Revolution. In this regard, “the people,” a referent that demarcates a field of political struggle and antagonism for both populism and revolutionary cinema, becomes central to the analysis. Insofar as Gleyzer envisioned populism as a generalized phenomenon of Latin American politics, the chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of MRC and *Los traidores* (*The Traitors*, Argentina 1972–1973), Gleyzer’s cinematic indictment of Peronism. Through this comparison, the chapter argues that the filmmaker interpreted Mexico’s PRI system in correlation to Argentina’s Peronism, viewing the two political forms as manifestations of nationalist populism in Latin America. Gleyzer’s central political aim was motivated by a desire to expose the ideological traps of such systems across Latin America.

This book concludes with an epilogue that looks back at the decline of the longstanding relationship between intellectuals, film, and revolution through the visual archive of revolutionary Mexico in the neoliberal and digital era. From this perspective, the epilogue articulates a final assessment of the concerns addressed in the book, including a reflection on the shortcomings of the state-centered paradigm of revolution that

dominated the cinematic imagination of revolutionary thinkers during the period from 1940 to 1970. John Holloway argues that this paradigm, which marked not only the revolutionary experience of the early twentieth century but also national liberation and guerrilla movements in the 1960s and 1970s (12), led to the dead-end of revolutionary skepticism in the twentieth century (20). The epilogue precludes a future inquiry into the prospect of concrete political action in the face of the constant dematerialization of social experience in the digital age. The vantage point for this reconsideration is the neo-Zapatista uprising of the 1990s and its netwar at a global scale, which sought to reinvent intellectual leadership, revolutionary tactics, and the very aim of revolution beyond the state paradigm and visual media such as film.

The Visual Culture of Revolutionary Mexico and the Revolution/State Divide

Before moving on to the detailed discussion provided by individual chapters, I would like to situate them within a wider context related to Mexican nationalism, the visual culture of the Mexican Revolution, and the historical imperatives defining both the revolutionary years and the period from 1940 to 1970, which concern this book. The Mexican Revolution has been subject to multifarious interpretations regarding not only its historically ambivalent outcome and legacy but also its iconicity. The prototypical Mexican landscape, particularly as linked to the U.S.-Mexico border, is much indebted to the use of visual technology. The image of border cities, such as El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, is the result of a plethora of filmic and photographic records taken during the revolutionary period.⁴ Many battles, such as the Battle of Juárez (1911), attracted a multitude of cinematographers, souvenir hunters, and photographers, who swarmed the border to capture the revolutionaries in action and disseminated the revolution's spectacular character within a matter of days to an American public that was avid for violence on the other side of the border (Dorado Romo 155–156). Through the eyes of the camera, global audiences witnessed Francisco Villa's meteoric rise to national prominence and, subsequently, his abrupt downfall. Hoping to consolidate worldwide support for his cause, Villa allowed film correspondents to follow his campaigns and even signed a contract with the Mutual Film Corporation in 1914, granting this company exclusive

rights to film his battles in exchange for 20 percent of the revenues (Katz, *Life and Times* 325; Orellana, *Mirada circular* 74). Mutual Film profited from Villa's revolutionary persona. By combining newsreels with fiction, it turned Villa's life into Hollywood melodrama at the very peak of his movement. When American public opinion turned against Villa, particularly after Villa's invasion of Columbus, New Mexico, the film industry continued to capitalize on the revolutionary's public image, this time as a most-wanted bandit. This is the case of the Eagle Film Manufacturing and Producing Company, which released *Villa Dead or Alive* in 1916 (Katz, *Life and Times* 326). On the other hand, the spectacular, cinematic character of Villismo is also attributable to the technological sophistication of the movement itself. Villa waged a campaign based on speed and surprise, using visual media consciously as a strategic military tactic. Long after Villa's own revolution, the Italian intellectuals studied in this book continued to evoke Villa's iconic image not only as the Mexican bandit of previous Hollywood incarnations but also as a modern guerrilla fighter in the political westerns of the 1960s.

Villistas gained worldwide recognition due to their ability to profit from their visual appeal, but they were not the only ones to do so. Many other Mexican revolutionary factions made use of visual media (photography and film) as a key instrument of propaganda with the same effectiveness. These revolutionaries were well aware of the capacity of film and photography to gain supporters or help defeat enemies effectively and used these visual technologies against each other. Besides occupying territory, the revolutionary fighters needed to seize control of the immateriality of perceptual fields if they wanted to win the war. Salvador Toscano Barragán, a pioneer of filmmaking in Mexico, wrote to Venustiano Carranza about the unprecedented effect that film had on the masses, a power "greater than that achieved with propaganda in a hundred newspapers" (Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution* 4). Martín Luis Guzmán's autobiographical novel *The Eagle and the Serpent* (1928) depicts Carranza as an astute politician who knew how to manipulate visual media in order to gain supporters, most notably during the Aguascalientes Convention (December 1914). In the face of growing tensions between Carranza, and Zapata and Villa, Carranza refused to attend the Convention in person. However, he sent one of his photographers, Jesús H. Abitia, along with a documentary film on the recent seizure of Mexico City to promote his image as the only leader of the revolution capable of unifying the disparate factions of the revolution. The episode of the

novel, “The Film of the Revolution” (285–291) records the firsthand impressions of the implicit author on the film’s impact:

Laughter and catcalls, stamping and whistling turned into a deafening ovation as the title of the revolutionary epic adapted to the screen appeared in gleaming letters. And then I knew what the unanimous applause of a whole theater as the curtain falls is like; I tasted in imagination the glory of great actors. . . . The noise of the machine was unimportant; now the attention of the audience was unmindful of the ear and was concentrated in the eye. (289–290)

The narrator’s observations in this fragment conform to Virilio’s hypothesis that “the history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception” (*War and Cinema* 7).

Film, argues Mary Ann Doane, archives the experience of presence, but a presence already haunted by historicity because it is “the disjunctivness of a presence relived” (*Emergence of Cinematic Time* 23). The fighters of the Mexican Revolution understood their role as protagonists of a contingent event becoming history at the moment the cameras captured their actions. They entered the spectral universe of photography and film,⁵ already aware of the invaluable revolutionary potential of this media in affecting an unpredictable future. Thus, the early photographs and films of the Mexican Revolution carried traces of revolutionary passion and immediacy, regardless of the political or lucrative uses that these early records may have had. The intellectuals discussed in this book reworked such traces in their films, and shaped new genealogies in favor or against revolutionary thinking in other world scenarios and epochs.

Numerous photographers and cinematographers⁶ covered the war throughout the Mexican territory, becoming important political actors of the revolution as well. If some remained loyal to specific revolutionary factions (Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution* 2), others became entrepreneurs, and still others archivists and early historians. The photojournalist Agustín Casasola amassed a wide repertoire of photographic images of the revolution through a family business, founded in 1912 (Agencia Mexicana de Información Gráfica). By the early 1920s, Casasola began to promote his own myth as the photographer of the Mexican

Revolution, with the publication of *Álbum histórico gráfico* (1921) (Mraz, *Photographing* 45–46). The Casasola Archive became the most significant repository of photographs of the Mexican Revolution, attesting to the relevance of this revolution as a watershed period in the visual history of Mexico (Legrás 143). Certainly, the filmmakers studied in this book used this archive for political ends, contesting or endorsing the referential character, with which such images were conventionally promoted. In the realm of film, the above-mentioned Salvador Toscano played a similar historical role to that of Casasola by producing some of the first historical documentaries of the revolution, such as *Historia Completa de la Revolución Mexicana de 1910 a 1915*, in which he compiled his own footage and that of several cinematographers (Miquel, *Salvador Toscano* 71). In 1950, his daughter Carmen Toscano turned him into an epic figure of the Mexican Revolution in the compilation film *Memorias de un mexicano*. This film used archival footage to endorse the denotative authenticity of the image, a feature that the Mexican state benefited from. *Memorias de un mexicano* was a source of reference for the filmmakers studied here, particularly Gleyzer, who used this film in opposition to the Mexican state's official discourse, exposing the constructed nature of cinematic accuracy.

On the other hand, the potential of the Mexican Revolution to foster political interest beyond Mexico and beyond the years of its armed phase is not limited to the vast hermeneutical possibilities of its photographic and filmic archive. It is also the result of a cultural crusade—nationalism—that took place during the postrevolutionary period and included national and foreign actors; media and arts, such as painting, literature, and architecture; and other disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, and history. The aim was to turn the revolution's legacy into the founding myth of a renewed nation and to rethink, through an integrationist ideology, the symbolic role of the indigenous population in the nation-building process.⁷ This call to cultural action came to the fore as an initiative of the Mexican postrevolutionary state during its formative years. There is a broad critical consensus that the official history generated by Mexican nationalism diminished the historical role of the indigenous peasant masses as the makers of their own history by placing them under the paternalistic protection of the state and the lettered elites. Yet, nationalism was also a much more complex phenomenon, as it entailed the struggle to define popular sovereignty. Viewed from this

perspective, the peasant base of the revolution (Zapata's agrarianism) planted the seed of nationalism even if the postrevolutionary state would subvert Zapatismo's principles for political control.

Further, the mediation of culture during the early postrevolutionary period went beyond the politics of the state, which was still a weak entity at the time. In the 1920s and early 1930s, artists and intellectuals envisioned Mexico's national reconstruction as a collective project and viewed culture as the site to enact "the common of the community" (Legrás, *Culture and Revolution* 9). These two decades witnessed an exponential proliferation of variegated cultural productions, including those of foreign artists and intellectuals, such as Michael Lowry, Anita Brenner, Tina Modotti, Katherine Anne Porter, Frank Tannenbaum, Carleton Beals, Frances Toor, Edward Weston, Paul Strand, and Sergei Eisenstein, among many others, who gave Mexico's revolutionary archive a dynamic character.

In the realm of cinema, Eisenstein's Mexican film project is widely believed to be the founding filmic discourse of Mexico's nationalist cinema. The Russian director came to Mexico in 1931, accompanied by photographer Eduard Tissé and Grigori Alexandrov, to work on the film, raising Mexico's cultural prestige worldwide (De los Reyes, *Medio Siglo de Cine Mexicano* 114). The unfortunate outcome for Eisenstein is well known. Due to financial and time constraints, Eisenstein could not complete the film. Producer Upton Sinclair called a halt, selling the footage to Hollywood producer Sol Lesser, who released *Thunder Over Mexico* in 1933.⁸ The release of *Thunder over Mexico* stirred substantial debate among avant-garde critics and filmmakers in the United States regarding the limited revolutionary potential of this commercial version, which did not meet Eisenstein's approval. On the other hand, even if critics like John King considered that the impact of Eisenstein in the thirties and forties was limited to the painterly aspects of his visual style, "the architecture of the landscape, the maguey plants, the extraordinary skies, the noble hieratic people" (44), *Thunder over Mexico* did influence the work of politically engaged filmmakers. After watching this film, Pare Lorentz and Leo Hurwitz reconsidered the political potential of Hollywood for the international Left (Robé, "Eisenstein in America" 18–31). In 1932, Paul Strand recalled an Eisensteinian photography of collective action to develop a revolutionary narrative in *Redes* (*The Wave*; 1936), a Mexican-produced documentary-style film, which became

an important precedent for later films, including *The Forgotten Village* (U.S., 1941) studied in this book.⁹

Nationalism in Mexican cinema reached its apogee in the late thirties, when the Mexican film industry acquired institutional endorsement and international consecration during the so-called Golden Age (c. 1938–1955).¹⁰ High levels of production, technical refinement, and the growing hegemony of the Mexican industry over other markets, predominantly those of Latin America, characterize this cinematic boom. The Golden Age of Mexican cinema was partly the result of the state-to-state collaboration between the United States and Mexico. In the context of World War II, the United States provided financial and technical support to the Mexican industry, boosting the Mexican film production. Mexico's film industry became the sixth most important in the world during these years (García Riera, *Breve historia del cine mexicano* 123; Noble 15). Golden Age cinema encompassed genre and auteur films. Genre films tackled the experience of the everyday through the portrayal of distinctive Mexican stars, unique humor, and emblematic spaces. According to Carlos Monsiváis, the Mexican public “trusted that its [cinematic] idols would explain how to survive in a bewildering age of modernization” (“Mythologies” 117). Conversely, the auteur films of director Emilio Fernández and photographer Gabriel Figueroa exported the aura of a mystical Mexico to an international audience avid for primitivism.¹¹ The Fernández-Figueroa films used melodramatic plots based on indigenous, rural, or revolutionary narratives, and featured Figueroa's distinctive photographic style, characterized by the frequent use of dialectical compositional elements, chiaroscuro lighting, low-angle shots, deep focus, and oblique perspective (Ramírez-Berg 34–35). This cinema was also associated with Fernández's own public legend as a prototypical Mexican, bearing the nickname “El Indio” Fernández (Tierney 49). Ironically, the peculiar “Mexican” character of these films was the result of the dialogue between several national and international visual trends, such as José Guadalupe Posada's graphic popular art, Mexican muralist painting, and the photographic and cinematographic work of the aforementioned foreign filmmakers (Ramírez Berg 27–35). This cosmopolitan style was taken as the national imprint of Mexico in the space of global art cinema in the early 1940s and became a point of reference for many of the films studied here. A direct precedent of *Viva Zapata!* with respect to Steinbeck's involvement is *La Perla* (*The Pearl* 1947), coproduced by

the Mexican production company Águila Films and one of the major Hollywood studios, RKO Pictures (Fein, “Transcultured” 85). John Steinbeck worked closely with Fernández and Figueroa in the film adaptation of his novella. This book does not seek to add anything substantial to the many critical studies written about *The Pearl*, but instead to reflect on the consequences of the hemispheric collaborations that determined the film’s production in order to examine Steinbeck’s subsequent engagement with *Viva Zapata!* during the Cold War.

In his study of culture and revolution in postrevolutionary Mexico, Horacio Legrás focuses on the 1920s and 1930s, the immediate decades after the armed conflict. During this period, the process of state formation was still in the making and nationalism was a competing enterprise among diverse cultural discourses. Hence, Legrás relates the culture of revolutionary Mexico with what he terms “textuality,” a way of understanding society as text. For him, textuality is the modeling force to interpret nationalism beyond historicist perspectives, privileging contiguity over hierarchy. In this regard, he tackles the revolutionary archive outside its institutional dwelling, dissociating it from the sort of official history that treats archival materials as faithful and original records of the past.¹² To a certain extent, this book favors this approach by underscoring a rich array of borrowings from the visual culture of revolutionary Mexico. However, the period covered here, 1940 to 1970, corresponds to the waning of the way nationalism was understood in the twenties, namely as a direct result of democratization inspired by the revolution. According to Legrás, in the twenties, nationalism became a novel heuristic device to make sense of the country as a whole after the shock of the armed revolt (15–16). By the 1940s, in the context of Mexico’s regime of import substitution industrialization (ISI), the legitimacy of nationalism as a common revolutionary enterprise became questionable. For this reason, this book approaches the relationship between culture and revolution with a specific political concern in mind: the conflicting relationship between state and revolution in a period characterized by the impetus of technological modernization and authoritarian normality (Williams, *Mexican Exception* 28–30). During this period, several movements, particularly in the destitute Mexican countryside, began to reclaim the legacy of their agrarian revolution by means of insurrection. From this perspective, the intellectuals studied in this book could not engage with the history and the visual archive of revolutionary Mexico without encountering conflict and paradox. Hence, a brief overview of

the historical imperatives of this period is in order before proceeding to the chapters.

For most historians, the Mexican Revolution encompasses not only the armed insurrection that broke out in 1910 against the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) and the ten-year period of civil war that followed,¹³ but also the critical years of state formation (1920–1940). In this regard, Alan Knight writes, “We may . . . see the Revolution, in its totality, as the work of a generation (1920–1940), who first destroyed the old regime, then built a new state apparatus and, finally, carried through social reforms unprecedented in Latin America at the time” (*Mexican Revolution* 3). This book begins at the end of this revolutionary period, in 1940, the year Manuel Ávila Camacho succeeded Lázaro Cárdenas as President of Mexico. This election heralded the end of the state’s Jacobinic approach to public education and of its anticlerical stance, which had led to a bloody war during the presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928). Against the background of World War II, Ávila Camacho’s election also presaged the withering away of Cardenismo, a period characterized by a radical form of government, which faced substantial opposition that limited its accomplishments after 1938.¹⁴

In Mexico, World War II invigorated a capitalist economy that made the state its central player. The promotion of economic growth and large-scale agribusiness, favoring foreign enterprises, characterized the administrations of Ávila Camacho (1940–1946) and his successor Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946–1952). This “desarrollista” state institutionalized a large bureaucracy and eclipsed the agrarian demands of the revolution (Schneider 278). Hence, if conventional wisdom regards the period between 1940 and 1970 as that of an economic miracle due to sustained economic growth and low inflation, revisionist historians contend that it was also characterized by social unrest and popular mobilization (Padilla 14). The outbreak of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 added to an atmosphere of political and social discontent in Mexico, particularly during the administrations of Adolfo López Mateos (1958–1964) and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970). In the context of the Cold War and the emergence of the New Left, the idealized image of the Cuban Revolution came to revitalize a revolutionary ethos among Mexican groups, such as railroad workers, teachers, and students. These groups were already dissatisfied with the course that the Mexican Revolution (which was considered an ongoing project of national transformation in the decades after the conflict) had been taking under the leadership of

the PRI (Keller 52). By the 1960s, violence, explicitly visible in 1968 against the student movement, became the Mexican state's vehicle for asserting its own eroded legitimacy. Nonetheless, the government continued to promote its revolutionary origin even though this myth had grown inefficient for explaining the rationality of the state's corporatist and capitalist base since the early forties (Bartra, "Mexican Oficio" 37). The intellectuals discussed in this book confronted this basic contradiction when they delved into the visual archive of revolutionary Mexico in order to produce politically engaged films during these years. In exploring the relationship between state and revolution, they therefore recalled, even if indirectly, two significant periods in the history of the Mexican Revolution: 1934–1938, the radical years of Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency (1934–1940), and 1914 to 1916, the peak and fall of the popular rebellion led by Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa. Together, these two periods bring into focus the hopes and nightmares of revolutionary thinking in the political imaginaries of these intellectuals as seen through the medium of film in and beyond Mexico.

Even if historical revisionism has debunked the myth of 1930s Cardenismo as the perfect state by demonstrating its connection to the foundation of the corporatist model that characterized the official party (Sosa), consensus on Cárdenas's legacy rests on his ability to articulate and fulfill the popular demands of the revolution by granting representation to workers and peasants. For some historians, Cárdenas's policies constituted a shrewd balancing act between regional (and popular) demands and national interests. His actions on land reform and oil expropriation brought to the fore the revolution's national ethos, because these policies were envisioned as addressing an affront to foreign economic interests in Mexico. Further, Cárdenas's national accomplishments also fulfilled popular demands at the local level. Land reform strengthened communal systems in the countryside; at the same time, it increased large-scale national productivity (Nora Hamilton 168). In his book *El cardenismo, una utopía mexicana*, historian Adolfo Gilly considers Cardenismo a utopia precisely because its goal was to bridge the gap between state policies and popular demands.

The span of Mexican history explored in this book witnessed the waning of that utopian notion of the state. If the first chapter addresses an idealized view of the Cardenista welfare state under threat of collapse due to the menace of fascism during the presidential election of 1939 and 1940, the fourth chapter presents a critique of the legacy of that state in the context of the Latin American New Left at the beginning

of the 1970s. Yet, beyond the historicist approach suggested here for establishing a line of progressive erosion of the state paradigm from the first to the fourth chapter, this book also shows that the belief in the possibility of achieving revolutionary change by seizing state power was never a stable one. In this regard, the book demonstrates that the intellectuals examined here confronted the revolution/state divide in different scenarios and from different ideological standpoints, by revisiting the years 1914 to 1916, which mark the peak and fall of popular rebellion during the Mexican Revolution.

According to Gilly, the seizure of Mexico City by the fifty thousand troops of Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata in December 1914 constituted the peak of the revolution's social curve, because it brought widespread national consciousness to the popular rebellion (*Mexican Revolution* 182). On the other hand, this unprecedented event proved ephemeral. Villa and Zapata soon lost the capital against Carranza and Álvaro Obregón, and throughout 1915 and 1916, the bloodiest years of the Mexican Revolution, they resorted to guerrilla warfare in the territories they had won (Katz, *Life and Times* 437). This period witnessed the establishment of the postrevolutionary state under the leadership of Carranza, who promulgated the 1917 Mexican Constitution. The agrarian demands of the Zapatista revolution became the core principles of Article 27 of this Constitution. However, the state under Carranza could not put into practice such radical principles. A Zapatista-inspired form of self-government that appeared in the state of Morelos parallel to the process of state formation, ultimately did. Gilly has labeled this government the "Morelos Commune" in reminiscence of the Paris Commune of 1871. According to Gilly, the Morelos Commune granted direct power to the people and redistributed land against the interests of the landowning class (*Mexican Revolution* 241–246). On the other hand, Gilly interrogates the limits of this commune as a regional form of organization incapable of seizing control of the state at a national scale. Within his Marxist perspective, the Morelos Commune was thus a transitional instance in the revolutionary process, just as the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies had been in revolutionary Russia.¹⁵ For Gilly, it was Cárdenas during the radical years of his presidency (1934–1938), and not the Zapatistas in 1915, who managed to expand the ideals of the Morelos Commune at a national scale.

Bruno Bosteels ("Más allá del poder dual") notes that Gilly's thought has evolved from a Marxist inquiry into the possible internationalization of the Morelos commune in *La revolución interrumpida* (1971), to a subaltern

critique of modernity that privileges “community” as an idealized space of shared habits and beliefs in *Chiapas: la razón ardiente* (1997) (“Más allá del poder dual” 158–161). Bosteels highlights Gilly’s evasion of the Marxist idea of commune and his celebration of the cultural concept of community for the case of Chiapas. According to this critic, cases like Gilly’s attest to the historical failure of the Marxist approach to revolution, as well as the intellectual left’s political impasse in confronting the many insurrectional scenarios that permeate contemporary Mexico. The need to rescue revolution from the state illusion (Holloway 21) or the challenge to rethink emancipatory politics in a nonrevolutionary age through the state/insurrection rapport (Bosteels) are some of the concerns in current intellectual debates on revolution and social change, but such debates are beyond the scope of this book. Instead, what I will document here are earlier perspectives of the critique of the revolution/state divide, in and beyond Mexico. Between 1940 and 1970, Zapata’s movement reappeared in the global cinematic imagination either as a telluric premodern community, as a bandit narrative, or as an autonomous commune disrupting the conception of revolution as totality. This book will attempt to correlate these figurations with the historical and political conjunctures that led to their making.