



FROM THE TABLE OF MY MEMORY:<sup>1</sup>  
IDENTITY, POLITICAL CHANGE, AND SHAKESPEARE IN MEXICO AND ARGENTINA

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Image: Still from *Enamorada* (1946, Dir. Emilio Fernández) Source: Remezcla.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, I, 5, 99

### Abstract

In Mexico and Argentina, the localization of Shakespeare marks the crystallization of a new nationalist, political identity rooted in a reshaped collective memory. The development of this identity and the role of memory form a new kind of national citizenship. This group citizenship gives an individual a connection to a nation established around the collective memory of events, or what I term the memory-nation. The localization of Shakespeare, then, marks the complete formation of a citizenship in a new memory-nation. In Mexico, the localization of Shakespeare and its use in cinema was part of a larger process of defining post-Revolutionary Mexican political identity rooted in an appreciation for *lo mexicano* (or all things mexican, from cultural products to people to the landscape) and the egalitarian project of the Revolution. Shakespeare appears in four films that make distinct arguments in favor of this new national identity: *El peñon de las ánimas* (based on *Romeo and Juliet*), *Enamorada* (based on *The Taming of the Shrew*), *Romeo y Julieta* (based on *Romeo and Juliet*), and *El charro y la dama* (based on *The Taming of the Shrew*). In Argentina, the localization of Shakespeare to protest the dictatorship conveyed a post-dictatorial Argentine identity based on a mandate for memory and a search for justice. It articulated a new kind of non-violent political existence rooted in a search to remember the wronged by achieving justice for them (the disappeared in Argentina were represented by the ghost of Hamlet's father). These emphases came to define political rhetoric, the practice of social accountability, and the expectations placed on the Argentine government. Moreover, the appropriation of Shakespeare serves as the victory of the oppressed over the anglophile oppressive party by claiming the pinnacle of the oppressors' culture as the new vehicle to articulate a non-violent, rights-based vision of citizenship in the nation. In both Mexico and Argentina, Shakespeare is used to illustrate the ideals of the new memory-nation and justify those ideals, transforming the audience's understanding of citizenship. This new citizenship is always non-violent and rights-based.

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## Introduction

In the summer of 2015, I had the distinct privilege of interning for the Fundación Shakespeare Argentina, an organization in Buenos Aires that seeks to promote Shakespeare throughout Argentina. According to the President of the foundation, Mercedes de la Torre, Shakespeare makes us better citizens and exposes the machinations of politicians. This was not the first time I had encountered Shakespeare in a political context, but it was certainly the most powerful use of Shakespeare that I had seen. One evening, I went to see a production of *Rey Lear* (*King Lear*) with the directors of the organization, who had been advertising this show for months. I was expecting a show about an infirm father who made a series of poor decisions until his daughter rescued him. Though this was still the general outline of the plot, this production was not the *King Lear* I knew.

In traditional interpretations, *King Lear* is a tragedy about the conflict between family and politics. It explores the idea of the Machiavel and unchecked political ambition. The world of *Lear* is notable for its lack of a merciful and responsive God, a world without cosmic justice. Justice and wrongdoing are decided by one's social status. We are meant to sympathize with King Lear, who finds respite and friendship in the Fool and Poor Tom—Edgar—and we are meant to hate the power-hungry sisters and Edmund. The latter orchestrates the torture of his own, innocent father; he seduces the two sisters and drives them to murder and suicide; and, he leads a war against the heroine of the play, Cordelia. It is through Edmond's power-hungry manipulations that *King Lear* becomes, as scholar Stephen Greenblatt asserts, the only political tragedy without an anticipation of a new regime.<sup>2</sup> The ominous line we are left with is Edgar's

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Shakespeare and the Ethics of Authority," in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 79.

“we that are young/ Shall never see so much, nor live so long.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, *King Lear* is the vision of a world of chaos and unforgiving tragedy, a truly Hobbesian world; the play serves as a call to maintain the political system with empathy and loyalty, the hope of Shakespeare who lived in a dangerous era.

While there are a multitude of moments in *Rey Lear* that I could emphasize to illustrate the changes, the trial scene was particularly potent. In Act III, scene 6, Lear, the Fool, Edgar in disguise, and the Earl of Kent stage a mock trial to prosecute the imaginary Regan and Goneril. Edgar and the Fool are the “robed man of justice..../And...his yoke-fellow of equity.”<sup>4</sup> Though the trial begins hopefully with Edgar cautioning, “let us deal justly,” it quickly falls prey to the madness of the king. It is important to note the relationship between Lear’s madness and justice, which, above all other subjects, is the theme of the play. When Lear is at his most mad, in this scene and Act IV, scene 6, he demands that his fellows adopt trial-like proceedings, as argued by scholar Dorothy C. Hockey.<sup>5</sup> In the Argentine production, however, the trial fails because of corruption. First, the two justices are Edmund—not as his alter ego—and Kent. Edmund’s reach into the court illustrates the permeation of his executive power into the judicial system, which is familiar to many Argentines. There is a less clear separation of powers at the federal level.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in *Rey Lear*, Lear turns to Kent to dictate his role in the mock trial, and informs him, “Tú formas parte del tribunal sin juicio,” or “you will form a part of this tribunal without wisdom (or sense),” which is not included in the original. With a powerful manipulator on one

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<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare and Stephen Greenblatt, “King Lear: Conflated Text,” in *Norton Anthology of Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), I. 5.3.324-25.

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, “The Tragedy of King Lear: A Conflated Text,” 3.6.33-4.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy C. Hockey, “The Trial Pattern in King Lear,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1959): 389.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Cussianovich, “Modern History of Argentina,” July 2016.

side and a foolish, but loyal servant on the other, the trial is doomed from the beginning. Then, La Loca returns to prompt Lear to give up his effort, encouraging him to sleep rather than pursue justice. To a US audience the trial scene is the result of Lear's madness, the Argentine scene interrogates the discourse of the rule of law and justice.

As in *King Lear*, the pursuit of justice is complicated in Argentina. Generally, there is a justifiably distinct lack of trust in the police and the courts. Stained from a history of involvement in state terrorism and maintaining the monopoly of the wealthy, institutions of justice are notoriously unpopular. According to a CIPPEC survey performed in 2012, though the State system has an approval rating of 55.4% among all Argentine's surveyed, notably 2 points higher than the US, the courts have an abysmally low 46 % approval, lower than all other institutions surveyed.<sup>7</sup> Not only have the courts failed to hold the perpetrators of state terrorism responsible for their actions, due to amnesties granted by former President Carlos Menem, but there also exists a significant gap between the letter of the bill of rights in the Argentine constitution and law enforcement and practice, according to political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell.<sup>8</sup> The Rule of Law, treasured by democratic citizens, is severely undermined in Argentina, as class, status, and power are significant factors in determining access to the law and justice.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the situation is such that a professor I had in Argentina, Ernesto Cussianovich, went so far as to say that "the word accountability does not exist in *castellano*, and therefore the concept does not exist."<sup>10</sup> The court scene of *Rey Lear*, reimagined in this context and tweaked

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<sup>7</sup> Germán Lodola and Mitchell A. Seligson, "Political Culture of Democracy in Argentina and in the Americas, 2012: Towards Equality of Opportunity" (CIPPEC; Universidad Torcuato di Tella; LAPOP Americas Barometer; Vanderbilt University, January 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, Juan E. Méndez, and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, eds., *The (Un)Rule of Law* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>9</sup> O'Donnell, Méndez, and Pinheiro, 278.

<sup>10</sup> Cussianovich.

by the director, provides a biting critique of the justice system; thus, an attentive audience member will recognize the commonalities with his or her life, and, as Mercedes de la Torre asserted, will be more difficult to manipulate and more demanding of the democratic institutions.

This *Rey Lear* provides a window into the treatment of Shakespeare in Argentina, but more importantly, the intersection of theater, politics, and political identity. There is ultimately a political mandate within this work of art. This use of Shakespeare for political purposes is not limited to Argentina, but appears all over Latin America, from an anti-dictatorship *Coriolanus* in Brazil in the 1970s to a social justice-oriented *Merchant of Venice* last year in Chile to the conscious identification with Ariel and Caliban from *The Tempest* throughout the region during the independence movements. Shakespeare is part of the political fabric in Latin America. As *Rey Lear* demonstrates, the Shakespeare in Latin America is not the same as the Shakespeare in the English-speaking world. The plays have been localized to fit not only within a specific linguistic milieu, but a political and cultural one as well. If we look at when Shakespeare is transformed into this local version—when he is appropriated—it becomes clear that he appears for the first time at certain moments of great political change: brutal dictatorships, huge rebellions, independence movements. During these moments of political upheaval, productions of Shakespeare, on the stage and on the screen, articulate distinct visions of the world to mass audiences. In this public realm, the practice of theater/cinema coalesces with the practice of citizenship. The myths, ideals, and the accompanying images of political culture that tie individuals to a nation and nationality, are realized in spaces of public performance. Cinema and theater sit between the powers of the theater as a public space to “arm the people with reason”

and “an occasion for the manipulation of popular opinion,” as elucidated by Jürgen Habermas.<sup>11</sup>

In Latin America, Shakespeare is a key actor in this liminal space, playing a role as the transformer of political culture, and, thereby, citizenship.

How did he get there? What arguments exactly does he make? Why does he show up at these exact moments? What is happening politically that leads to the appropriation of Shakespeare? Most importantly, what role did this kind of localized Shakespeare play in the development of political identities? In citizenship?

### Why Shakespeare?

It is unusual to find an analysis of Shakespeare in modern political science writing, especially when discussing the development of specific, concrete national identities. It is even rarer to see Shakespeare discussed in reference to the politics of Latin America. Why is he discussed there? He is certainly not the only cultural form that can be used to analyze the development of political identities, especially in Latin America.

I chose to focus on Shakespeare in the Latin American context for five reasons. First, from a logistical standpoint, he provides an excellent framework through which we can understand exactly how political identities are changing. Due to the fact that Shakespeare is localized, we can compare the original side by side with the local version to examine exactly what changes are made, and the specific effect of those changes on the narrative/argument of the plot overall. From a political science perspective, this allows us to easily analyze the values of the practitioners and the main tenants of arguments about identity and political action, as we saw

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<sup>11</sup> Qtd in, James R. Lehning, “Introduction,” in *The Melodramatic Thread: Spectacle and Political Culture in Modern France*, Interdisciplinary Studies in History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 6.



with *Rey Lear* example. The ability to compare to original and localized texts makes the political and cultural implications crystal clear. Second, his work appears in immensely popular, unified cultural forms that allow a good degree of certainty about the universality of these arguments. The theater and cinema continue to be extremely popular, mainstream forms of culture. Furthermore, their basic premise, especially in films, is to produce the same message night after night with very little variation for ever-changing audiences. The widespread consistency of these productions ensures that, as observers, we can be certain about arguments made about national identities instead of regional ones. Third, Shakespeare has a certain universality and cultural capital that make his stories compelling for audiences throughout the world. He is universally recognized as a great playwright, master wordsmith, and insightful philosopher of the human condition. The global reverence of Shakespeare makes his work particularly potent, or perhaps there is global reverence because of his potency. Either way, the recognition of Shakespeare as a political and human philosopher by his audiences ensures that those who are spectators to the arguments of localized productions of Shakespeare will be particularly attune to the political and social messages made therein. Thus, there is a direct connection between Shakespeare and politics that scholars can analyze. Fourth, from an aesthetic standpoint, the analysis of Shakespeare in the formation of identity is unexpected and interesting, especially given that Shakespeare is an anglophile cultural product that we would assume has little impact in the Spanish-speaking world. His powerful role in the formation of identity deserves attention simply because it is intriguing. Finally, I must confess my own biases and admit that I am fond of Shakespeare. It was serendipitous that he plays such a concrete role in the development of those identities.

## Review of Literature

Previously, scholars from other disciplines have remarked on the importance of spectacle—festival, the theater, and cinema—in reconstructing political regimes, political development, and narratives of political identity in colonial Mexico (Linda Curcio), Revolutionary and Restoration France (James Lehning and Sheryl Kroen), and Post-World-War-II Germany (Heide Fehrenbach). In political science, debates continue about the role that popular narratives and mass culture play in defining citizenship and developing the ‘national we.’ The idea of a political identity rooted in collective citizenship and spectacles first appears in Aristotle’s *The Eudemian Ethics*. He outlines the idea of a political community that involves not only working together, but also *syntheōrein*, or co-spectatorship, of a festival or play, for example. More recently, Yael Zerubavel 1995 and Eviatar Zerubavel 2012 have focused on the role of cultural spaces and practices in the formation of political identities in Israel. Zerubavel 1995 argues that cultural practices shape the collective memory of a nation and solidify certain past events in that memory, which ultimately shape political identity.

The study of collective memory, identity, and culture has remained for the most part in the disciplines of Sociology and History. It is not absent from Political Science, but it merits further focus and study. Given the age of globalization and the questions surrounding pluralism, cosmopolitanism, what it means to be a citizen, and how political societies will interact in an interconnected world, it is pertinent to understand the roles of transnational exchange, specifically local events, and national political histories in the development of national identities. The development of collective memory and the inheritance of certain events of traumas shape the first level of understanding that informs these globally connected citizens. The narrative of the

nation that we children in schools shapes how individuals interact with the world. This project analyses the development of that narrative.

### Overview

In Mexico and Argentina, the localization of Shakespeare marks the crystallization of a new nationalist, political identity rooted in a reshaped collective memory. Borrowing a framework of political time from Stephen Skrowronek, the appropriation of Shakespeare marks the beginning, or the reset, of a cyclical process of identity formation. In this process, political or historical events force actors to reconcile with a previously existing identity and, finding it obsolete, force those actors to begin to form a new identity based on the inheritance of the memory of these events. That identity becomes widespread and persists until new events occur to unseat its hegemonic position, starting the cycle anew. The development of this identity and the role of memory form a new kind of national citizenship. This group citizenship gives an individual a connection to a nation established around the collective memory of events, or what I term the memory-nation. The localization of Shakespeare, then, marks the complete formation of a citizenship in a new memory-nation.

In Mexico, the localization of Shakespeare and its use in cinema as part of a larger process of defining post-revolutionary Mexican political identity. After the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), the government manipulated popular culture to convey a new Mexican identity rooted in an appreciation for *lo mexicano* (or all things Mexican, from cultural products to people to the landscape) and the egalitarian project of the Revolution. The most successful part of this cultural campaign was the production of big-budget films during the 1940s and 50s, the so-called Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Among these films, there are four adaptations of Shakespeare:

*El peñon de las ánimas* (based on *Romeo and Juliet*), *Enamorada* (based on *The Taming of the Shrew*), *Romeo y Julieta* (based on *Romeo and Juliet*), and *El charro y la dama* (based on the *Taming of the Shrew*). Each of these films departs from their source plays in specific ways that develop strong arguments in favor of this new national identity rooted in the collective memory of the Revolution.

In Argentina, the localization of Shakespeare to protest the dictatorship conveyed a post-dictatorial Argentine identity based on a mandate for memory and a search for justice. In 1980, Luis Gregorich translated *Hamlet* for the first time into the Argentine dialect of Spanish. The renowned Argentine actor Alfredo Alcon, under the direction of the famous Omar Grasso, took to the stage at Teatro Municipal General San Martín in Buenos Aires to present a vicious critique of the Videla dictatorship. Well-translated, the political discourse was clear to the actors, the audience, and, ostensibly, the authoritarian government. It articulated a new kind of non-violent political existence rooted in a search to remember the wronged by achieving justice for them (the disappeared in Argentina were represented by the ghost of Hamlet's father). These emphases came to define political rhetoric, the practice of social accountability, and the expectations placed on the Argentine government.

Moreover, the appropriation of Shakespeare serves as the victory of the oppressed over the anglophile oppressive party by claiming the pinnacle of the oppressors' culture as the new vehicle to articulate a non-violent, rights-based vision of citizenship in the nation. In Mexico, practitioners claimed Shakespeare as their own, robbing the Europhile elite of their last remaining ace, and used him to argue for the anti-elite, socialist, Mexican Revolution. In Argentina, theater makers and goers transformed the ideal cultural product of their totalitarian oppressors and used it to not only highlight the flaws with the dictatorship, but also to argue for

the destruction of the junta and justice for the disappeared in the name of Argentina. In both these cases, Shakespeare is used to illustrate the ideals of the new memory-nation and justify those ideals, transforming the audience's understanding of citizenship. This new citizenship is always non-violent and rights-based.

## Chapter 1: Theory

This work rests on three theoretical models. First, the vision of national identity rooted in collective memory relies on the transformation of the cycles of *political time*. Second, the vehicle through which this transformation is articulated requires practices of *cultural cannibalism*, or appropriation/localization of Shakespeare. Finally, the vision of identity is imagined as a type of political citizenship in a national body founded on collective memory of a specific event or events, or a *memory-nation*. Together, the theories present a pattern of anti-imperialist identity formation through the inheritance of the collective memory of specific events that informs modes of being (acting, thinking, etc.).

### Political Time:

Political time progresses through a framework that consists of cycles of repudiation, solidification, and popularization. A theory originally developed by Stephen Skrowronek, political time describes the cyclical pattern of *executive* political change. As he outlines, political time functions differently from secular time. There is not necessarily a linear aspect to it; the driving force behind temporal transitions is not the exhaustion of a calendar cycle, but rather a conscious redefinition of political ideology. In his work *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, he establishes political time as the cyclical, repeating process through which political actors come to redefine the terms and conditions of legitimate executive governance. It is the “medium through which presidents encounter received commitments of ideology and interest and claim authority to intervene in their development.”<sup>12</sup> Executive leaders reckon with the work

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Skrowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*, 2 Expanded Revised edition (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2011), 18.

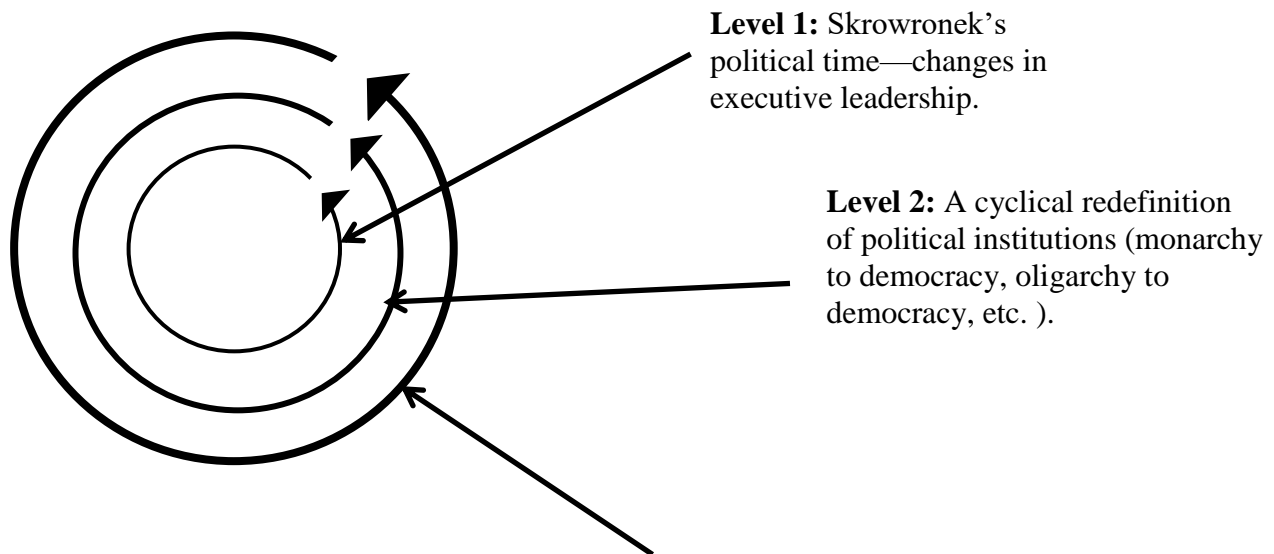
of their predecessor (repudiation), locating their rise to power within the recent course of political events, and address the political expectations that attend their intervention (solidification).<sup>13</sup> Their new vision will then become the norms of legitimate governance (popularization). Exogenous factors, such as economics and war, have driven a process of regime degeneration that reveals certain ideologies incapable of coping with new circumstances, refashioning a new vision of politics; order shattering becomes order affirming. The period breaks are marked by extremes of performance and political effect as policy and culture changes rapidly. This degeneration and regeneration demarcates American political history into eras as a “great repudiator” resets political time.<sup>14</sup> These political actors redefine the terms and conditions of legitimate national government. Thus, according to Skrowronek, the history of U.S. politics has been a sequence of five cycles: the shifts between Adams and Jefferson, Quincy Adams and Jackson, Buchanan and Lincoln, Hoover and FDR, and Carter and Reagan. What Skrowronek describes is not the repetition of certain concepts of legitimacy, but rather the returning to the beginning of the cyclical framework.

This repeating cyclical pattern can be zoomed out, as it were, to understand larger processes of political change. If Skrowronek’s initial theory concerning executive power defines how the role of the executive is reimagined within a given governmental system, then we can easily imagine larger cyclical patterns that encompass the change in government institutional design and even changes in the entire political sphere. They can be schematized like so:

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<sup>13</sup> Skrowronek is an American political theorist, and therefore focuses on American presidents; but I am using his theory in the context of Latin America.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 19.



These changes can include transformation of the duties of the citizen, like the implementation of a democratic constitution that demands participation; change in political identity, like that of a newly oppressed colonial subject; and, revision of foundational myths, like the transition between the Weimar Republic and Hitler's Germany. As one may see from the German example, Level Three change may likely also include resets in Level One and Two, though it need not always.

Borrowing Skrowronek's term, I have classified his original theory as a Level-One change in political time. Level-Two changes are major shifts in the underlying structure of government: a successful democratic revolution, a sudden military dictatorship, or a rewriting of a constitution. A Level-Three change, then, is an even more substantive shift not only in political regime and institutions, but also in political ideology and culture.<sup>15</sup> Level-Three change is more powerful than Level One or Two because it potentially revolutionizes not only institutional political reality but also how the public *conceives* of the nation and its own political identity. It can be

<sup>15</sup> It would seem that the third cycle moves the slowest, given the momentousness of its change, but this may not necessarily be the case. During Elizabeth I's reign, the citizens of England came to think of themselves as universally Protestant. Their identity was upset again when Elizabeth began expeditions to the new world, and the citizens became members of a global empire. One could argue that there were two resets of Level Three political time without any change in Level One.



understood using the same framework as before. The population reckons with the past, parsing through the collective memory of events, which become the founding myths. Then, the new identity rooted in events solidifies. Eventually, this identity is popularized either organically or through propaganda. Ultimately, the identity becomes obsolete and a new identity will be formed in a new cycle.

It is important to note that a Level-Three reset in political time need not include a complete and permanent transformation of every aspect of politics within a country. Indeed, the sector of society that controls power, for example, may not have changed, but the way the citizens of a nation envision themselves in relation to that power, or to the governing structures, and the manner in which they speak about the government and its ruling project will have fundamentally transformed. An excellent example of this change would be the communist revolution in Czechoslovakia. The de facto political rights of the citizens remained the same, but the political myths of the nation transformed to encompass the ideal Communist identity of the comrade-worker, the mythical origin of the state in the proletariat revolution that overthrew the bourgeoisie, and the national promise of universal prosperity to come. Though the balance of power in the country did not by any means shift to the true proletariat—the educated elite remained in power, and those with expertise in governance continued to govern—the rhetoric and philosophy of and the people's relationship to governance was radically altered. Most importantly, the country shifted from one totalitarian regime to another, and the proletariat did not gain any power, but people's status as citizens changed. Though Czechoslovakia briefly democratized after the defeat of its Third Reich occupiers in 1945 by the Allied troops, the emergence of a Soviet-backed, terroristic, undemocratic one-party state almost immediately after the election of the communist party to power in 1948, assured that the people did not control the

Czechoslovakian People's Republic.<sup>16</sup> This kind of citizenship, tied not to a constitution or political border of a state, but rather to foundational myths and symbols that help to define identity in relation to other citizens is my principal focus.

This analysis focuses on Post-Revolutionary Mexico (1930-1950) and post-1976 Dictatorship Argentina (1983-now). In these countries, the radical redefinition of what it meant to be a citizen of those nations drove a Level-Three reset of political time that re-created foundational national myths. In Mexico, following the argument of the Revolution, political identity and national myths became tied to the celebration of *lo mexicano*, as opposed to the earlier idealization of foreign goods and ideas, especially French, British, and (later) American, at the expense of local culture, goods, and philosophy. *Lo mexicano* encapsulated the appreciation of anything that originated in Mexico, specifically the celebration of indigenous ethnic and cultural roots and the idealization of the national beauty of Mexico. The revolutionary narrative of a working-class uprising combined with this new cultural milieu, created a new Mexican political identity rooted in emphasizing individual rights, socialist goals, and non-violent political solutions while celebrating the essence of Mexico. The government actively drove this process, as they created an official history of the 1911-1917 Mexican Revolution to further the development of this identity for their own political purposes.

In Argentina, the brutality of the dictatorship drove a renewed political identity that imagined the citizens as the inheritors of a legacy of horrible human rights violations, which linked the new Argentine identity to the non-violent search for justice and memory within a rights-based rhetorical framework. This non-violent vision proposed that the duty of citizens was to seek institutional methods of justice and social accountability of government, opposing the

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia, 1945-89: A Political and Social History*, European History in Perspective (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 58–59.

previous culture of political violence and impunity that had driven a cycle of ever-more violent dictatorships in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The citizens drove this redefinition in reaction to the atrocities of the 1976 Dictatorship, a project that the state adopted upon the return to democracy. It is within this substantial political change that we can situate that the localization of Shakespeare is linked to these shifts in understanding.

### Localization/Cultural Cannibalism

Shakespeare is present in some form in all countries; but only at key political moments is his work adopted, adapted, and transformed to suit local political needs—through a process of cultural cannibalism, or *Antropofagia*. Theater scholar Maria Clara Versani Galéry elucidates this multifaceted theory first developed by Oswald de Andrade in the 1920s.<sup>17</sup> Cultural cannibalism is a process through which countries absorb and digest aspects of other cultures, producing something entirely new. It is a process through which cultural exchange is localized. This localization is first and foremost a political act. Diana Taylor argues that culture is ultimately both a political resource and the means for communicating a value system. In the Mexican and Argentine cases, Shakespeare sits at the intersection of these two facets, or “faces” of culture. The first face relies on the understanding of culture as articulated by Clifford Geertz: “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, culture contains the

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<sup>17</sup> Maria Clara Versani Galéry and Ana Stegh Camati, “Shakespeare in Latin America: Appropriation Politics and Performance Practices,” in *The Shakespearean World*, ed. Jill L. Levenson and Robert Ormsby (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Qtd in, Diana Taylor, “Transculturating Transculturation,” *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (1991): 91.

essence of a group of people, and the conscious transmission of that meaning across cultural borders is one method of expanding the reach of that essence (i.e., those values and worldviews). From a political perspective, the transmission of culture can become an imperial project. This is the second “face” of culture. Here, culture is consciously politicized; and, the strategic use of cultural symbols makes cultural identity a political resource in group action.<sup>19</sup>

In the Latin American cases, the exportation of cultural artifacts to the New World fundamentally changed those cultural practices when they arrived at the colonized sites. Understanding the political power of culture, colonists have frequently exploited the cultural arena as a method of assimilating their new subjects and folding them into a global empire. This was the experience of Latin America in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the political hierarchy, Spain and Portugal imposed western forms of self-expression and identity, such as language, artistic models, and religion, onto the native people of the Americas. Of course, culture cannot be systematically wiped out, and in spite of Latin America’s history of colonization, the native peoples still largely do not speak, worship, or create like their dominators. The languages, worldviews, and artistic forms are *mestizo*, to a degree, and contain within them Native, European, African, and other influences, reflecting the ethnic identity of the population. This kind of cultural mixing—localization—is counter-hegemonic by nature. Whether conscious or unconscious, it is a form of successful rebellion against the homogenizing forces imposed by the colonial powers. Localization relies on the appropriation of “the signs and symbols of the other to express the worldview of the now defining self.”<sup>20</sup> It uses the colonizers discourse against them.

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<sup>19</sup> Diana Taylor, “Transculturating Transculturation,” *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (1991): 91.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

Shakespeare's work undergoes this process, which transforms him from the pinnacle of colonial, Western, Anglo, and/or Global-Northern culture into a vehicle for the articulation of post-colonial, post-European, local identities. He is claimed, rewritten, and adapted to fit local specifics in order to illustrate the new political identity and explore citizenship in a renewed memory-nation in a fantastic demonstration of a triumph over Europhile/anglophile oppressors. The appropriation of Shakespeare, which is widely recognized as defining the Western literary cannon and contains perhaps more cultural capital than any other form of artistic production, marks the ultimate success of the anti-Anglo, anti-Global North movement. Shakespeare has been wrested from his historical and ethnic context and manipulated to illustrate, justify, and explore the new type of citizenship through various artistic changes in the narratives, language, and characters while still maintaining the claim to be Shakespeare.

### Collective Citizenship in the Memory-Nation

In these two cases, the Level Three reset of political time resets a collective citizenship rooted in collective memory and participation in the memory-nation. This kind of citizenship is comprised chiefly of co-spectatorship, or the collective witnessing of cultural events that perpetuate and shape collective memory. The cultural events can include both political celebrations, such as military parades, and expressions of popular culture. In political science, debates continue about the role that popular narratives and mass culture play in defining citizenship and developing the 'national we.' According Andrea Noble, the audience of spectator events acts as a kind of "horizontal comradeship" in a provisional nation forged by spectatorship.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

It is at these gatherings where collective memory is examined, reshaped, and edited. It is substantiated through forms of commemoration, such as communal festivals, the reading of stories, or participation in memorial services. At each of these commemorative rituals, shared memories of particular events are created, articulated, and negotiated through a symbolic re-experiencing of the past. These symbols help to create a commemorative narrative, built around specific historical events that become reified.<sup>22</sup> As Eviatar Zerubavel argues, "...remembering involves more than just recall of facts, as various mental filters that are quite independent of those facts nevertheless affect the way we process them in our minds (including the way we recall the general gist of past events, which is often all we actually remember of those events), thus leading us to remember some more than others."<sup>23</sup> Certain events stand out as more important than others. As the first theorist of collective memory, Maurice Halbwach, asserted, though individuals remember events, social groups determine what is worthy of being remembered.<sup>24</sup> This kind of group memory not only determines which past events will be remembered, but also decides how the past will be embraced by individuals as their own. One must question, of course, how much intention there is in the social groups in making those determinations. The social group does not assemble in a town meeting and select traumas and glories worthy of remembrance. In fact, there are ongoing discussions about the actors, forces, and processes involved in crafting collective memory. From elite groups manipulating and disseminating official narratives through public education and propaganda (as happened in Mexico) to civil society organizations, such as human rights organizations or ethnic

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<sup>22</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 19.

organizations (as was the case in Argentina), the actors and processes vary by case. Whatever the process, collective memory selects certain events as symbolic markers of change that represent a turning point for the history of the group. These turning points become the national founding myths; thus, collective memory making defines the identity of the political body.

Therefore, there is an inherent political impulse behind collective memory, especially if the collective group forms a nation. Citizenship in this nation is determined by one's relationship with the past events as defined by collective memory, which transforms the traditional political nation, defined by its borders and constitution, into what I term a *memory-nation*. The consolidation of the Third Reich in Germany provides an excellent illustration of the role of co-spectatorship in reforming collective memory and the memory-nation. Between the emphasis the state placed the Wagnerian *Ring Cycle* Operas, public book burnings, and rallies, Hitler manipulated mass spectatorship to redefine what it meant to be German, locating the historic origin of the German people in the noble Teutonic tribes. The pure Aryan ancestry, especially the perfect Nordic race, of the German people, became the official collective historical memory of the German memory-nation. This imagined history was reinforced in art, music, the Nazi Youth programs, education, etc. This kind of indoctrination was as important as the political consolidation of power among members of the fascist party and Hitler's early military campaigns for the success of the Third Reich.

As the German example illustrates, the memory-nation is a liminal space held in the minds of its citizens that informs a certain set of actions such as acceptance of political rhetoric, and active participation in furthering national narratives. It holds within it not a shared ideology, but rather a common set of material and a framework for understanding, talking about, and acting upon political developments. It is as much part of nationality as voting and paying taxes.

The memory-nation, though it exists more in imagination than in practice (the creation of legislation according to the rules set forth in the constitution is more concrete than waxing poetically about the first Thanksgiving), is realized when it is invoked in speeches and conversation, when it becomes the litmus test for political office as politicians attempt to outdo each other in their invocation of the ideal, mythical nation. This kind of invocation of the ideal nation rooted in specific events seems to be relatively common in political rhetoric. In his first inaugural address, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt cited the “permanently important manifestation of the American spirit of the pioneer” as the solution to the Great Depression; the expansion into the West is one of the great American foundational myths.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in her inaugural address, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff invoked the collective memory of the dictatorship at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has become a foundational myth for 21<sup>st</sup> century Brazil, “anyone who, like me and like so many of my generation, has struggled against the imposed will and censorship of the dictatorship, naturally loves the fullest democracy and the intransigent defense of human rights, in our country and as a sacred banner for all peoples.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is clear that the American and Brazilian memory-nation, respectively, informs political rhetoric. Its reach is much broader, however. It holds a common set of material and a framework for understanding, talking about, and acting upon political developments. The memory-nation is a narrative composed of the events of collective memory that establishes its citizens as the inheritors of those events, which inform the proper modes of being, from acting, to thinking, to speaking.

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<sup>25</sup> “Franklin D. Roosevelt: Inaugural Address,” accessed March 21, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14473>.

<sup>26</sup> “Dilma Rousseff Inauguration Speech: Brazil’s First Female President Addresses Congress In Brasilia (Full Text) | Huff Post,” accessed March 26, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/03/dilma-rousseff-inaugurati\\_1\\_n\\_803450.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/03/dilma-rousseff-inaugurati_1_n_803450.html).



The reset of Level-Three political time, then, marks the genesis of a new memory-nation. Memory is, by nature, impermanent. As a hegemonic collective memory forms, marginalized groups with a different commemorative framework present counter-memories. Occasionally, this counter-memory can obliterate older collective memories to become the official memory, supporting new political, social, and economic orders. This is the third level cycle of political time. Like Skrowronek's original framework, the cycle of the memory-nation and its defining collective memory passes through the three phases of repudiation, solidification, and popularization. The events that define collective memory on which Yael Zerubavel focuses begin the process of repudiation. One of these events, such as a revolution or a dictatorship, call into question the hegemonic identity, creating counter-memories or allowing counter-memories of other historical events to come to the forefront of discourses. During the solidification phase, the new collective memories are crystallized and the memory-nation begins to form. It is here that particular national myths are institutionalized through a streamlining of historical events into a standard universal narrative. Actors and processes define the content (what is the identity) and boundaries of that identity (who qualifies for that identity). The two are interrelated, and boundaries may change depending on the content of the identity. In Mexico, for example, the content changed in order to consciously widen the borders. Citizens of the Republic of Mexico who had previously only understood their political identity vis-à-vis a specific region, like various indigenous groups, became incorporated into the larger memory-nation as the social and political programs taught a new kind of identity rooted in all things Mexican. In the third phase, this new identity becomes universal, and a particular, hegemonic collective memory informs

behavior, creating a renewed citizenship in the memory nation. Eventually, the popular identity will be challenged again by new events, and the process begins again.<sup>27</sup>

### Situating Shakespeare

Emergence of Shakespeare in these moments marks the emergence of a specific kind of collective memory rooted in the creation of an anti-colonialist, anti-anglophile national identity. Shakespeare works within the process of making collective memory to help redefine the myths of the memory-nation. His works are taken by artists and government officials and consciously reworked by altering plots, characters, settings, and language in order to make an argument for a new vision of citizenship in the memory-nation. Through this process of localization, Shakespeare becomes an anti-hegemonic vehicle for the expression of an ideal memory-nation that is rooted in myths stemming directly from hyper-local political experience. This ability to appropriate Shakespeare to articulate what it means to be a citizen in the memory-nation and outline the political values and goals that the citizens should have marks the completion of the level-three reset of political time by the oppressed.

In Mexico and Argentina, the localization of Shakespeare, the ideal cultural product of the Anglo and European-allied oppressors, notes the crystallization of the new memory-nation, or the transition between the second and third stages of Level-Three political time. The actors—the state in the case of Mexico and civil society in the case of Argentina—reticulate citizenship in the memory-nation by using Shakespeare to popularize that identity. In Mexico, the transformation of Shakespeare into film during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema represented the triumph of *lo mexicano* over foreignism and the success of the post-Revolutionary

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<sup>27</sup> Certain aspects of the new identity may be universal enough to survive later changes in the memory nation.

government in its campaign of indoctrination. Essentially, Mexicans claimed Shakespeare as their own, robbing the Europhile elite of their last remaining ace, and used him to argue for the anti-elite, socialist, Mexican Revolution. In Argentina, the translation of *Hamlet* into Argentine Spanish in 1980 provided the populace with a vehicle they could use to critic the dictatorship that was strongly allied with the United States and U.K. Theater makers and goers transformed the ideal cultural product of their totalitarian oppressors and used it to not only highlight the flaws of the dictatorship, but also to argue for the destruction of the junta and justice for the disappeared in the name of Argentina. In both these cases, Shakespeare is used to illustrate the ideals of the new memory-nation and justify those ideals, transforming the audience's understanding of citizenship. This new citizenship is always non-violent and rights-based.

**Chapter 2:**  
**Vámonos con...Shakespeare?**  
**The Case of the Mexican Revolution**

“Shakespeare is Mexican, I think, because he speaks our language,  
and by that I don't just mean Spanish, but the language spoken in the  
furthest margins of the country.”

—Luis Mario Moncada, Mexican Playwright, 2012

In 1943, famous Mexican comedian Cantinflas produced and starred in *Romeo y Julieta*, a self-referential, Mexican *Romeo and Juliet*. Characteristic of Cantinflas' comedic style, the movie was inspired by the traditional form of outdoor improvisational satire that was used to provide a crudely provocative critical voice about politics. In the film, Cantinflas plays a cab-driver rogue (clearly working class, a perfect revolutionary) who is hired to play a European actor. The main female protagonist, the upper-class Julieta, loves a young man named Romero, but her father, Sr. Capulido, has engaged her to an Italian. In order to marry the man she loves, she must convince her father that the Italian is a buffoon: enter the cab driver. In the course of a dinner, Capulido announces he wants to become a producer and recruits the cab-driver-turned-actor to be his Romeo in a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cantinflas' response, lauding Shakespeare's deep understanding of the human soul parodies the typical grandstanding of Mexican politicians. He proclaims,

“My friend *Chicas-pearre*...told me, ‘look, what are we in life if I do not open—flood the exits of disillusionment?’ What phrases! What phrases that capture everything—everything you could capture in a phrase—phraseology.... At the northern border—where everything is pureness—There, he convinced me that all of us—that the moment—momentaneous—in which we live—that we know to understand because we are not—nor will we ever be again—but if we keep in mind this psychology of the—of the universe.”

Applauding this rousing speech, the characters step into their equivalent Shakespeare roles (with the exception of Romero), and the high class social set gathers to see this excellent production. This film was part of a much larger film movement in Mexico, known as the Golden Age of Mexican cinema.

These films were inspired by the Mexican Revolution (1911-1917) and helped usher in a new, modern era of Mexican nationhood. More than just a revolution and an inspiring source for films, however, the Mexican Revolution triggered a reset in the cycles of political time, redefining political culture and what it meant to be a democratic citizen in Mexico. This Level Three reset transformed the Mexican memory-nation from a Europhile, anti-Mexican Mexico populated by citizens who either painted themselves as European or were repressed. It became a pro-Mexican memory-nation in which citizens were the mestizo inheritors of the noble indigenous past and celebrated *lo mexicano*: traditions, landscape, indigenous culture, and, above all, the egalitarian principles of the Mexican Revolution. The adaptation of Shakespeare in the 40s and 50s was part of a larger cultural campaign the post-Revolutionary government to streamline the narrative of the revolution and teach a new collective citizenship. The appropriation of Shakespeare in this effort to supplant Europhile ideas marked the success of the recreation of the memory-nation that was rooted in an anti-imperialist nationalism that pushed back against anglophilism.

### Mexico, *la Revolución*, and Political Time<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Previous academics have limited the impact of the Mexican Revolution to a social revolution, or a “rapid, basic transformation of a society’s state and class structures...accompanied by class-based revolts from below”; Tulia Falleti, “Mexico and Corporatism” (PSCI 213: Latin American Politics, University of Pennsylvania, October 10, 2016). Certainly, the Revolution was a social revolution, as it did contain class-based conflict and triggered a rapid transformation of state and

There were many revolutions in the history of Mexico, from popular uprisings, to the War of Independence. Most likely, there will be more before the century ends. Indeed, one could view the local coups that bring vigilantes and other community members to power over the police to protect towns from the cartels as forms of revolutions. There is only one *Revolución* with a capital “R,” however. The Mexican Revolution began in 1910 and lasted until 1917, though the government was not consolidated until 1928. It stands out in the minds of Mexicans as the most important event in the history of modern Mexico. The Revolution began a new era of Mexican politics. It broke down old institutions, shifted demographics in terms of region, class, gender roles, and wealth; it brought new political parties and mechanisms of control into being. Most importantly, however, it redefined what it meant to be Mexican through the commodification of a renewed litany of national rhetoric, images, and consciously manufactured national myths. *La Revolución* began a new Level Three cycle of political time.

We can briefly divide the political history of Mexico into reset Level One, Two, and Three cycles of political time. In 1810, Mexico gained its independence from Spain in a prolonged conflict. This political revolution, which changed state structures and institutions ushered in a new Level Two cycle: the Republic of Mexico. The nineteenth century was defined by outsized political and economic chaos caused by prolonged conflicts between local powers and the Liberals and Conservatives. Between 1824 and 1855, *caudillo* (or regional military leader) politics dominated Mexican politics. Called “the long wait,” this period was defined by prolonged internal wars between different regional caudillos who fought each other for control of the new nation. The most famous of these caudillos, Antonio López de Santa Anna—of Mexican-American War infamy—held the presidency for a long period, and multiple times,

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class structures, but its impact spans far beyond that of a social revolution, as I will argue later on.

before he eventually failed to deliver on his promises one too many times and lost his allies.<sup>29</sup>

1855 ushered in a new, promising period (Level Two cycle reset): La Reforma. Benito Juarez, who would become the first indigenous president of Mexico in 1861, led the creation of the new Federal Constitution of 1857, which established an indirect, non-mandatory universal male suffrage.<sup>30</sup> Citizenship in the Republic was the domain of men, and political figures were prized for their military valor in a period notable for its violent conflicts. Thus, an element of political violence underlay ideas about political identity, at least for those in power.

In 1861, the Conservatives, adversaries of Juarez, won back control of the country and invited Maximilian von Hapsburg of the Austrian Empire to rule their country (Juarez, along with a significant portion of the population, did not accept the foreign imperial control; thus, for a while, there were two leaders in Mexico. The conservative leadership, having undone the liberal reforms, felt that the country needed a strong hand, and they “imported a king.”<sup>31</sup> In a concrete display of their Europhilia, they were so convinced of the inferiority of native Mexicans compared to Europeans that they inflicted a rather inept French-Austrian Hapsburg upon the country. Juarez violently overthrew Maximilian in 1867 with popular support, beginning another

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<sup>29</sup> Aside from his leadership in the Mexican-American War (1847-1848), Santa Anna is perhaps most famous for losing his leg in battle with the French during the Pastry War. About to lose a fort to French troops, Santa Anna rallied his forces and overcame the invaders, but he was shot in the leg with “grapeshot,” which is the cannon’s version of birdshot. The balls destroyed his leg and killed his horse. Lying in a hospital bed, convinced of the nearness of his death, he wrote his own eulogy. He was never actually on death’s door. Unsurprisingly, he recovered a few days later and held a state funeral for the lower half of his leg. He received an intricate and booted peg leg as a replacement, which he then lost when he had to flee at one point during the Mexican-American War. His peg leg is on display in the state capitol of Illinois. At one point, the citizens of Mexico City were particularly upset with one of his actions, and they dug up his desiccated leg and paraded it around the city. There are many rumors circulating about the current location of his leg; Helena von Nagy and Victoria Gilbert, *The Pastry War*, Political MissAdventures Podcast.

<sup>30</sup> It was not until after the Revolution that universal suffrage was actually achieved.

<sup>31</sup> Falleti, “Mexico and Corporatism.”

Level-Two cycle, and his associate Porfirio Díaz succeeded him upon his death. Still, political action was rooted in violent political protest and conflict.

Porfirio Díaz controlled Mexico from 1876 to 1911 in a period known as the *Porfiriato*. Though he finally brought peace to the conflict-torn country, it was through dictatorial measures. Díaz established an oligarchic regime in which he controlled the power of the regional caudillos to perpetuate his own control over the national government. His time in office is remembered not only for its central control of political power, but also for the violent suppression of revolts, theft of land from non-white communities, concentration of great amounts of capital among the elite, and the unfair treatment of workers, especially agricultural workers. He intensified the foreignism that controlled the government, convinced that the ‘industrious’ Northern Europeans and Americans in particular were superior to Mexicans. Porfirio confiscated land for the British railway companies and allowed them to keep all profits from the use of railroads. He even went so far as to give all foreigners diplomatic immunity for any crime, including murder. His thirty-year dictatorship created the perfect social conditions for a revolution.<sup>32</sup>

In 1910, Díaz reneged on his promise to step down and rigged an election against Francisco Madero, the son of a wealthy landowning family, by arresting him without charge. In response to his fraudulent loss, Madero published the Plan of San Luis Potosí, which demanded the democratization of Mexico. The publication of this document was a call for rebellion in November 1910 that began a chain of events that led to the downfall of the *Porfiriato* six months later.<sup>33</sup> A large portion of Mexican society took up the document and Madero’s loss became the cry for *la Revolución*. The story of the *Revolución* is that of a widespread uprising against Díaz

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 33.



and a protracted struggle for power that involved various political and military forces (initially rallied around Madero). Though the Mexican people were ostensibly the protagonists, the *Revolución* focuses on its leaders: Madero, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata. In the seven years that form the violent part of the Revolution, anti-insurgency and pacification operations by both government and revolutionary troops led by the disparate leaders Pascual Orozco, Victoriano Huerta, Venustiano Carranza, and Álvaro Obregón followed popular insurrections and mass mobilizations; peace treaties were signed between warring factions, but never enforced. The battles produced one million dead (in a population of 15 million). Insecurity in rural areas and the loss of property displaced entire populations within Mexico and across the border into the U.S. Furthermore, opposing agendas hampered the implementation of the revolutionary principles as the peasantry fighting for land, middle class bent on political participation, and a bourgeoisie determined to preserve past privileges struggled for dominance.<sup>34</sup> In 1911, Madero claimed his presidential power, but was murdered in a coup two years later by one of his generals, Victoriano Huerta. Venustiano Carranza rebelled against Huerta in response.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the Revolutionary mobilization devolved into disparate armed factions made of both men and women (the *soldaderas*) fighting each other for political control. This was actually the first time that women were notably part of political struggles. Despite a potential political gain for women, however, by 1916, the Revolutionaries described their situation as “absolute chaos.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the raging violence, however, the principles of the Revolution were not abandoned.

Indeed, the violence continued because the stakes of victory—which meant a modern and democratic Mexico, complete with full political rights—were so high. For the *Maderistas*, *la*

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<sup>34</sup> Zuzana M. Pick, *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution: Cinema and the Archive* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

*Revolución* “was initiated by the Apostle Madero, and carried on by the honorable Constitutional Governor of Coahuila don Venustiano Carranza.”<sup>37</sup> For the followers of Pancho Villa, the Revolution encompassed Madero’s insurrection and the constitutionalist struggle against Díaz; however, rather than the *Carrancistas*, the *Villistas* viewed themselves as the legitimate heirs to Madero’s mission of democracy. For the *Zapatistas* (the followers of the famous Southerner Emiliano Zapata who fought on behalf of the poor agricultural workers and natives), *la Revolución* encompassed neither Madero nor Carranza nor Villa; in fact, Madero was a false leader who betrayed the Revolution. The uprising was a popular movement that began against the *Porfiriato* and advocated for an agrarian revolution that would bring the land ownership back to the dispossessed.<sup>38</sup> The *Zapatistas* were, perhaps, most correct in their analysis: the countryside was the moving force of the Revolution. It was, ultimately, a social and economic movement of the “downtrodden masses against their oppressors,” in the words of Revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón.<sup>39</sup> Eventually, the desire to end the ongoing violence brought the disparate leaders together to create the 1917 Constitution, which was the most left-leaning constitution of its time. The new government, however, failed to stop the chaos. Though the Revolution was technically over, the revolutionary battles continued.

In 1919, Zapata was assassinated. In 1928, after the first peaceful succession of power, Álvaro Obregón told Plutarco Elías Calles that he had “proved that the presidential palace [was] not necessarily the antechamber of the cemetery.”<sup>40</sup> On July 17, an anti-revolutionary

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

assassinated him.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the Revolution was not over. Indeed, the claim of the ongoing *Revolución* provided an important unifying myth that offered legitimacy to the governments of the post-revolutionary period.<sup>42</sup> Despite its claim to be unifying, however, the factional grudges ensured that the newly proclaimed era of continuing revolution was divided by memory: there were multiple Revolutions. The political developments, violence perpetrated by and against ordinary people, and the successes and failures of its larger-than-life heroes that marked the violent struggle of the Revolution became the master narrative that the governments in the 1920s and 30s turned to for legitimacy.

Officially, the Revolutionary violence ended in 1929, with the consolidation of political power in a select group of people. The final success of the Revolutionary government relied on two developments, both instigated by Plutarco Calles: the establishment of the *Partido Nacional de la Revolución* (PNR) in 1929 (in direct violation of the 1917 constitution) as the only heir to the Revolution, and the use of popular culture and mass media to streamline the narrative of the Revolution. The party arose partly out of an effort to end the bloody and exhausting violence that had “all but obliterated the political institutions of the past without establishing any viable substitutes for them.”<sup>43</sup> Calles was on his way to beginning a new Level Two cycle of political time. There were other parties during the 1920s, but they chiefly served to promote individual interests and never succeeded in fashioning a network of support. The PRN also stood out from

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<sup>41</sup> He was a member of the Cristero movement. The Cristero Rebellion was one of the largest popular rebellions in Mexico; it claimed 90,000 lives in its attempt to stop the secularization of Mexico.

<sup>42</sup> Arthur Schmidt, “Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2001), 26.

<sup>43</sup> Evelyn P. Stephens, “Mexico’s PRI: The Institutionalization of Corporatism?,” in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, ed. J.M. Malloy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 229.

political parties under the previous regime because its leaders were based on political skill, not military power, as the *caudillos* had been: a new party for a new era.<sup>44</sup> The *líderes* brought along their followers, fashioning a powerful and streamlined political machine. Furthermore, as John Mraz argues, the PNR (which would later become the PRI), “concerned to legitimate the party as the sole heir of the founding cataclysm,” established an official account of the conflict that conflated “the Revolutionaries into the same camp, eliding the fact that...this struggle was defined more by warfare between the revolutionaries than by the battle of Old and New.”<sup>45</sup> Welcomed into the new one-party Revolutionary family which spoke in their name, Mexicans across class, race, gender, and generational lines were rechristened as Mexican citizens united by one aspect: rooted in this official history was the valorization of *lo mexicano*, or Mexican culture, indigenous history, ethnic reality, and natural beauty. The success of the Revolution and the transformation of the cultural ideal from European to Mexican crystallized under the 1934 PRN President, Lázaro Cárdenas.<sup>46</sup> He incorporated the labor sector into the party, ensuring their representation in political decisions, and returned land to indigenous communities. His repatriations remain the largest of any Mexican president.<sup>47</sup> When he left office after his *sexenio* in 1940, the Revolution seemed a success.

### The Failure of Revolution

1940, however, was a turning point in political Revolutionary history. It was the beginning of the end of the Revolutionary promise. Between the end Cárdenas’ administration in

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<sup>44</sup> Stephens, 230.

<sup>45</sup> John Mraz qtd in Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> *Lo Mexicano* will be explained and defined later in the analysis.

<sup>47</sup> Tulia Falleti, “Mexico, Part II” (PSCI 213: Latin American Politics, University of Pennsylvania, October 12, 2016).

1940 and the 1960s, the socialist and egalitarian potential of Cárdenas' political regime that promised to lift the oppressed into power evaporated with the presidencies of the conservative Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-46) and Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-52).<sup>48</sup> Due to the manufacturing needs of World War II and Mexico's Allied participation and the success of the statist policies of Import Substitution Industrialization, Mexico's economy was booming.<sup>49</sup> Yet despite this "Mexican Miracle," the monumental construction of highways, hydroelectric dams, stadiums, and other markers of modernity obscured the failure of the revolution: the demands for a polyarchical regime with inclusive and liberal elections and the application of effective policies for social justice had been indefinitely postponed.<sup>50</sup> By the 1960s, "the revolution was a fraud."<sup>51</sup> The inheritor of the Revolutionary cause, the PRN (now called the PRI) had become a paternalist, corporatist government immune to democratic principles. In the words of historian Arthur Schmidt, democratic struggles were repetitive: "the fight was basically the same, and the state always won."<sup>52</sup> The people always lost. The project of nation building had been replaced by "nation destroying."<sup>53</sup> Although the PRI had promised to be the vehicle through which the Revolution was realized, the political system had become characterized by controlled participation exercised by the same political elite that had always been in power, who claimed that power based on privilege, not on right. "Democratic" decisions were—and arguably still

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<sup>48</sup> This is precisely the period that saw the most concerted effort in manufacturing the new memory-nation, however. Though the political system was failing the Revolution, the fabrication of national myths kept the radical promise of the it alive; Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 56.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Chávez, "The Eagle and the Serpent on the Screen: The State as Spectacle in Mexican Cinema," *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 3 (2010): 120.

<sup>50</sup> See Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución*, 158.

<sup>52</sup> Schmidt, "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940," 29.

<sup>53</sup> Enrique Krauze, qtd in *Ibid*, 31.

are—legitimated by massive support from the sectors of society that receive the least benefits: labor, the working class, and the Indigenous.<sup>54</sup> In 1974, political scientist Evelyn Stephens characterized the Mexican political system as dominated by corporatism at the expense of the electorate.<sup>55</sup> Until 2000, when the National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox won the presidency, the PRI maintained a corporatist monopoly over political power in the country, given the rubber stamp by manipulated elections.<sup>56</sup>

During their reign, the PRI could not even claim a steady revolutionary progress between presidents. In 1968, the unrest between the working class, especially farm workers, and the government, which was spending its money on preparations for the 1968 Olympic Games, peaked in the Plaza de Tres Culturas in the Tlateloco section of Mexico City. In what became known as the Tlateloco Massacre, government troops killed between 300 and 400 student protesters as they responded to apparent shots fired upon them by the crowd.<sup>57</sup> It was later speculated that the government planted the snipers who fired the first shots. The actual death toll remains unknown.<sup>58</sup> A decade later, the economic “Mexican Miracle” came to a crashing halt as the IMF came looking to collect Mexico’s petrodollar loans after the price of oil dropped in the 1980s. Mexico’s economy crashed in 1982. Since the economic crash, Mexico has recovered with the assistance of NAFTA, thanks in part to PRI negotiations, and has a blossoming middle

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<sup>54</sup> “a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into...singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered...categories licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate monopoly...in exchange for observing certain controls....”; Stephens, “Mexico’s PRI: The Institutionalization of Corporatism?,” 227.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 250.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

<sup>57</sup> President Díaz Ordaz had up to that point been considered a “tolerant, liberal Machiavellian” by scholars of Mexico. After the events in 1968, he came to be understood as a kind of “Mexican Nero,” playing his Olympic lyre while Mexico burned; Krauze, qtd in Schmidt, 31.

<sup>58</sup> Elena Poniatowska and Octavio Paz, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane, Reprint edition (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1991).

class, but it has since moved out from under the shadow of the utopian Revolutionary promises of a socialist, egalitarian society into a time of great uncertainty. The “disintegration of the national project” has coincided with the articulation of global, cosmopolitan networks that are redefining national ties. Thanks to NAFTA, Mexico has a quickly growing middle class; but international trade has a darker side: the cross-border drug trade has transformed Mexico’s power structures. The PRI—the party of the revolution—has lost its monopoly. The nation has modernized, but political power remains out of the hands of the people; and, when the people attempt to take back their political power against the interests of the governing elite, the results are often violent, as the 43 students from Ayotzinapa—who were disappeared on their way to a protest by members of a cartel in conjunction with local police on the apparent order of the Mayor of Iguala—discovered.<sup>59</sup>

The reforms of the Revolution remain unfinished; and, Mexico is plagued by the uncertainty of the prolonged and incomplete transition to a robust institutional democracy. Though the 1996 revisions to the electoral code made Mexican elections more inclusive, ensuring that Mexico does meet the minimalist definitions of democracy, the formal rules of the political game outside of elections hinder the democratic quality of the state. Robert Dahl’s more substantial definition of democracy demands a consideration of institutions that make government policies dependent on votes or other expressions of preference. These institutions are but one of eight guarantees that must be satisfied in order to meet last of three necessary, but insufficient, conditions of democracy: having the preferences of its citizens weighed equally in

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<sup>59</sup> VICE News, “Ayotzinapa: A Timeline of the Mass Disappearance That Has Shaken Mexico,” *VICE*, September 25, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/article/ayotzinapa-a-timeline-of-the-mass-disappearance-that-has-shaken-mexico>.

the conduct of the government.<sup>60</sup> These institutions include the justice system, which are supposed to realize the laws created by the democratically elected representatives, and informal norms and practices that shape the conduct of government, including corruption. The lack of any justice for the 43 students at Ayoztinapa that has come to represent the country's broken rule of law and the efforts of the Mexican government to spy on the international team of lawyers investigating the disappearance clearly points to the failure of the judiciary institutions to uphold its role in creating a robust democratic regime.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, as Wilson Center World Fellow Luis Rubio stated, "personal enrichment has always been central to Mexico's political system."<sup>62</sup> That did not change after the Revolution, and is still persistent today. The role of money in the business of government blunts the actualization of the expressed preferences of the electorate. Given the continuing anti-democratic practices, it would seem that the Revolution had mixed success.

### Viva la Revolución!

The promise of the revolution may be incomplete, and the power structures of the political system may still be radically unchanged, but the 1929 consolidation of PRN power nonetheless marked a reset of Level Three political time due to its impact on popular political culture in Mexico. To understand the Mexican political system, we cannot focus on the state alone, as sociologist and state theorist Bob Jessop warned: the Mexican state cannot be understood as an institutional monolith, but as "an ensemble of practices, institutions, and

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Dahl, "Democratization and Public Opposition," in *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>61</sup> Azam Ahmed, "Spyware in Mexico Targeted Investigators Seeking Students," *The New York Times*, July 10, 2017, sec. Americas.

<sup>62</sup> Luis Rubio, "Corruption Is Mexico's Original Sin," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed March 19, 2018.



ideologies of rule.”<sup>63</sup> These ideologies of rule as modes of sanctioned political behavior are connected to the definition of the memory-nation. The Revolution shaped the modern identity of Mexico and transformed the ideology of Mexican nationalism, even though ideals about nationhood are challenged by globalization. The revolution forms a master narrative of Mexican history that “is culturally constructed and provides the group members [i.e. Mexican citizens] with a general notion of their shared past.”<sup>64</sup> The narrative of the Revolution and the ambitions that accompanied it make up the core of the collective memory of the Mexican nation.

In keeping with the need to construct a viable myth for the nation, the Mexican state sought to build political consensus “sacrilized by a civic religion” that used the narrative of the Revolution as its founding text.<sup>65</sup> A union of citizens was to be united by the Revolutionary Tradition in the new Mexico, which was defined by Revolutionary principles and the 1929 consolidation of Revolutionary political power within the PRN. This new vision consciously erased the pre-1911 Mexico, defined by power structures, inequality that the Revolutionaries fought to overthrow, and the obsessive quest to be European. Thus the public face of the Revolution was crucial to forging harmony within the Revolutionary Family—the basic unit of the Mexican memory-nation. Therefore, the tradition of the Revolution and the outcome of the Revolution was never solely tied to the practical successes of its inheritors, but rather kept alive by its status as the foundational myth of a nation.

The Revolution was quickly woven into a new narrative of Mexican history. The 19<sup>th</sup> century conservative narrative had posited that the Conquest of the Aztec in 1521 was the birth of the nation of Mexico; Cortés was its founding father, and the Virgin of Guadalupe that

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<sup>63</sup> Jessop, qtd in Schmidt, 41.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*

appeared to peasant Juan Diego in 1531 christened the new nation. This Mexico was Eurocentric, condemning the ‘degenerative’ native culture, viewing the conquered indigenous communities as idolatrous, brutal, and savage heart-sacrificers. It relied on the Spanish colonial narrative of the conquistadors as servants of God who had come to civilize the brutal savages. After the Enlightenment-influenced War of Independence, and the accompanying hatred of Spain, the narrative of Mexican history quickly became Hispanophobe. The conquistadors became the violent, brutal oppressors of the noble indigenous, and the ancient Mexicans were glorified through a revival of the accounts of native sympathizers such as Fray Bernardo de Sahagún. Though there were competing historical visions after Independence, the Catholic Church remained the core stabilizing institution of the country in most narratives. The hero of the Independence movement, for example, was not the ringing of the bells in order to draw attention to the plight of indigenous communities by the excommunicated rebel priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (who would become the protagonist of Independence after the Revolution), but rather the former royalist soldier Augustin de Iturbide, who achieved national independence after he promised to maintain the Catholic religion and create a constitutional monarchy, with Mexico ruled over by a European prince.<sup>66</sup>

After independence, efforts to define *lo mexicano* were thwarted by uncertainty and the conservative faction’s obsession with Europe. The Aztec were reified to foil the Spanish; though Hispanophobe, the elite were still Europhile. They focused their post-independence energies on admiring France and England to prove how Mexico was inherently backwards. The non-elites, though they understood themselves to be Mexicans, were more concerned with their *patria chica* (little country) so their political identity was much more parochial than imperialist. There was no

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<sup>66</sup> Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 10 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 231.

unified narrative for a large sector of the population, however, that could serve as the foundation of the memory nation. Their citizenship in the memory-nation was weak, if at all present. The 19<sup>th</sup> century reformers and independence fighters were not able to break this pattern because of the political and economic chaos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though France replaced Spain, the elite's foreignism and non-elite's regional identities persisted.

Under Porfirio, there was at least peace, but his efforts to define what it meant to be Mexican still relied on the foreignist elite/parochial non-elite dichotomy. Porfirian intellectuals and prominent members of the government believed in a particular Mexican interpretation of positivism that saw white Europeans at the pinnacle of societal development and believed that the average mestizo/indigenous Mexican was at a lower level in that process of evolution. AS a consequence, they copied European cultural products; and, they believed themselves to be superior to the Mexicans of color.<sup>67</sup> The idealized citizens were actual foreigners, specifically Northern Europeans and Americans. Thus, though the foundational myths were redefined, there was no unified memory-nation in which all Mexicans could claim citizenship because most of them were excluded from it. The defining principle of Mexican identity for those who thought of themselves as citizens in a larger Mexican nation was a consciousness that they were not European.

The Revolution inherited the prevailing history of remaking national myths and actually created a unified identity, engendering a consciously Mexican and universal memory-nation. After the violence was over, the Revolution was historicized as the third stage in an ongoing revolutionary battle that began with the insurgency of 1810 and Hidalgo's Cry of Dolores that removed the Spanish yoke and began the battle to free the peasants and indigenous from their

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<sup>67</sup> Meyer et al, 325–27.

wealthy oppressors, continued with the glorious revolution of the Juarez Reforms of 1855 that placed the “rights of man” in the Constitution, and would reach its ultimate success in the new, modern, democratic Mexico. The story of the Mexican nation, and the myth of the memory-nation, became that of a country that arose from an indigenous past that was brought to the Christian faith and blessed by the Virgin, awakened to freedom by Hidalgo’s cry, and finally forced that freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Revolution became more than a series of internal struggles with high stakes; it was reified as concrete, independent, and autonomous, nearly beyond human agency. The reification not only helped to make sense of the chaotic events of the 1911-1917 conflict stage, but also justified and legitimized every action of the revolutionaries and the new regimes. If the people were unsatisfied with the current leadership, they could look to *La Revolución* for redress.<sup>68</sup> It is an idea that transcended the men and women who fought and any outcome that they could have possibly realized. The reification also ensured the Revolution’s permanence in the national myth. Mexican collective memory of the nation became tied to the promise of the Revolution and its specific history, and despite the uneven results of the political project, the idealized narrative persisted.

In the words of Mexican historian Enrique Florescano, it is “not just a series of historical acts that took place between 1910 and 1917, or between 1910 and 1920, or 1910 and 1940; it is also the collection of projections, symbols, evocations, images, and myths that its participants, interpreters, and heirs forged and continue to construct around this event.”<sup>69</sup> *¡Viva la Revolución!*

### A New Mexico Defined

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<sup>68</sup> Benjamin, 21-22, 47.

<sup>69</sup> Pick, 2.

After the violent period of the Revolution was brought to a close by the consolidation of PRN power, the state began its long process of reconstruction of the memory nation to legitimize its existence and practices. As with the preservation of individual memory, the collective memory of the memory-nation was formed in a struggle between official history and personal experience. Talking, singing *corridos* (traditional narrative songs), painting, and writing invented popular visions of the *Revolución* independent of government actions. The performance of Revolutionary myths by artists, government officials, and individual citizens sought to heal the wounds created by prolonged violence and began the process of lifting the events out of their historical reality. The Mexican state eventually realized that it had a vested interest in the construction of the new memory-nation in the search to legitimize its actions, beginning in the 1920s. Through monuments, festivals, education programs, official history, and mass media, the government learned to exhibit, disseminate, and perform the Revolution.<sup>70</sup> Officials embarked upon a national project of creation, or, rather, the recreation of history according to the official history, which eventually supplanted the historical reality of the struggle. They created a definition of the Revolution and its causes. Thus, the story of the Revolution became that it was a struggle by the people to overthrow their Europhile, anti-Mexican, oppressive government and engender a socialist nation, in which everyone was afforded the same opportunities and celebrated being Mexican. Beginning in the 1920s, the revolutionaries had sought to realize their dream of a more inclusive society by remaking Mexican culture. Their new focus, in line with the egalitarian dreams of the Revolution, was to create a new nation built around Hispanic traditions absent of European influences. The ideal source of inspiration for the new, highly local and nationalistic vision of Mexico was the countryside. The Mexican rural landscape not only

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<sup>70</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución*, 13.

contained the physical beauty of the nation, but was also home to the masculine, honorable, and patriotic *charros* (traditional horsemen), the downtrodden agricultural workers for whom the revolutionaries fought, and the majority of indigenous communities, who represented the historical glory of pre-Columbian Mexico. Social programs that began under the administration of Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) sought to fold the long-ignored or oppressed indigenous communities into the Mexican memory-nation.<sup>71</sup> The prevailing illiteracy and inability to speak Spanish within rural indigenous communities led to massive provincial programs aimed at incorporating all of the people, including indigenous communities into a “unified, literate, Spanish-speaking nation, with a modern, secular, standardized education based on” Mexican culture.<sup>72</sup> This contrasted with the dichotomous Europhile/parochial Mexico before the Revolution.

Under the watchful eye of José Vasconcelos, the ‘cultural caudillo’ of the Revolution and the Minister of Education under Obregón, this social program encompassed the entire nation and commodified what would become the new revolutionary culture. Most significantly, Vasconcelos was responsible for the mass popularization of *indigenismo*, or the glorification of the indigenous past of Mexico. According to Vasconcelos personal philosophy, informed by the Revolution, the indigenous people of Mexico represented the power and the glory of the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations (chiefly, the Aztec) and were the root of a kind of ‘Cosmic Race.’ This future, universal, fifth race of the Americas that he proposed, was personified by the Mexican *mestizo*, who represented the biological combination of the Iberian, Indigenous, African, and Asian people. Essentially, mestizaje contained the essence of indigenismo.

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<sup>71</sup> William Beezley, “Creating a Revolutionary Culture: Vasconcelos, Indians, Anthropologists, and Calendar Girls,” in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 420–31.

<sup>72</sup> Beezley, 420.

Previously denigrated by the Europhiles, the mestizo became the physical site on which the Revolution was glorified and its work carried forward. The philosophical emphasis brought this previously oppressed social group into power, and changed the popular culture of Mexico. The mestizo leaders who made up Obregón's government brought with them a traditional form of music: mariachi. Mariachi quickly became the new national music, and lyrical emphasis on wistful feelings for a rural life that had never truly existed was crucial in the dissemination and folklorization of nostalgic attitudes towards a non-existent national rural heritage. Thus, this popular music form became a method of political transformation as the state actively promoted this mestizo music to simultaneously redefine what the ideal citizen looked like and what historical culture they inherited to further the nationalistic, egalitarian principles of the political and social revolution. Encompassing other forms of culture, Vasconcelos' program popularized the traditional, rural *jarabe tapatio* dance (which became the national folk dance of Mexico); implemented the "India Bonita," or 'Miss Indigenous' contest and published the results in a national magazine, helping to idealize native women instead of European beauty standards; and, most importantly, started the mural movement.

Under Obregón's and his successor, Plutarco Calles, the movement transformed the walls of public buildings into canvases for Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the most important, and socialist, Mexican muralists. Their political beliefs and emphasis on ideological art helped to cement the vision of the Revolution as a socialist struggle to free the working class from oppression and indigenous inspiration furthered the Revolutionary government's *indigenismo*.<sup>73</sup> The most famous of these murals are, of course, Diego Rivera's

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<sup>73</sup> Beezley, "Creating a Revolutionary Culture: Vasconcelos, Indians, Anthropologists, and Calendar Girls."

series of 122 frescoes at the Secretaria de Educación Pública in Mexico City. These murals capture the united spirit of the Revolución that Calles wanted to present to the nation.



Diego Rivera, *Giving of Community Ranges* (left) and *Emiliano Zapata* (right), Secretaria de Educación Pública, Wikimedia Commons.

Calles' state-driven project innovated the production of the memory-nation in two concrete ways. First, he successfully transformed the Revolution into a government with the rhetoric of the PRN and the state-driven Revolutionary narrative: *la Revolución hecho gobierno*—the Revolution made government.<sup>74</sup> Second, he invented the tradition of the Revolutionary nation. Through this cultural project, the Revolutionary government defined the new citizenship in the memory-nation. There were two parts to this citizenship. First, citizens celebrated *lo mexicano*—indigeneity, mestizo culture and ethnic identity, and the physical beauty of the Mexican countryside, including its unique cultural forms. Second, citizens idealized the Revolution as a struggle for freedom and equality against the anti-Mexican, foreignist oppressors; and, therefore defended the government that would realize the dreams of the Revolution.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 68.



Film was the most significant cultural product that the revolutionary government officials used to advance their philosophy and official history, and redefine what it meant to be Mexican along the lines of mestizaje and the egalitarian, rural, ranchero lifestyle. The power of motion pictures ensures standardized the collective memory of the Revolution, and the national identity became concrete. The consolidation of the Revolution under Lázaro Cárdenas and the beginning of the Golden Age of cinema (1935-1950) redefined the relationship between the state and culture. The new policies aimed at sustaining nationalist discourses on modernization utilized mass media to promote national unity and prosperity. As renowned journalist Elena Poniatowska writes, the popular movements are “fundamental to an appreciation of the deeply rooted, moral sensibilities of Mexicans.” These sensibilities can be understood by another name: Alex de Tocqueville’s mores, which define the political culture of a nation.

Conveniently for the Revolutionaries, Porfirio Díaz’s overthrow coincided with cinematic innovation in terms of camera mobility and editing. A few filmmakers captured the revolution on video; and, some producers made films about the revolution. But the production of Revolutionary content during the Revolution paled in comparison to the post-Revolutionary state-sponsored films. To some degree, the roughly twenty-year gap between those who experienced the revolution and the commercialization of the official memory of the revolution on screen can be understood in light of the state’s neglect of the still evolving technology of film.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The revolutionaries were able to actually film battles and parades of the Revolution. Comically, at the first viewing of a revolutionary film, *El águila y el serpiente*, in 1914, someone in the audience shot the image of Carranza on the screen. This amusing anecdote from the annals of film history simultaneously captures the passions and rivalries among revolutionary fighters and the reactions of early audiences to moving pictures. After this rather disheartening result, film fell out of popularity as a means to document the revolution. When it was revitalized, there was a decade gap between those who experienced the actual events and those who watched the moving, memory of the Revolution; Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 1 edition (London: Routledge, 2005), 48-55.

The intervention of the state in the fictional representation of national narratives on the screen in the 1930s started with the dawn of talkies.<sup>76</sup> The Revolutionary government owed the success of its project of a recreated memory-nation partially to lucky timing. Not only were films becoming more and more popular due to the success of moving pictures with sound—which allowed for bigger productions—but the disruption of Hollywood and European film circulation due to World War II gave rise to increased commercial possibilities for Mexican motion pictures.<sup>77</sup>

With a wider reach, increased state funds, and assistance from otherwise unemployed Hollywood technicians, Mexican spectators were able to easily enjoy a reasonably sustained, regular repertoire of technically excellent films in their own language, featuring local songs and music, and dealing with issues specific to national cultural identity—*lo mexicano*. It helped the state project that films in Mexico were highly popular. Early audiences comprised a wide spectrum of Mexican societies. By the 30s and 40s, the Mexican filmmaking industry had become well-established, and going to the cinema became an everyday practice. The wealthier citizens paid roughly four pesos to see a movie in a highly refined environment, complete with tuxes and floor-length gowns at a time when the weekly minimum wage was about three pesos. The lower classes could go to the *cines de pijotas* (flea pits) located in working class neighborhoods and see three films for 80 centavos. By the 1940s, the national cinema had found its dedicated audience in the vast and amorphous middle class, for whom the regular outing to the movies (once or twice a week) became part of the rhythm of family life.<sup>78</sup> Film became so

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<sup>76</sup> Chávez, “The Eagle and the Serpent on the Screen: The State as Spectacle in Mexican Cinema,” 118.

<sup>77</sup> Seth Fein, “Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2001), 167–68.

<sup>78</sup> Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 74–77.

popular in all sectors of society that critics such as Carlos Monsiváis could look back on the era and claim satirically,

En el principio, creó Dios la sala y las butacas. Y advirtió que las butacas estaba vacías y decidió formar al hombre y la mujer para poblar la sala de sonidos aprobatorios.

In the beginning, God created the movie hall and the seats. And he saw the seats were empty, so he decided to create man and woman to fill the hall with approving sounds.<sup>79</sup>

The cinema became an institutional ritual gathering, a community of sorts, in which spectators who shared a region, language, and (now) and culture, would reenact the gathering of the nation.

While watching together and absorbing the provocative mimesis of film, the Mexicans were learning to the new modes of behavior according to the memory-nation. The movies showed how to be a proper modern Mexican according to the principles of the (official history of the) Revolution. As Monsiváis noted, “it was in front of the screen that the public acquired, to the best of its ability, the new language of modern life.... For the audience, the myths of Mexican cinema were bridges of understanding, privileged faces that stood out for collective biography.”<sup>80</sup> Though his commentary was more cultural than political, Monsiváis captured the politically didactic spirit of film. These grand movies not only initiated the masses into the rituals of modern, urbanized life that was slowly reforming after the disruption brought by the Revolution, but also taught the populace how to act, what to think, and what to remember as citizens of the Revolution. The great films of director Emilio Fernández were specifically part of a didactic, citizen-building agenda. Mexico’s political identity as a modernizing nation was

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<sup>79</sup> qtd in *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>80</sup> qtd in Noble, 79.

directly tied to the Golden Age of cinema.<sup>81</sup> The attachment to the *patria grande* was enhanced by mass culture and the commodification of collective memory that bound rural and urban Mexicans together into one, united people through common rituals of consumption. Attempts to install the memory of the revolution were at the center of this process of national imagining. The visual archive of the Revolution was put at the service of nationalism and given a pedagogical mission. Images of men in sombreros, battles in the countryside, and the powerful female *soldaderas* were repeated endlessly in films to make collective memory using a “fetishized commodity.”<sup>82</sup> It was through the exploitation of these myths and images that the state manipulated popular culture and Mexican identity to affect their legitimacy and create “the idea of a fusion between the masses and the state, between the Mexican people and the Revolutionary government.”<sup>83</sup> Spectatorship was the medium through which the new citizenship was conveyed. Thus, by the 1950s, the audience had undergone a process of institutionalization that passed the official history of the revolution into the domains of collective memory, and redefined their behavior by a set of revolutionary standards rooted in the need to legitimize the government.

These films depicted a specific “mystifying-*indigenista*” discourse exactly in line with the dogmatic deployment of the principles of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* that had been initially illustrated by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, The cinematic experience promoted the spectators’ identification with a repertoire of new and traditional images connected with *lo*

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<sup>81</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, “Assembling Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2001), 11.

<sup>82</sup> Pick, *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution*, 213.

<sup>83</sup> Fein, 185.

<sup>84</sup> Chávez, 116-119.

*mexicano*.<sup>85</sup> Specifically, the films reaffirmed the glorified indigenous and mestizo roots of Mexico and the associations of race and land with the indomitable identity, strength, and primitive beauty derived from Aztec and other indigenous heritage.<sup>86</sup> Each step of the way, the films also argued for a nostalgic, bygone era in which *lo mexicano* invoked a roughly shared assumptions about cultural belonging, political stability under a unifying patriarch, honor, and justice. Each movie was carefully set to connect these traits with the visual motif of picturesque Mexico.<sup>87</sup> The customary plots, iconography of social inequity, class solidarity, and bravery that were relocated to the rural regions and regendered (women began to play incredibly important roles in the action of these films) countered the confusing, urbanizing, and still-reforming modern society.<sup>88</sup> The most famous films, *Allá del el rancho grande* (1936), *María Candelaria* (1943), *Rio Escondido* (1947) *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) were notable not only because they were fantastic, moving films with emotional plots, but also because they were some of the most successful at conveying the ethos of the Revolution and the message of the revolutionary government. *María Candelaria*, in particular, captured the mestizaje message of the Revolution in its depiction of a woman with “pure, indigenous ‘essence’” and a deep connection to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the famous indigenous Virgin Mary who embodies the mestizo spirit of Mexico.<sup>89</sup> Not all big production movies produced adhered to the government project. In fact, one of the most well-known films today, *Vámonos con Pancho Villa* (1936) told the story of six rancheros who were rewarded for their loyalty to Pancho Villa by the legendary caudillo’s

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<sup>85</sup> Noble, 71.

<sup>86</sup> Chávez, 119.

<sup>87</sup> Pick, 10.

<sup>88</sup> Pick, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Modern Identity* (Wilmington, Del: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), xv.

indifference to their plight and ultimate death. The film failed at the box office, however, because people resisted efforts to manipulate their heroic image of the revolution.<sup>90</sup>

The attempt on the part of the state to create a cultural of revolutionary nationalism rooted in loyalty to Mexican personalities mediated by the screen had clearly succeeded.<sup>91</sup> These personalities included as many historical revolutionary heroes as they did stars of the silver screen. Dolores del Río, María Félix, Pedro Armendáriz, and Jorge Negrete became iconic models of masculinity and femininity, acting out the proper behavior and impulses for male and female revolutionary citizens. By the 1940s, though the government had actually departed from the radical revolutionary agenda realized by Cárdenas, the epic pantheon of heroes began to acquire increased symbolic power, and the Revolution was carried on in the political memory of the collective citizenry, mediated through the sentimental ranchero movies.<sup>92</sup> The genre of the revolution, ranchero melodramas replete with indigenous images, star power, and patriotic sentiment, did the political campaigning for the politicians. Through these films, the people learned a new citizenship according to the memory-nation: love *lo mexicano* and love the government that stands for the Revolution.

### Appropriation of Shakespeare

It is within this didactic use of film that Shakespeare arose in Mexico as a vehicle to advance the development of the memory nation. Four films from the Golden Age were clearly based on Shakespeare plays: *El peñon de las ánimas* (*Rock of Souls*, 1942), *Romeo y Julieta* (1943), *Enamorada* (*Woman in Love* 1946), and *El charro y la dama* (*The Charro and the Lady*,

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<sup>90</sup> Pilcher, *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Modern Identity*, 216.

<sup>91</sup> Pick, *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution*, 125.

<sup>92</sup> Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 57.

1949). Of course, there were over fifty notable films produced in the 1940s alone; thus the fact that four films used Shakespeare may seem unremarkable. Yet, given their consciously Hispanic, Mexican-nationalist, aggressively anti-European project, they should not have been producing Shakespeare at all. They were certainly not lacking inspiration or creativity to create their own plots. Still, the state and the filmmakers chose to mexicanize Shakespeare by appropriating his stories to convey the ideal revolutionary message and use his work to teach Mexicans about their identity vis-à-vis the Revolution. They stole the culture of their former oppressors and used it to cement their political and cultural victory. Each one of these films stands out as a revolutionary classic. They stole the culture *Peñon*, based very strictly on *Romeo and Juliet*, featured superstars Jorge Negrete and María Félix (in her first role in a major motion picture) is an award-winning film. Jorge Negrete was crucial for forming the image of the *charro* and popularizing mariachi music. Therefore, it not only stands out as an excellent film, but also marks an important moment in the development of Golden Age cinema. *Enamorada* is loosely based around *The Taming of the Shrew* and, again, stars María Félix and Pedro Armendáriz, another giant of the Golden Age. Furthermore, Emilio Fernandez was the director and Gabriel Figueroa the cinematographer; this team was the most important creative force behind the state's didactic project. *Romeo y Julieta*, clearly based upon *Romeo and Juliet*, was the only film that nodded to its Shakespearean origins in the title. The made direct references to the most famous U.S. version of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by George Cuckor, that existed at the time. It starred Cantinflas, the famous, Chaplin-like comedic film star of the Golden Age known for his big nose, ridiculously small mustache, and very critical satire. Cantinflas helped to define Mexican modernity through his low-brow comedy. Finally, *El charro y la dama*, featuring Pedro Armendáriz, was notable not only for its casting, but also for how faithful the movie remained to the core story of its

inspiration, *The Taming of the Shrew*. Clearly, though there were only four Shakespeare-inspired films, these movies stood out because of their star-power, cinematic excellence, clarity of argument, and permanence.

### El peñon de las ánimas<sup>93</sup>

*Peñon* is a succinct illustration of the grandeur of *lo mexicano* and the defense of the revolutionary government, which would realize the goals of the revolution. It tells the story of two lovers, María Ángela Valdivia (María Félix) and Fernando Iturriaga (Jorge Negrete), from warring families with a dispute going back over two hundred years who fall in love despite their families' animosity to tragic ends. Though the action takes place at the end of the nineteenth century, the themes represented are post-Revolutionary. True to the localization of Shakespeare and the project of the revolutionary government, it takes the basic plot of *Romeo and Juliet* and mexicanizes it to emphasize four themes: the greatness of Mexico, the post-Revolution ideal man, the post-Revolution ideal woman, and the necessary death of old (pre-Revolution) ideas. The opening shot of the film quickly establishes the pictorial beauty of pastoral Mexico, and the idyllic lifestyle of the charros in their big sombreros, reinforcing the emphasis that the Revolutionary government placed on the countryside as the symbol of the Revolution. In first lines we hear from the newly returned María Ángela, she tells us how she missed "the biggest well, the tallest tree, and the bluest sky" while she was away in Spain. Her love of the *patria* is rooted in the rural landscape. The celebration of indigenous roots is also evident, from the indigenous designs on the blanket that Fernando gives María Ángela during a storm, to the slow pan over the peaceful activities of *tortillera*, to the importance of mariachi music to woo and

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<sup>93</sup> All translations are mine.



celebrate in the film. The film is also the story of María Ángela's transformation from a European woman, influenced by the past six years that she spend in Spain, back to her Mexican identity. Over the course of the film, she loses her Castilian Spanish, with its "vostotros" pronoun and "-ais" second personal plural verb endings, along with her European dress, in favor of classically Mexican and indigenous fashion: big stripes, flowing shirts and skirts, and hair braids. Aesthetically, the film privileges Mexico above anything else, using the frame of the classical love story to further nationalism.



*The first image of María Ángela, having recently returned from Spain, in classically European dress, and, later, at a dance, looking much more Mexican. Screenshots from the movie.*

Furthermore, the Romeo character is mexicanized and this ideal lover becomes the ideal post-revolutionary Mexican man. First, he is macho, but unencumbered by his own masculinity. In this post-Revolutionary world, being macho meant knowing when to eschew violence, a useful message for a government attempting to claim a monopoly over the use of political force. When they first meet, both María Ángela and Fernando have taken shelter from a storm in an old church. Concerned about the presence of a man, María Ángela leaves, and Fernando immediately runs after her to save her from a flaming tree; he goes into the thunderstorm to allow her to stay

safe—clearly he is macho. Seconds later, however, he comes back admitting it is too wet, which allows the two characters to have their initial conversation in which they fall in love. His ability to overcome his masculine pride initiates the love story. Furthermore, we discover that Fernando is an excellent sharp shooter as he shoots his initials into a tree, but every time he is in a gunfight, he only shoots lamps to allow his men to escape and pistols out of enemies' hands to end the escalation of violence. He is called a coward, and still refuses to fight, negating the toxic culture of masculinity, unlike the original Romeo, whose battle to avenge Mercutio's death, that results in Tybalt's death, causes his banishment, and, therefore, the tragic ending of the play.

Furthermore, his refusal of violence is ultimately tied to his ability to express his love for María Ángela, something the other male characters are unable to do, lacking sufficient revolutionary spirit. Another contender for María Ángela's love, Manuel (who is María Ángela's cousin) challenges Fernando to a duel, to which Fernando responds, "Kill me if you want, but I am not going to let any more blood run between María Ángela and I." The emphasis on refusing invitations to violent interactions was a direct result of the state's consolidation of power and insistence on the cessation of Revolutionary violence; the time for fighting was over. In painting the ideal man as one who rejects violence, the state was teaching citizens to reject any further Revolutionary conflict and be peaceful participants in the new democratic process. Their duty was to love (Mexico, Mexican women, etc.) instead. Post-revolutionary men were supposed to be thoroughly romantic and educated, an ideal that helped the state reinforce its national education efforts. María Ángela develops feelings for Fernando because, like in *Romeo and Juliet*, they share a poem. She reads aloud from her book of poetry at his prompting, and he fishes the stanza of an obscure poem by the Spanish writer Bécquer. When she asks why he knew the poem, he responds romantically, "Maybe Bécquer wrote it so that we could speak it

together.” Like Romeo’s ability to improvise a sonnet, Fernando’s poetic knowledge points to his education and romantic nature. This was essentially an advertisement for the national education system implemented by the state. In order to be romantic like Jorge Negrete, you had to go to school and learn these important Hispanic poems. Again, the ideal citizen is painted as taking advantage of the new institutions of its government. The national education system served both as an equalizing force in the post-revolutionary Mexico, ensuring that everyone had the rights to a basic education, and as a site of indoctrination into the nation-state, where the official history of Mexico was streamlined into textbooks produced by the government. In *Peñon*, the educated male romantic ideal was at once an expression of the socialist ethos of the revolution and an example of one propaganda campaign reinforcing another. Set to the background of pro-Mexican images, the film argues in support of obeying the new government.

Most importantly, however, Fernando is an accomplished mariachi musician (Jorge Negrete was known as the “singing charro” because of his beautiful voice and excellent mariachi renditions). Their shared poem may have sparked romantic feelings in María Ángela, but she really falls in love with him because he sings mariachi so well. Mariachi music punctuates the score, and Fernando uses it to woo María Ángela from below her window. The most important mariachi song in the film, however, is “Yo soy mexicano” (I am Mexican), which just expresses love for Mexico and encapsulates the revolutionary ideals. He sings the first two verses directly into the camera, speaking,

Yo soy el mexicano, mi tierra es bravía.  
Palabra de macho que no hay otra tierra más linda  
Y más brava que la tierra mía.

*I am the Mexican, my land is untamed.  
On the word of a man, there is no other land more beautiful  
Or more wild than my land.*

Our fondness for the romantic hero stems equally from his romantic notions and love of María Ángela and his commitment to the Revolutionary project of nationalist passion for Mexico rooted in the rural landscape. He continues singing,

...Mi orgullo es ser charro, valiente, y braga'o  
traer mi sombrero con plata borda'o  
que nadie me diga que soy un raja'o

Correr mi caballo en pelo monta'o  
Pero más que todo, seré enamora'o  
Yo soy mexicano, my atravesá'o

Yo soy mexicano, de nadie me fío  
Y como Cuauhtémoc cuando estoy sufriendo  
Ántes que rejarne, me aguanto y me río.

*...I am proud of being a charro, valiant and daring  
Of bringing my sombrero with a silver border  
So that no one can say I am a coward*

*Of riding my horse bareback.  
But more than anything, I will be in love.  
I am Mexican, a troublemaker.*

*I am Mexican, I don't rely on anyone.  
And, like Cuauhtémoc, when I am suffering  
Before I crack, I endure and I laugh.*

This mariachi song not only captures the love of the landscape, but also argues for national pride in charros, symbols of honor, the Revolution, and the idyllic rural lifestyle. These charros, however, according to the song, have replaced their weapons with fancy hats and romantic love, reenacting on a smaller scale Fernando's masculinity. Finally, the reference to Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, is a nod to the *indigenista* ideals of the post-revolutionary government. In general, Fernando's skill as a musician is a Mexican response to Romeo's displays of wit and wordplay in the text. We know he is a worthwhile man because he is completely committed to the post-Revolutionary cause and participates in this mestizo cultural celebration.

The vision of the ideal modern woman is also deeply rooted in the socialist, egalitarian, pro-Mexican Revolutionary cause. Beyond María Ángela's mexicanization, the identity of the women in the film is rooted in mestizo Mexico. Rosa, the daughter of the tavern keeper who takes on a Nurse-like character, always appears in classically Mexican costumes. The broad stripes on her dress signal her devotion to Mexican culture. More importantly, these ideal women have internalized the attitude of the *solderas* of the Revolution, or the female soldiers that fought alongside the men. She challenged Miguel to shoot a flower out of her hair to prove his skill and manliness, and when María Ángela chides her for it, she responds, "us women can't stay behind." Modern women were independent and brave, and this was a quality that men found attractive in these films. Furthermore, these modern women provided the necessary link between the individuals and state institutions. María Ángela demands time and again that the men of the film sort out their problems using official channels: "Are there not authorities? Is there not justice? Are there not laws?" He brother responds, "this is a matter for men." His arrogance, dismissal of María Ángela because she is a woman, and unwillingness to submit to the



*Rosa speaks to Miguel.*

institutions of the state is ultimately what leads to the tragic ending. The women of the film understand the need to bow to the government and give them a monopoly over violence. Through its depiction of women, the film argues for the beauty of Mexico, the modernization of women, and the cooperation with the state institutions, goals very much in line with the agenda of the state's project.

Finally, the film depicts the necessary death of antiquated concepts, specifically the power of the elite *hacenderos* and the execution of justice by private citizens. María Ángela's



*Abuelo in the graveyard*

grandfather, the owner of the hacienda, is the antagonist of the film, and barrier to the lover's union. We first meet him in a graveyard, where he fits in with the crosses. His presence in the graveyard seems to presage his death, but he never dies in the film. Thus, the long shot of Abuelo alone among the crosses signals that he should die, but his continued existence is wreaking havoc on the modernizing world. He rejects to accept the new institutions, refusing to end the feud between the families when the Archbishop and the Governor of the state demand that he do so. Worse, true to his role as a Lord Capulet figure, he stands in the way of the love

that could bring an end to the animosity. He declares that he would prefer to “see [María Ángela] dead than married to the son of her father’s murderer.” To preserve the memory of the conflict, instead, Abuelo attempts to arrange María Ángela’s marriage to Miguel so that she may have a son to continue the conflict; we later learn that Miguel is her cousin. Thus, he is particularly evil because he not only refuses to let the old hatred die, but he consciously promotes incest to maintain the violence. The film ends when María Ángela runs away with Fernando and instead of letting them escape, Abuelo shoots from across a river. He, the old source of wealth and power, is an evil figure who wreaks havoc on his world and kills our beloved protagonists. This is the film’s most articulate argument for the need to adhere to the new values of post-revolutionary Mexico: the old ways lead to tragedy.

It is clear that the film does not follow the exact storyline of *Romeo and Juliet*, though the source material is easily recognized within the film. More important is how the film deviates from the play. The tragic death of the two lovers is not due to improper flows of information due to an unfortunate series of events, but rather a direct action by the man that represents everything the Revolution fought against. This single change could have a persuasive enough argument for the Revolutionary principles. The redefinition of masculinity and femininity in accordance with Mexican standards not only represented the localization of Shakespeare, but also transformation of the story of *Romeo and Juliet* from a tale of two young, comically romantic lovers swept up in their own passions into a story of two perfect adults who should be together according to everything the movie has told us, but who fail in the end because of an incomplete adherence to Revolutionary ideology on the part of others. The film teaches the audience how to be good private citizens in the new, nationalist, memory-nation—to love mestizo culture, to be independent women, to be macho without killing people—and how to be good citizens of the

new government that valorized *lo mexicano*: to shun violence in favor of institutional justice, to adhere to the institutions of government, especially public education, which was another site of collective memory didacticism, and to reject the old system of power that the revolutionaries had overthrown. It succinctly argues for the pro-Mexican vision of citizenship and the acceptance of the new government and its institutions within that narrative of citizenship.

### Enamorada

The other three films are variations on the same theme. *Enamorada*, based on *The Taming of the Shrew*, stars Pedro Armendáriz as José Juan Reyes, a great and just general of the Revolution who learns to use non-violent methods, and María Félix as Beatriz Peña Fiel, the daughter of the richest man in town who joins the Revolution. The movie loosely follows the main tropes of the source play, namely that it is a story about a rich daughter and a poorer man who are attracted to each other because of their mutual fieriness, but who fall in love completely with each other as they tame each other.<sup>94</sup> Beyond major changes to the cast of characters and the plot, the film differs from the play in terms of the argument it makes. As with *El peñon de las animas*, *Enamorada* is pro-Revolutionary. It concerns itself principally with the defense of the Revolution, seen through the actions and dialogue of José Juan and Beatriz's conversion to a *soldadera*. It also advances the same kind of masculinity that is prized in *Peñon*.

The film quite clearly advocates for the Revolution. The first sequence depicts the battle for the town of Cholula. The second shot of the film, showing men riding on horseback, mimics

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<sup>94</sup> Though, the taming of the man and the deep love story is a modern vision of *The Taming of the Shrew* that is somewhat obscured in the surface of the text. Some scholars will still argue that *Taming of the Shrew* is merely a deeply misogynist play that advocates violence towards women.



an older film style and seems to be actual footage of the Revolution.<sup>95</sup> As always, there is an emphasis on the landscape. The battle ends; the flag of Mexico is hoisted high; and the camera pans past a plaque commemorating the Independence, reinforcing the new national narrative of Mexico as completing the Revolution that began with the struggle for independence.



*Hoisting the flag and the Independence plaque. Screenshots from film.*

As the soldiers enter Cholula, the mayor declares, “Welcome...soldiers of the Revolution... liberating army...[you broke]...with your blood the chains of oppression...brothers of Juarez, brothers of Hidalgo.” He reinforces the historical connection between the Independence (Hidalgo), Reformation (Juarez), and the Revolution that was advanced by the state.

Having established the direct line between the historical fighters of oppression and these soldiers, the film justifies the logic of the Revolution in a prolonged scene in which José Juan deals out justice to the richest of the town. He chastises the wealthy, who do not understand why they are there: “food disappears, and prices go up, and every town that pays, still goes hungry.” Like the official narrative of the real revolutionaries, José Juan’s battle is with the oppressors of the poor. One of the businessmen in the town promises to support the Revolution in exchange for

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<sup>95</sup> It may or may not be actual footage, but it captures a kind of photographic quality that makes it stand out.

his money, to which José Juan responds, “those who want to be friends with everyone, the people who aren’t anyone’s enemy when there is a battle that determines the destiny and the future of the motherland, those are the real traitors.... Men have the right to think freely, or they aren’t free men at all.” Desperate to maintain his business and wealth, he offers his wife to José Juan; he is immediately taken out to the firing squad. Clearly, the fight of the Revolutionaries will disrupt the social system, but there will be a place for all citizens, except those without any honor or principles. Furthermore, any discomfort the audience may have felt in the merciless execution of this man is immediately offset by the arrival of a teacher, who says the school has been closed for a while. José Juan immediately reopens the school, pays the teacher his entire missing wage, and doubles his salary. This moment reinforces the revolutionary government’s emphasis on education as a method to unite all of the people of Mexico, their modernizing efforts, and the egalitarian principles of the revolution. The revolutionary general immediately understands the need for everyone to be educated; and, this is a key example of the failings of the old system: the public education should have been continuously funded. These egalitarian principles are key for José Juan. The only real argument between José Juan and Beatriz occurs because she sneers at the soldaderas. He shouts at her, “the people are unequal because of a simple accident of birth, nothing more than that. If you had been born...without a single advantage, like most of these women, what class of woman do you think you’d be?” She slaps him, as has become common by this point in the film, but this is the only time he hits her back. We immediately understand that his violent reaction was wrong, but it is also clear that his anger was justified. His is a project of equality. Over and over again, the film displays the official narrative of the Revolution as a unified struggle against the forces of oppression (class distinction, dishonorable rich men, and improper use of government funds).

Beatríz's character arc further reinforces the importance of the Revolution. Ultimately, the film is the story of her "taming," or her conversion to the Revolutionary cause. She is already an independent, intelligent, modern woman at the beginning of the film. She knows how to handle a gun, she stands up to the men that catcall her, she shows her knees, and she smokes. She is equal inside of the house in which she lives. She becomes the one to confront José Juan when he comes to speak to her father, arguing to her father, "I [will speak to him]. That's it. I'm right...there are things that women can solve better than men." Her father and the visiting priest can do no more than agree that she has the right to speak for herself. She is so independent and fiery that, upon meeting her and being slapped for catcalling, José Juan says, "that's the woman I am going to marry," which immediately transforms what was previously understood to be unfeminine behavior by pre-Revolutionary standards into not only an acceptable, but an ideal manner in which to act for women. Throughout the course of the film, her anger towards José Juan begins to lessen as she starts to understand his Revolutionary project. She learns as the audience learns. The turning point comes when, as José Juan is preparing to leave and she is marrying her American fiancé, the judge performing the wedding says, "this demonstrates that between us there does not exist, nor ever has there existed racial prejudice...." She immediately looks up, having learned from José Juan that this statement is fundamentally untrue. A cannon shot is heard, the priest tells her that José Juan is retreating, and she runs after him, grabbing the shawl of the Indian woman standing in the doorway. Standing wrapped in a shawl with indigenous designs, she represents the *mestizaje*. Her transformation into *mestiza* woman who understands the social injustice and blindness of the upper class that necessitated the Revolution is complete as she wraps herself in the indigenous designs. The shadows of Revolutionary soldiers make the reasons behind her leaving even clearer. The film ends with her walking beside

José Juan's horse as a soldadera as they march towards the next battle. By this point, the audience should have also have been completely swayed by the egalitarian arguments of José Juan (and his mariachi music, mustache, and big hat). Thus, the film is another successful argument for both aspects of the new citizenship. Within the idealization of *lo mexicano*, the film justifies the revolution.



(Left) Beatriz decides to leave with the soldiers. (Right) Beatriz and José Juan march towards the next battle.

As with *El peñon de las ánimas*, *Enamorada* clearly veered from the source material, but it is in the changes that the argument of the film arises. Petruchio comes to Padua seeking a wife for her dowry and happens to meet his match in Kate. José Juan arrives in Cholula for the exact opposite: to use the spoils of the Revolution to unchain the oppressed. The time for personal wealth is gone in the new socialist regime of the Revolution. The behavior in Kate that is chastised is prized in Beatriz because she is an exemplar of the modern woman, who needs to be tough and intelligent to participate in the Revolutionary project. The other characters, Kate's sister Bianca and the other suitors are irrelevant in this tale because the film is not a comic love story, but rather a love story for the Revolution, where all of the focus must be on the Kate and

Petruchio characters as they justify the Revolutionary project. The errant behavior that is “tamed” in the Kate figure is her haughtiness and ignorance of the need for the Revolution.

### Romeo y Julieta<sup>96</sup>

Cantinflas' 1943 *Romeo y Julieta* is the only Spanish-speaking movie that directly parodied a Shakespeare play at the time. It stands apart from the other films as critical of the Revolutionary project by satirically undermining the tropes of the ranchero dramas, but still upholds the Revolutionary regime because the satire of the film is still unable to escape from supporting the arguments in favor of the revolution. Characteristic of Cantinflas' comedic style, the movie was inspired by the traditional form of outdoor improvisational satire that was used to provide a crudely provocative critical voice about politics. True to the project of the government, Cantinflas popularized this traditional cultural form and made it universally recognizable within the borders of the state. In the film, Cantinflas plays a cab-driver rogue (clearly working class, a perfect revolutionary) who is hired to play a European actor. The main female protagonist, the upper-class Julieta, is in love with a young man named Romero, but her father, Sr. Capulido, has engaged her to an Italian. In order to marry the man she loves, she must convince her father that the Italian is a buffoon: enter the cab driver. In the course of a dinner, Capulido decides he wants to become a producer. Hilarity ensues as he is dragged into performing *Romeo and Juliet* in the largest theater in the city. The characters step into their equivalent Shakespeare roles (with the exception of Romero), and the high class gathers to see this excellent production. The movie ends with the cast in a courtroom, explaining the story to a bewildered judge. Importantly, this

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<sup>96</sup> A version of the play *Romeo and Juliet* played in Mexico City a few years after the Cantinflas film was released, and former Cantinflas fan and scriptwriter Salvador Noro complained, “what a lamentable trauma these parodies have inflicted on young minds. A youth at one of these functions asked: ‘when does the funny stuff start? The Cantinflas movie was really hilarious;’” Pilcher, *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Modern Identity*, 214.

lowbrow comedy is set in Mexico City, not the countryside; thus, it tackles problems unique to urban living. Like Charlie Chaplin in the U.S., Cantinflas, whose real name was Mario Moreno, represented the “human debris of industrialization, rootless migrants to the big city who survived by their wits in a bewildering and cold-hearted environment.”<sup>97</sup> In a sense, he was more of a Groucho Marx than a Charlie Chaplin, as he constantly deflated the pretensions of the rich and powerful while resisting any personal desire for upward mobility. Cantinflas could also be considered akin to John Wayne, not in behavior, but in the intensity of his self-image. In the 1930s, journalist Salvador Nova claimed that in the “dawning of a wordy era, confused, oratorical, promising without accountability which prudent journalists would call “demagogic,” the sensitive antenna that received this new vibration, that gave the key of humor through which this new era rereleased its repression would be called Cantinflas.”<sup>98</sup> His comic take on social hierarchy, speech patterns, ethnic identities, and masculine forms of behavior reformulated modern identity in line with his chaotic humor. His status as a cultural icon was confirmed in 1992 when the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language added to its dictionary “cantinflear,” a verb meaning “to talk a lot without saying anything,” characteristic of his speech patterns.<sup>99</sup>

Cantiflas was also perhaps the most successful pro-government propaganda artist, for better or for worse. He significantly influenced the project of legitimation that the government orchestrated through cinema. Cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis claimed this capitalist Cantinflas was “a crucial element of the hegemony exercised by Mexico’s post-revolutionary state which sanitized the genuinely threatening urban proletariat into a harmless, even cute prankster known

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<sup>97</sup> Pilcher, xv.

<sup>98</sup> Qtd in *Ibid*, xix.

<sup>99</sup> This verb is perhaps could be appropriately applied to the currently president of the United States. *Ibid*, xviii.

diminutively as ‘el peladito’” (the little bum).<sup>100</sup> He was the palliative of the Mexican working class that helped the Mexican people shape their expectations and identities. Cantinflas was on odd, figure, however. As a celebrated comic, he was technically a member of the upper class that he mercilessly mocked. He was actually rejected by his fellow bourgeoisie, who would only celebrate his artistry when foreign critics attacked him or when he was a national champion, celebrated by foreign audiences. His wealth also ensured that, by the end of his life, Cantinflas was a strong supporter of conservative politics; yet, one of the Cuban revolutionaries who fought with Fidel Castro adopted Cantinflas as his *nome de guerre*.<sup>101</sup> Despite the contradictions between his characters, public persona, and private life, or, perhaps, because of them, Cantinflas perfectly represents the pathos of post-revolutionary society and this cultural movement. He represented a uniquely Mexican kind of identity, as John Wayne and Charlie Chaplin were recognizably American, which necessarily meant that we participated in the celebration of *lo mexicano*. His satire of the upper class continued to advance the arguments of the Revolution, which valued the workers over the capitalists. The identification with Cantinflas by the Cuban Revolutionaries points to the particularly strong defense Cantinflas seems to make of the working class. Finally, his personal wealth and politics and his status as a “crucial element of hegemony” used by the government to tame the proletariat highlights the national cinema’s ultimate use as didactic propaganda meant to inform viewers how to act in the new nation.

His 1943 *Romeo y Julieta*, however, is much simpler; it captures the impulses of the Revolutionary principles and the realities of urban life. He mocks the vision of romantic love that exists in the ranchero dramas, yet does not succeed in undermining the ideal form of masculinity and femininity. Like Jorge Negrete in *Peñon*, Cantinflas’ Romeo shuns violence. The opening

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<sup>100</sup> Qtd in *Ibid*, xix.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 213–16.

fight sequence in the play is replaced by a lettuce battle, which, of course, is funny, but also viciously mocks the culture of masculinity that supports fights in the street. Similarly, when he confronts Tibaldo after his marriage to Juliet, Tibaldo threatens to “cook him on all four sides,” a ridiculously masculine threat. Cantinflas puns on his verb “cocer,” meaning to “cook” and replaces it with the homophone “coser,” meaning to sew. He warns him, “A sewing machine won’t give him a good ‘through and through.’” His joke undermines Tibaldo’s masculinity, and we prize Cantinflas’ Romeo for his wit instead. Furthermore, like in *Romeo and Juliet*, the love between Romeo and Julieta blossoms as they create a sonnet out of rhyming couplets. The Cantinflas version has a particularly modern spin, however,

R: O visión, o ensueño, o—

J: Más cerca.

R: Okay.

J: Seguí. Aquí está mi mano.

R: Que lisita.

Me da miedo profaner con las mías esta blanca palomita.

J: Que mano tan delicada

R: Es que uso crema almendrada  
Pero mis labios son más delicados....

*R: O vision, o dream—*

*J: Get closer.*

*R: Okay.*

*J: Continue. Here is my hand.*

*R: How smooth! I’m afraid to profane this little white dove with my hands.*

*J: Your hands are so delicate.*

*R: It’s because I use almond cream. But my lips are even softer....*

He clearly mocks the notion of the romantic love as espoused in *Romeo and Juliet*, defined by poetry and hyperbolic confessions of love. Yet his addition of almond cream fits perfectly within the rhyme scheme, and we again can appreciate this Romeo for his wit and intelligence. He is improvising modern poetry to woo the object of his affections. He still achieves the romantic, educated ideal of the lover that we saw in *El peñon de las ánimas*. Furthermore, Juliet’s response



indicates her modern identity. She is not timid, but, like the women created by María Félix, is bold. Furthermore, the frame narrative of the love story between Romero and Julieta is fundamentally about her sexual liberation and her ability to freely choose a (properly revolutionary, non-European) Mexican husband. Despite Cantinflas' mockery, he cannot escape from the romantic ideals espoused by the Revolutionary government.

The film also argues in support of the Revolution. It adheres to the mestizaje/Cosmic Race vision of the revolution and the glorification of the indigenous past. The film privileges *lo mexicano* over Europe. As in the play, París confronts Romeo as he stands over the tomb of Julieta. Romeo responds, "London! I mean—París!" The interchangeability of European towns diminishes Europe compared to the specifics of Mexico City that have been laid out in the film. Furthermore, we know Sr. Capuleto is evil because, unlike in the source play, he is marrying Julieta to París to gain power: "Oh, my Juliet, so beautiful/ he's a brute, he's an idiot/ But he owns most of Verona/ and I will be Columbus." The audience is supposed to hate Capuleto not only because he would sell his daughter to gain more land and power (replicating the pre-revolutionary capitalists that oppressed the working class), but also because he connects himself to Christopher Columbus, who brought the destruction to the New World and, indirectly, caused the fall of the great Aztec empire. He is power hungry and a European colonist, the worst combination of traits for a post-Revolutionary citizen to have. Juliet, like a good Revolutionary woman, refuses to tie herself to this colonizing project. She does not want to marry the "pretentious blonde man"; she prefers, instead, the "Moreno"—or the darker-skinned Romeo/Cantinflas. In fact, Cantinflas trademark whiskers, discreet tufts of hair situated at the corners of his mouth, were supposed to signal his inability to grow a mustache, a trademark of the indigenous ancestry that made him mestizo, the modern exemplar of Mexican identity.



*Cantinflas as Romeo lies dead below the tomb of Julieta.*

Thus, the film continues to espouse the egalitarian, pro-Mexican values of the Revolution, as its protagonists fight for their Mexican love in the face of the evil father's European-colonial and wealth-accumulation goals. Furthermore, the vision of the government in the film critiques the pre-Revolutionary state, and, therefore, argues for the newly installed government. When the Prince enters to stop the fight between the Montescos and the Capuletos in the first scene of the play, he quickly runs away muttering, "let's go. Things might turn ugly" after proclaiming his God-given right to be the executor of justice. This is a direct attack on the distant governments that espoused their power without the support of the people. The proclamation of his divine right earns an eye-roll from Romeo. The sarcastic reaction mimics the appropriate reaction from the audience, who were now subjects of a government that had proclaimed its conversion to democracy. Finally, Friar Lawrence soliloquizes on the high cost of living in the rural areas of the country, one of the most important grievances that brought the lower class into the Revolution. Other interruptions of the verse for lampooning, including Romeo's assertion that his exile is an excellent example of the lack of justice in Mexico, provide sharp critiques of the

previous regime to remind the audience of importance of the Revolution. The film clearly valorizes the arguments of the Revolution and adheres to the new vision of citizenship in the memory-nation, which encompassed the celebration of *lo mexicano* (Cantinflas' mestizo identity and the evil pro-European machinations of Capulido) and the love of the Revolution, which assumes agreement with the social and economic critiques that brought about the struggle.

Thus, though Cantinflas may have been a satirist and slapstick comedian, his *Romeo y Julieta* recreates the arguments made by the ranchero dramas in comic form in order to support the official history of the Revolution portrayed by the state. This lowbrow film was no less didactic than the sweeping romances. Though the film is remarkably faithful to *Romeo and Juliet*, where it departs from the source material marks the strongest arguments in favor of the Revolution and the Revolutionary government, like the other Shakespeare-based films discussed previously. Cantinflas may have exuded a darker side in his later work that showed the governments failings, only to disguise them behind comedy and satiate the proletariat as other scholars have commented, but this *Romeo and Juliet* only shows the Revolution. Through the comedy, a passionate advancement of *lo mexicano* emerges.

### El charro y la dama

Like *Romeo y Julieta*, *El charro y la dama* uses comedy to advance the arguments for the Revolution. Based on *Taming of the Shrew*, it adheres more closely to the general plot than *Enamorada* in order to glorify Mexico. Patricia de Villar (Rosita Quintana) is a capricious and tortured American woman living in Texas engaged to Memo Haste, who, true to his name is both an idiot (memo is slang for idiot) and obsessed with time. Her father decides that the best thing for her would be to return to Mexico, and there, in a rural town, she meets and falls in love with

Pedro Menses (Pedro Armendáriz), a headstrong, but honorable charro. Though conveyed through slapstick, which negates some of the effects, the film advocates for an uncomfortable amount of violence towards women. While absconded at Pedro's ranch, Patricia undergoes a litany of abuses from being forced to sleep in a dog house briefly, being ordered around, spanked, tricked into thinking Pedro is undressing behind her, and pranked with a fake crocodile while bathing in a river. This kind of violence and mental manipulation is true to the source play, however. The violence is also partially excused by its role in the larger "taming" game that they play with one another: every manipulative act on his part is met by her own teasing. However uncomfortable, the sexism does have a larger role in the evolution of Patricia from an American woman to a proper Mexican one.

The first shot of the film is of a bustling U.S. city; a woman screaming cuts through the sounds of the cars: "I won't marry him! I will not marry him!" This woman is Patricia. Much to the chagrin of her father, she refuses to marry her fiancé. The fiancé's (Memo Haste) response is to announce, "It's time to drink my grapefruit juice!" and leave, staring at his watch, blissfully unperturbed by the chaotic situation. He is clearly an unsuitable husband, according to Mexican Revolutionary standards. Patricia's concerned father asks her what is wrong, citing her education, swimming trophies, and economic advantage as reasons why she should be happy. She can only respond, "I'm missing something." The solution to her problem, he decides, is to go to Mexico, where she will most certainly find that "something."

Mexico is much better than the bustling U.S. Though bandits attack the travelling carriage on its way to town, the bandits have beautiful eyes, according to Patricia's friend Clarita. Patricia goes into town to find help (as she is the most capable—an auspicious sign for her future transformation into a Revolutionary woman), and meets Pedro. Pedro immediately

appears to the audience as far superior to Memo. Not only is he masculine in his charro identity, with deft horse riding skills and a large sombrero, but he is a man of opinions as well. He challenges her, “as I am a Mexican, I eat of my country. What do you gain, what do I gain, and



*Pedro greets Patricia*

what does my brother gain from eating someone else’s corn?”<sup>102</sup> The saying also succinctly expresses his nationalism, which makes him even more attractive. Furthermore, when the father and friend are rescued, the party is welcomed into town with a huge celebration. Of course, as this is a comedy the welcome sign is spelled “vienbenidos” instead of “bienvenidos,” and the mayor of the town (who is also the chief of police, only judge, mail administrator, and tax collector) gives a rousing and rambling speech. In his attempt to be erudite, he says, “here we have peace, bread, home, [spoken in English] home, sweet home, [back to Spanish] as Machiavelli said after he hugged Shakespeare.” Various women in the crowd react, “so well spoken” and “what a guy.” The comical concentration of power and political grandstanding, however, are harmless in this ridiculous town. More important is the welcoming ceremony and

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<sup>102</sup> Como soy mexicano, consume lo del país. Que te ganas, que me gano, y que se gana mi hermano con comer de otro maíz?”

the warm reception the returning travellers receive. Rural Mexico is clearly a happier place than the metropolitan United States. In fact, although the mayor is also the judge, the justice system seems to be in perfect order. Pedro is arrested upon suspicion of being the leader of the bandits that attacked the carriage (Patricia planted evidence on him to play a trick), and, despite the protestations and demands of the judge, the foreman of the jury calls out the judge's bias and refuses to follow his orders. They find him guilty and he sentence him to be hanged. As a crowd member expresses, "the only way to end these assaults is to do this." Per the agreement of the town, the post-Revolutionary Mexico is no place for lawless assaults on good people. The citizens must adhere to the institutions of justice and, as we have just seen, these institutions work quite well. Although Pedro is actually innocent, and key piece of evidence for the trial was Clarita recognizing Pedro's eyes (ridiculous proof), the justice system still remains intact, because Patricia shoots the rope before Pedro is hanged, allowing him to escape. The men of the town all rally to chase down the criminal. Though the glorification of Mexico is not as easily achieved as in the other ranchero dramas, and the needs of the plot conflict with the perfect illustration of the government systems, Mexico is a much better place than the U.S. The men are manlier, the government officials can reference Shakespeare, and the government proceeds with honor. As even the most ridiculous aspects of government work are put on display only to be diminutized, this vision adheres to the first aspect of the new citizenship, the celebration of all things Mexican at the expense of the U.S.

The theme of honor is the most important in the film; Patricia's "taming" teaches her about the importance of honor. Having escaped the mob searching for him, Pedro arrives at Patricia's house and kidnaps her. The kidnapping is quite loud, and Pedro allows Patricia to write a note on the mirror saying who kidnapped her. Clarita witnesses the entire ordeal, and

immediately calls for the women of the town, who, like proper Revolutionary women, arrive with their horses and muskets, prepared to save Patricia. Of course, no one can find Pedro's house, because we need the taming plot to unfold. At this secluded ranch with traditional masks on the walls, Patricia learns to be a proper Mexican. He teaches her how to make coffee on his gas stove (and he is insulted that she thinks he does not own a gas stove); he walks around singing folk songs on his guitar while she tries to counter it with Strauss' "Blue Danube" waltz to little effect. Most importantly, she discovers how deeply she wounded his honor and pride by falsely accusing him of lawlessness. Finally, she admits to saving his life.

Pedro: You didn't care that they were going to hang me, and now you can't even kill a miserable chicken?

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Patricia: Ingrate. No, I would save it.

Pedro: What are you saying?

Patricia: You heard me. I was the one that cut the rope with a bullet.

Upon hearing that she saved his life, giving him the opportunity to restore his honor, he kisses her. She has come to understand what is required of her in this post-Revolutionary society, and he knows that she, too, is honorable. The film ends with Pedro saving Patricia's father from the real bandit's blackmail and pretending to be a bandit to kidnap Patricia so that she may stay in Mexico, which is a much better place to be.

Though clumsy, occasionally cringe-worthy, and lowball, this film continues to advance the basic argument of the Revolutionary government about the new citizenship: that all things Mexican are stellar, especially when compared to the dishonorable, bumbling, and cold U.S. (personified by Memo Haste). Like *Enamorada*, *El charro y la dama* rewrites the majority of the plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* in order to localize it and use it as a successful vehicle for the Revolutionary argument. All frivolities—extra characters, secondary plots, and motivations for personal wealth—are removed so that the core story of the transformation of a woman to socially

acceptable standards may proceed unencumbered. This was the last Shakespeare film of the Golden age, and, in fact, one of the final films of the didactic period of cinema. After 1950, Hollywood regained its power, and the resources the U.S. had lent to Mexican studios disappeared. This drop in production also coincided with the beginning of the disillusionment with the PRN governments. The people began to notice that the Revolution had yet to be completed. Nonetheless, the new image of Mexico was complete.

### Conclusion

The Mexican Revolution reset the cycles of political time by refashioning Mexican political culture. Not only did it lead to a new executive role within the government (Level One cycles of political time, Skrowronek's definition), but it also refashioned governmental institutions (Level Two cycles of political time) and recreated Mexican citizenship and political ideology (Level Three political time). Given the ultimately incomplete nature of the Revolutionary project, the continuing power inequality in Mexico and the lack of a complete transition to institutional democracy, we cannot understand this recreated citizenship as a rights-based political citizenship.<sup>103</sup> Rather, the Revolution (through the efforts of the post-Revolutionary government) remade collective memory and refashioned Mexican citizenship as members of a memory-nation. The collective memory of the official story of the Revolution demanded certain modes of being in the new memory-nation: the celebration of *lo mexicano* (indigenous roots, mestizo cultural practices, and the beauty of Mexico) and the love of the Revolution (which included love of the government that worked in the name of the Revolution and agreement with the egalitarian arguments of the struggle). The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Either polyarchy or democracy as defined by Robert Dahl.



century that revealed the failures of the Revolution did not destroy the revolutionary tradition; it survives not only in official symbolism and rhetoric, but also in the understanding of what it means to be Mexican. In the period after the PRN came to power in Mexico, the state began to consciously direct the formation of the memory-nation and Mexican political identity, using first murals and rhetoric and then, with the advent of talkies, motion pictures. It is within this context of revolutionary narrative, the construction of collective memory, citizenship in a memory-nation, and a state-driven process of political legitimation that we can understand the role Shakespeare adaptations played in the recreation of Mexican democratic citizenship.

Clearly, a new version of Shakespeare arose in Mexico after the Revolution with the purpose of teaching a new identity. Localized and appropriated to suit the needs of the post-Revolutionary nation, Shakespeare became an unwavering vehicle for the state's pro-revolutionary argument in their conscious construction of a new citizenry through co-spectatorship. The collective memory of the Revolution as defined by the government forced a new memory-nation based on this idealized history. Citizenship in that nation is comprised of specific modes of acting and thinking rooted in that official history. These Shakespeare-based films make succinct arguments in favor of those new modes of being in the memory-nation, specifically the idealization of *lo mexicano* and the Revolution as the vehicle that freed Mexico from the Anglo and other foreign powers and ushered in a new age of equality.

From an analysis of how these four films deviate from their source material, it is obvious the arguments they succinctly advance. *El charro y la dama* shouts "¡viva México!" along the lines of a nationalism rooted in landscape and an ideal vision of masculinity. *Romeo y Julieta* depicts an urbanized Revolution and continually prizes the indigenismo and emphasis on the mestizo over the evil machinations of the Europhile upper class that refuses to accept the modern

Mexico. *Enamorada* is one loud, long, argument for the Revolution and the need to right injustice in Mexico set to a love story. Finally, *El peñon de las ánimas* shows the deleterious effects of citizens who refuse to adhere to the principles of peace, state monopoly over violence, and the modern age. Each film teaches its audience how to be good Mexican citizens, how to operate within the new system, and rewrites the history of Mexico to be a story of dramatic deserts, noble men on horses, powerful women, and the grandeur of the indigenous people. Together they demonstrate to the audience what should be prized vis-à-vis the new memory nation. The audience members are the inheritors of the collective memory of a Revolution fought to overturn oppression in Mexico and celebrate Mexico as it is. The didacticism of the films advocates for the love of Mexico and a love of the Revolution on a mass scale. The Mexican government has yet to actually achieve the goals of the Revolution to this day. The democratic power of the people is weak; the government is paternalist; the state presence in much of the country is little or none; and, inequality still persists, although the middle class is rising. Nonetheless, the state successfully reformed the memory-nation and revolutionized the political sphere. Shakespeare is a clear and crucial player in this Level-Three change in political time.

Furthermore, by appropriating the pinnacle of European culture, on a mass scale, the films demonstrate the success of the transformation of the narrative and the triumph over the old, Europhile modes of thinking. By appropriating Shakespeare to define the new post-Revolutionary identity, which was fundamentally rooted in the destruction of the primacy of foreign political, economic, and cultural influence that undermined local cultural forms, the Mexican state and these filmmakers demonstrate that they have achieved a kind of superiority. Culturally hegemonic groups appropriate the practices of less powerful ones. Thus, the power structures inside of Mexico had become dominance over the former anglophile sympathies that

prized foreign nations over Mexico. The localization of Shakespeare was not only a useful tool for teaching a new form of citizenship in the reformed memory-nation, but also a consciously anti-imperialistic political act in and of itself.

**Chapter 3:**  
**“A Motor that Permitted the Phoenix to Rise from the Ashes”**  
**The Case of Argentina**

“Shakespeare reveals power in all of its forms, wakes us up, and advises us  
that sometimes men are not what they seem.”

—Mercedes de la Torre, President, Fundación Shakespeare  
Argentina, 2015

In 2011, Mercedes de la Torre and her husband, Carlos Drocchi, created the Fundación Shakespeare Argentina (FSA) to encourage the collaborative study and understanding of Shakespeare throughout the country. She argued that Shakespeare not only helps us to understand ourselves as men and women, but also as citizens: “a *pueblo* educated in Shakespeare is more difficult to manipulate.”<sup>104</sup> In her mind, Shakespeare cuts through to the truth of political realities and (occasionally) presents a solution. Whether or not Shakespeare productions achieve this every time, the first Shakespeare production localized in Argentina did accomplish it. Under the crucible of the 1976 dictatorial junta, productions of Shakespeare became truly Argentine: translated for the first time into Argentine Spanish and consciously located within political developments. In Argentina, the '76 Dictatorship was a turning point that triggered a Level-Three reset of political time. Amid the authoritarianism of Argentina's dictatorship, several politically charged performances questioned the government's intrusion into public and private life.<sup>105</sup> Unlike what occurred after the Revolution in Mexico, this vision of Shakespeare is inherently anti-government, serving as a measure of social accountability rather than government propaganda. Such questioning, had certainly not been absent before 1976, but it had never been

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<sup>104</sup> Mercedes de la Torre, FSA Founding, WhatsApp, October 6, 2016; in this context, “pueblo” signifies “populace” or “people.”

<sup>105</sup> Noe Montez, *Memory, Transitional Justice, and Theater*, Theater in the Americas, Carbondale, IL: Southern University Press, 2017, 3.

this widespread nor had it led to lasting, positive results. In plain view of the public, those performances competed on a massive scale with and responded to larger political performances of state power, from clandestine kidnapping to public displays of military might, outside of the theater, encouraging spectators to reinterpret displays of dictatorial authority and to ally themselves with nontheatrical, as well as theatrical, dissident performance.<sup>106</sup> Of the many political plays performed under the dictatorship—most of which were performed in small, private, or cabaret theaters, or even in people's homes—one stands out in particular. In 1980, Teatro Municipal de San Martín, one of the largest, publicly funded theaters on Avenida Corrientes (the Argentine equivalent of Broadway), premiered *Hamlet*. For the first time, it was translated directly from the original English into the Argentine dialect of Spanish. Directed by the award-winning and infamously provocative director Omar Grasso, the production starred Alfredo Alcón, widely regarded as one of the most important Argentine actors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>107</sup> Despite its high profile, public presence, and government-funded budget, the production quickly became recognized as one of the most vicious critiques of the junta.<sup>108</sup> This *Hamlet* became the vehicle for the articulation of the new memory nation that imagined the citizens as the inheritors of the collective memory of the atrocities committed by the Junta in those seven years and proposed new modes of being centered around questions of remembering the disappeared, seeking justice, and arguing for human rights. The Argentine example is particularly modern compared to the Mexican case study, but a brief overview of modern

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<sup>106</sup> Ana Elena Puga, "Introduction," in *Memory, Allegory, and Testimony in South American Theater*, n.d., 1.

<sup>107</sup> "Omar Grasso murió ayer," *La Nación*, May 30, 2001, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/308748-omar-grasso-murio-ayer>; "Alfredo Alcón: a cara limpia," *La Nación*, March 20, 2005, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/688540-alfredo-alcon-a-cara-limpia>.

<sup>108</sup> Ah, the glories of the cultural capital of Shakespeare that allows it to be subversive to the faces of the oppressors.

political culture in Argentina highlights that the new memory-nation has indeed been created, and citizens have begun to act in accordance with their new political identities.

### Argentina Before the Dictatorship

In the case of Argentina, political time can be demarcated into six Level-One, three Level-Two, and one Level-Three change, which map onto the established periods of Argentine political history. The first Level-Two shift occurred with the consolidation of the Argentine Republic in 1862, transforming the government from the chaotic period of nation-state formation to the oligarchic republic. The adoption of the Sáenz Peña Law allowing for universal male suffrage, mandatory voting, and secret ballots led to the election of Hipólito Yrigoyen and the ascendancy of the Unión Cívica Radical party (Radical Civic Union, UCR) in 1916. This marked the first regime degeneration and regeneration. That Level-One cycle ended when José Félix Uriburu staged the first coup d'état of the Argentine Republic in 1930.<sup>109</sup> The third Level-Two cycle began on 17 October 1945 with the Day of Loyalty, a mass protest calling for the release of Juan Domingo de Perón, and the founding of the Peronist movement. Perón became the voice of the working class, revolutionized Argentine politics, and finally transitioned Argentina away from the agro-export economic model. His populist movement was so successful that the Iron Law of Argentine Politics, “only Peronists can win in free and open elections” remained unbroken until the end of the 1976 military Dictatorship. Though Perón dominates Argentine politics, his rise to power did not constitute a Level-Three reset because the culture of violence, repression, and military takeovers of the government persisted. Perón was ousted by a coup in

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<sup>109</sup> Tulia Falleti, “Argentina Part 1: Nation-State Consolidation and Middle-Class Political Incorporation” (PSCI 213: Latin American Politics, University of Pennsylvania, September 26, 2016).

1955 and went into exile. He could only come back in 1973. He was reelected and died a year later. The Peronist movement came to a crisis at the end of the first era of Argentine politics: the military violently intervened, overthrew Peron's widow and successor, Isabel, and instituted the most violently oppressive dictatorial regime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Americas.<sup>110</sup>

Although the political history preceding the 1976 coup can be divided into units of political time, the period, especially the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was a continually intensifying cycle of "crisis and collective action;" citizenship became defined by one's participation in huge popular movements or opposition to them.<sup>111</sup> Those in power faced ever-escalating, violent conflict until they were toppled and the political crisis shifted fortunes to the awaiting party. According to the Argentine literary figure and political activist David Viñas, the history of Argentina can be characterized as "a history: more military than civil of the wars of independence, passing from civil wars and the Conquest of the Desert of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the village itself."<sup>112</sup> The last century in Argentina has been marked by economic crises that devolve into militaristic political crises and vice versa, creating an atmosphere of "crisis, instability, and uncertainty."<sup>113</sup> From 1930 (the first dictatorship) to 1983 (the sixth and last dictatorship), the political system oscillated between populist democratic regimes that engaged in

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<sup>110</sup> Tulia Falleti, "Argentina Part 2: Peronism" (PSCI 213: Latin American Politics, University of Pennsylvania, September 28, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> Kelsey M. Jost-Creegan, "Debts of Democracy: Framing Issues and Reimagining Democracy in Twenty-First Century Argentine Social Movements," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 30 (2017), 170.

<sup>112</sup> Hans-Otto Dill, "The Riders Get off the Horse: David Viñas and the Demise of the Authoritarian Argentine Military," in *Post-Authoritarian Cultures: Spain and Latin America's Southern Cone*, ed. Luis Martin-Estudillo and Roberto Ampuero (Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 35. The Conquest of the Desert refers to the barbaric 1870s campaign directed by General Julio Argentina Roca to establish Argentine control over the Patagonian pampas that captured and massacred the indigenous people. Rory Carroll, "Argentinian Founding Father Recast as Genocidal Murderer," *The Guardian*, January 13, 2011.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

vote buying and dictatorships with no sequential transition between one democratically elected leader and another.<sup>114</sup> In the mind of Viñas, the military was “the previous and the permanent: it proceed[ed] the Nation and [was] the substance of the Nation.”<sup>115</sup> Most presidents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had served in the military; and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the military was the final source of authority. Indeed, the military that had supported President Yrigoyen during his violent worker suppression efforts from 1920–22, called “The Tragedy in Patagonia,” was made of the same officials that overthrew and imprisoned him in 1930 for his liberal economic policies.<sup>116</sup> This pattern of cooperation and coup lead to the cycle of military dictatorships and democratic regimes.

#### Nacionalismo: the Definition of Citizenship

Before the 1976 coup, Argentine political identity revolved around violence. The memory-nation of Argentina for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was defined by the inheritance of military, paramilitary, and militaristic action. Citizenship, therefore, was equally violent. This way of thinking materialized into a political movement that dominated politics: the anti-democratic “*Nacionalismo*” that defined political identity within the memory-nation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their members were comprised of fascists, wealthy conservatives, and intellectuals who believed that they “were heirs to a military civilization...grounded on Christian teachings, Greek philosophy, and Roman order.”<sup>117</sup> The movement was part of a cultural tradition shaped primarily by the Catholic Church that arose in response to rapid social change. The

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*; Tulia Falleti, “Argentina Part 2: Peronism.”

<sup>115</sup> David Viñas, *Horseriders*, quoted in Dill, 37–38.

<sup>116</sup> Falleti, “Argentina Part 1: Nation-State Consolidation and Middle-Class Political Incorporation.”

<sup>117</sup> David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (University of California Press, 1993), xix.



Nationalists—whose ranks included not only generals, paramilitaries, dissident guerrillas, and torturers, but also clerics, poets, historians, and journalists—shaped national agenda. They directed politics; Nationalist ideas “[became] firmly rooted in national policies.”<sup>118</sup> In every reset of Level-one political time, the Nationalists played a role in either enforcing or attempting to prevent that change. They first appeared in the 1880s to fight against the efforts to expand state-funded education; they fought against labor unions in the 1910s and contributed directly to the 1930 collapse of popular democracy; and, they attempted to prevent Perón’s ascension in the 1940s, though many Nationalists later joined the Peronist movement. Most important, their efforts to conduct a “crusade of moral purification and defense of the national soul” lead directly to the Dictatorship of 1976.<sup>119</sup> These were the powerful political actors that wrestled for control of the cycles of political development, and eventually won. Of course, not every citizen was a Nationalist, but their methods became the guide for political action.

In the lead up to the ’76 coup, the Nationalist influence transcended right and left wing ideology to become all-pervasive. Their influence became a central defining facet of Argentine citizenship because they held positions of power throughout all levels and ideologies of government. During the 1960s and 70s, they infiltrated right and left-wing Peronist movements, the conservatives that fought against Perón’s re-election, and the military that attempted to quash the Peronists. The violent left-wing guerrilla Peronists, the *Montoneros*, evoked nationalist strategies.<sup>120</sup> They, and other small groups who saw Peronism as a means to revolution, attempted to achieve their goals not only with political persuasion and activism, but also by

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<sup>118</sup> Raúl Alfonsín quoted in Rock, 233.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, xx–xxi, xix.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 231, 266.

murder, kidnapping, bombing, and attacks on the state security forces.<sup>121</sup> The highly authoritarian command structure of the *Montoneros* fostered a system in which “two symmetrical military totalitarianisms were confronting one another.”<sup>122</sup> On all sides, the Nationalists made “national identity into a simple-minded absolute value,” a violent zero-sum game, and warped “the conflicts that were inevitable in a highly complex society into an artificial, straight-laced [authoritarian] uniformity.”<sup>123</sup> The coup was an outcome of a gradual substitution of violence for politics that had begun in the 1930s, but had roots in the military action of the early days of the Republic. This would change after the 1976 coup.

#### The Dictatorship: Triggering Level-Three change

This break and the shattering of the illusion of democracy in 1976 forced a reset of the political sphere and the forging of a new memory-nation founded on the collective memory of the Dictatorship; it was far more violent and authoritarian than anything that had come before and pushed citizens too far with policies dependent on mass human rights violations. It was “the greatest and most savage tragedy” of Argentine history.<sup>124</sup> To the members of the military junta—many of who were Nationalists—the coup was a historical imperative and the only way to preserve their identity as a “free civilized society.”<sup>125</sup> The generals drew on Nationalist eschatology to portray themselves as “Christian commanders leading struggle to extirpate the heretics and convert unbelievers.”<sup>126</sup> Those ‘unbelievers’ included communists, Peronists, and all

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<sup>121</sup> Argentine National Commission on Disappeared People, “Nunca Más” (Faber and Faber, 1986), xi.

<sup>122</sup> Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, 219.

<sup>123</sup> Raúl Alfonsín, quoted in Rock, 233.

<sup>124</sup> Rock, xiii.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

other “subversives”—anyone who disagreed with their policies. The junta, convinced of the failures of the bureaucratic economic policies that had been in place since Perón’s first presidency, implemented a neoliberal, Christian process of national political, cultural, and economic reorganization, or the *Proceso*.<sup>127</sup> In the seven-year course of the Dictatorship, around 30,000 people were disappeared—kidnapped by usually anonymous members of the military or state police and taken to clandestine prisons where they were tortured and/or killed. Women, especially, were targeted. By virtue of their involvement in guerrilla activities or mere association with fellow “subversives,” they were viewed as violating the proper Christian role of nurturing the national family. They were often subject to rape within the clandestine prisons; their children (whether the products of rape or taken women who were pregnant when they were kidnapped) were given to ‘proper’ Argentine families that would raise them in accordance with the values of the junta.<sup>128</sup> The official response was that no one knew what had happened. The leader of the junta, Rafael Videla stated, “it is a mystery, a *desaparecido*, a non-entity, it is not here: they are neither dead nor alive, they disappeared.”<sup>129</sup> The government, in fact, refused to recognize any involvement in the disappearances until twelve years after the dictatorship; retired naval officer Adolfo Scilingo broke the military pact of silence and admitted to participating in abduction, torture, and the murder of the *desaparecidos*.

This ultimately U.S.-designed process was made easier by a general culture of silence, which contributed to the mass scale of the atrocities:

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<sup>127</sup> Tulia Falleti, “Types Authoritarianism and Legacies” (PSCI 213: Latin American Politics, University of Pennsylvania, October 31, 2016).

<sup>128</sup> David William Foster, “Intellectuals, Queer Culture, and Post-Military Argentina,” in *Post-Authoritarian Cultures: Spain and Latin America’s Southern Cone*, ed. Luis Martin-Estudillo and Roberto Ampuero (Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 219.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Ana Ros, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* / (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 15.

“State terrorism is a process, not a single event. The process begins when a majority of the population is eager to see the end of violence and shares some ideas about which groups are responsible.... Exhausted by years of public atrocities, the population is prepared to believe a government that promises peace. Of those who are imprisoned or disappear, there is a widespread belief that “they must have done something.”<sup>130</sup>

The systematic repression utilized the fatigue of a militant citizenship in order to destroy the solidarity bonds and antiestablishment ideas that had formed during Perón’s presidencies. Once opposition became an unspoken crime, a culture of fear ensured that those who were not weeded out by the security forces adhered to the new form of citizenship that the officials enforced. The violence of the Dictatorship brought about a crisis of political identity that fostered a Nationalist, anti-party-affiliation citizenship that hinged on fears about state violence.

Like in Mexico, the oppressive forces in Argentina were deeply connected to anglophile nations. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America, most domestic politics were directly influenced by U.S. efforts to halt the spread of communism. First, all of the military leaders who were part of the junta had been trained at the Army School of the Americas, a U.S. military institution in Panama, where students were instructed in a Pentagon-created curriculum that focused on clandestine activities, torture, coercion, and, most-importantly, anti-communism. Second, true to the training of the leaders, the specific actions of the dictatorship were directly related to a messianic, U.S.-allied fight against internal leftist subversives. Although Argentina had no real communist party, the disappearances were part of a so-called “war on terrorism” against armed leftist groups—the “subversives.”<sup>131</sup> The junta began to reorganize the national economic systems along neoliberal lines, strengthening its alliance with the pro-capitalist

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<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Patricia Marchak, *God’s Assassins. Stet Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens’s University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>131</sup> Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*, A Century Foundation Book (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 111.

government of the U.S. In fact, Schamis 1991 argued that the dictatorship was particularly violent not only because of the escalating culture of political violence that led to its inception, but also because it was attempting to replace the popular statist economic policies with harsh neoliberal reforms in the style of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Brutal state coercion “and neoconservative economics were complementary dimensions of the process of restructuring.”<sup>132</sup> The actions of the junta were directly related to the U.S.-controlled anti-communist, counterinsurgency policies in Latin America

Beyond realizing U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, the repressive efforts of regime were reinforced by direct U.S. action. Fearing “another Cuba,” U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger agreed with this approach. He saw the authoritarian regimes in Argentina as bulwarks against the disorder in countries under violent siege by radical, antidemocratic, and anti-market forces. In his eyes, the reality of the Cold War impelled the United States to maintain a constructive relationship with the regimes in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America. As Sikkink 2004 cogently argues, the vision of Gerald Ford’s administration essentially gave the green light to fight terrorism without concern for human rights or the rule of law. Kissinger said to the Argentine ambassador to the U.S. in a meeting, “Look, our basic attitude is that we would like you to succeed. I have an old-fashioned view that friends ought to be supported. What is not understood in the United States is that you have a civil war...we won’t cause you unnecessary difficulties.”<sup>133</sup> There is no evidence for direct U.S. involvement in or promotion of the 1976 coup (unlike the Chilean coup in 1973). Nevertheless, the Argentine military junta correctly believed that they could depend on the U.S. to support their war against armed guerilla groups.

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<sup>132</sup> Hector E. Schamis, “Reconceptualizing Latin American Authoritarianism in the 1970s: From Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism to Neoconservatism,” *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 2 (1991): 210.

<sup>133</sup> Sikkink, xiv.

Finally, following the 1976 coup, the repressive regimes in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay joined together to institute an anti-communist plan assisted by the CIA. Called Operation Condor, this joint effort to eliminate covert subversives in all of the countries received financing, training, and occasional assistance from the U.S national security organizations.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, though the brutality of the dictatorship was perpetuated by Argentines against Argentines, the oppressive forces cannot be divorced from their association with the anti-communist efforts of the U.S. that permeated Latin America in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### New Citizens: From Madres to *Hamlet*

The junta's attempts to enforce their new political culture, however, failed. Under the oppression of the Junta, several voices rose to protest their civil and human rights abuses, and their illegitimate possession of the government. Mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared began to band together to ask the government what had happened to their children. Within their prescribed roles as Christian mothers in a nuclear, national family, they made space to protest the atrocities of the government and founded one of the most successful human rights advocacy organizations in the Americas: the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. They marched on government institutions with their heads covered by white handkerchiefs supposed to represent their missing children's diapers. The cloths at once "made [them] feel closer to [their] children" and

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<sup>134</sup> McSherry, J. Patrice, "Operation Condor: Deciphering the U.S. Role," Global Policy Forum, July 2001, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/168/28173.html>.

transformed a symbol of traditional motherhood into a potent icon of political dissidence.<sup>135</sup> The threat of arrest drove them to use rosaries to communicate their meeting times: “Hail Mary, full of grace (Monday at 5:30 we’ll meet at the Ideal) the Lord is with Thee.”<sup>136</sup> Under the protection of the eye of international press during the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, they loudly protested the disappearance of their children. Instead of broadcasting the World Cup opening, the press sent footage of the protest to their home offices. The junta was clearly not entirely successful at creating a culture of terrified silence and obedience. Rather, they provided the rhetorical cover for the protest their own atrocities: the emphasis on the maternal role of women by the junta became the symbol of the most successful protest movement. These women still gather at the obelisk in front of the seat of executive authority, the Casa Rosada, on Thursdays at five pm to protest in the name of the children with whom they still have not been reunited.

At the same time, theater practitioners in Buenos Aires carved their own space of protest. The intersection of political and aesthetic changes developed into a distinctly new voice of protest. As Argentine director Eugenio Barba noted, dramatic performance endows performers with the “possibility of changing ourselves and, therefore, changing society.”<sup>137</sup> Directors, playwrights, and theorists from Aristotle to Henrik Ibsen to Bertolt Brecht agreed that theater had a potent political power to drive change. Despite their passionate writings, it is impossible to determine, with certainty, to what extent a significant number of spectators were moved, or unmoved, by a given production, and to what extent the experiences of spectatorship translated into a concrete difference in thoughts and/or action outside of the theater. It is not my aim to

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<sup>135</sup> Hebe de Bonafini and Matilde Sánchez, “The Madwomen at the Plaza de Mayo,” in *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, The Latin America Readers (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2002), 435.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>137</sup> Montez, *Memory, Transitional Justice, and Theater*, 3.

answer the eternal question, “do dissident plays change people’s minds and behavior, or do they at best provide comfort to the already converted?”<sup>138</sup> I do not pretend to know the answer or, at least, how to seek the answer using empirical data.<sup>139</sup> My purpose here, rather, is to understand how personal and collective history and political experience entered into the dramatic and theatrical process that is “the creation of dramatic worlds that respond to and revise the ‘real’ world<sup>140</sup>

However, imagine that the production struck a cord with each member of the audience that saw it, and that each member understood what the show was arguing. The production was mounted at the Teatro San Martín in the Martín Coronado Salon, which seats a maximum of 1049 people. If the show had a standard run of three months in addition to its revival the next year, which we can assume was also a three-month run, and performed only three nights a week, which is standard practice now in Argentina, that means that 75,528 people saw the performance, or 7% of the population of Buenos Aires. For comparison, *Hamilton* sold roughly 10,700 tickets a week in 2017 in New York, divided by 6 performances, is 1,783 tickets per night, times three nights if it had been Argentina, times four weeks, times three months, is 64,200 people seeing the performance. That is only 6% of the population in Buenos Aires. Given the amount to which people still discuss this seminal performance and the general popularity of Shakespeare in Argentina, we can assume this production was highly successful. Furthermore, in Argentina,

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<sup>138</sup> Puga, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>139</sup> “Teatro General San Martín,” *Wikipedia*, December 27, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Teatro\\_General\\_San\\_Mart%C3%ADn&oldid=756911503](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Teatro_General_San_Mart%C3%ADn&oldid=756911503); “Hamilton Broadway Grosses - 2017,” accessed February 4, 2018, <https://www.broadwayworld.com/grossesshow.cfm?show=HAMILTON&year=2017>; “Take Pardo, Paz, “(More than) Five: The Argentine Production Model,” *HowlRound*, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://howlround.com/take-more-than-five-the-argentine-production-model-0>.

<sup>140</sup> Jean Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater Under the Dictatorship*, Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 2001., 9.



theater is far more culturally important than in the U.S. According to actor, director, and writer Rafael Sregelburd, in 2001 when the Argentine government defaulted on its loans and over half the population was living under the poverty line, audiences were showing up at the theaters with vegetables to barter for tickets. Ultimately, these numbers depend on the side of the theater. Teatro San Martin can physically seat more people than the Richard Rodgers Theater, but importance of this argument is that we can with confidence assume that the play was popular enough to have filled the hall nightly. Furthermore, the play was recorded and broadcast on television to a national audience, which multiplied the number of people who saw this subversive work.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, like in Mexico, this production created a kind of collective spectatorship that influences the development of the new citizenship in the memory-nation.

Furthermore, watching this play was a fundamentally political act. Given its subversive nature, after the first week, those who bought tickets understood that they could potentially be disappeared for participating in subversive activities. Thus, attending the play was a form of protest. Given its inherent danger, we can assume with some certainty that the play was thought provoking. This *Hamlet* served as a launching point for the production of collective memory and the redefinition of citizenship in the new memory-nation by bringing questions about the memory of the dead, the proper method to seek justice, and the importance of individual rights to the forefront of conversations. The themes emphasized in the appropriated Hamlet currently define modern Argentine political participation, especially the issue of memory: providing a compelling method to strike a balance between “not [turning] the horror into a religion, but also not [forgetting] what happened.”<sup>142</sup> In order to fully understand the impact of the dictatorship on

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<sup>141</sup> There are records of this film but I cannot actually find it anywhere.

<sup>142</sup> Osvaldo Soriano, qtd. in Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater Under the Dictatorship*, 13.

the Argentine *polis* in political terms, we must first understand how this *Hamlet*—alongside the many other native plays—prodded spectators to remember, speak, and lament their inability to speak or meditated on their collective personal and political losses, devise messages of resistance, and begin to reconstruct collective memories.<sup>143</sup> Unlike the other plays, *Hamlet* brought this kind of resistance out of living room theaters and into the national spotlight. Of course, *Hamlet* cannot be credited with the destruction of the dictatorship and the democratization of Argentina—that is due more to the failure of the junta’s monetarist economic project and their utterly embarrassing loss of the Falkland/Malvinas War that destroyed their credibility and led the business community to end their alliance—but the play served a central role in providing the new vocabulary for citizenship in Argentina. Assisted by this *Hamlet*, political citizenship in the memory-nation and the image of the ideal citizen transformed from a guerilla urban fighter in a militaristic quasi-democracy defined by military rule and populism to a non-violent vocal protester and disrupter charged with defending the memory of the dead and seeking redress for human rights violations.

#### Theater Practice in Argentina.

The success of the 1980 *Hamlet* is uniquely related to a long practice of cultural control in Argentina. Centuries of militarism and authoritarian practices have directly influenced the country’s artistic production.<sup>144</sup> Two paired issues define the repression of theater in Buenos Aires: censorship and self-censorship. Theater was subjected to less censorial control under the 1976 dictatorship because of its limited distribution compared to film and television, and productions were generally left alone if they took place in nonmainstream theaters. The junta

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<sup>143</sup> Puga, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>144</sup> Graham-Jones, 16.

preferred to ignore political productions rather than draw additional attention by censoring them.<sup>145</sup> Generally, the audiences for non-mainstream political productions were relatively self-selecting and, therefore, already in agreement with the political argument of the production.<sup>146</sup> When subjected to censorship, productions were either cancelled after multiple performances, or during the rehearsal process at the earliest. Very few plays were prohibited outright; there were only a few theater closures that lasted a couple of days, disrupting performance schedules. More often, seats and costumes would be displaced without warning under the pretense of “inventory checks.” Practitioners were subjected to anonymous telephone calls and threatening unsigned letters. Unofficial blacklists circled, banning some directors and actors from work in television and film. Some practitioners were also disappeared. Additionally, jeering audience plants and smoke bombs often disrupted performances. Theaters were either burned or bombed late at night. All of these acts, however, were sporadic. The line between acceptable and unacceptable theater was kept purposefully blurred so that the practitioners would limit their own work out of fear of government reaction.<sup>147</sup> According to theater scholar Jean Graham-Jones, by not explicitly defining prohibited behaviors, censorship extended “itself figuratively to the totality of...social actions and [interpolated practitioners into] society as the always possible receivers and protagonists of some guilty action, collective and indeterminate but experienced individually.”<sup>148</sup> The uncertainty and looming threat of punishment for an undefined illegal act drove the development of self-censorship, either the anticipation and avoidance of particularly polemical topics or the constant apologies for possibly ‘subversive’ content within works.

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<sup>145</sup> Graham-Jones, 18.

<sup>146</sup> If audience members participated in any so-called subversive acts, it would most likely be due to their pre-existing political beliefs, not because an avant-garde production drove them to act.

<sup>147</sup> Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater Under the Dictatorship*, 18.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

Obviously unable to treat political themes explicitly, the alternative practitioners developed a culture of countercensorship, which sought “to disarticulate the repressive discursive system in order to generate a discourse censored by that very system.”<sup>149</sup> Political messages were hidden within harmless texts through parody, quotes from canonical texts inserted to carry a message, double entendre, or breaking up particularly political sections of speech between multiple voices.<sup>150</sup> These works had to perform a delicate balancing act between saying too much and saying too little, between what James C. Scott calls “reproducing hegemonic appearances” and subverting the rules of the dictatorship openly.<sup>151</sup> The most important vocabulary of the counter censorship was the use of family drama as a metaphor for multi-level power relationships.<sup>152</sup> Actions that took place in the halls of government or the streets of Buenos Aires were reenacted in family dynamics for the enjoyment of those who understood the code.

### Shakespeare in Argentina

It is within this underground world of hidden clues and threats of attack that we must understand the *Hamlet* in 1980. Unlike the possibly subversive newly developed productions, *Hamlet* is William Shakespeare’s *opus magna*: the best play written by the world’s best playwright. As the Argentine translator of the 1980 *Hamlet*, Luis Gregorich wrote, “it is probable that it is *the play par excellence*, impossible to compare to any other past, present, or future.” He continued to proclaim, “in *Hamlet*, the two traditions, that of belief and that of dramatic practice, are magnificently fused in the creation of the most interesting character that we have known in

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>150</sup> Graham-Jones, 21.

<sup>151</sup> Qtd. in Puga, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>152</sup> Graham-Jones, 21.

theater up to now.”<sup>153</sup> *Hamlet*, by its nature is protected from censorship. It carries too much cultural capital. Inspired by Marxist formulations of capital, the idea of cultural capital posits that, like money, certain cultural practices are ascribed more worth than others and, thus, separate social groups. Activities like the attending the opera or reading Shakespeare mark the upper classes from the lower classes, and the unwitting proletariat strives in vain to mimic the culture of the bourgeoisie. Determined to show their legitimacy to the international community, dictators cannot censor productions of renowned, highbrow classics. In their mind, performances of Shakespeare are the mark of successful, civilized, western nations. Furthermore, *Hamlet* defined a long-standing tradition of Shakespeare in Argentina. It was the first Shakespeare production to arrive in Buenos Aires, in 1821. Titular actor and translator, Peruvian Luis Ambrosio Morante, presented a Spanish version of Jean Francois Ducis’ 18<sup>th</sup> century adaptation of *Hamlet*.<sup>154</sup> In 1871, Argentine writer and politician Pedro Goyena asked, “And who could show us a spirit which has penetrated more deeply into the abyss of the human soul, leaving us with revelations which are more surprising than those of our own nature, than the admirable author of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*?”<sup>155</sup> Shakespeare’s works, and *Hamlet*, especially, permeated early political culture in Argentina, which points to its larger cultural role. Furthermore, Eugenio María Hostos, a Puerto Rican writer and educator, traveled to Argentina in 1873 and, inspired by Argentine politicians and educators passion for Shakespeare, published one of the most

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<sup>153</sup> Luis Gregorich, “La Vigencia de Hamlet,” in *Hamlet*, 2006th ed. (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1983), 16.

<sup>154</sup> Ducis’ 1769 translation was the first translation of a Shakespeare play. In adapting it from English to French, however, he also “improved” the play by removing characters, altering the entire plot and backstory, and rewriting the ending. It was wildly popular and ran for 82 years at the Comédie Française; Michèle Willems, “Hamlet in France,” accessed February 4, 2018, [http://triggs.djvu.org/global-language.com/ENFOLDED/BIBL/\\_\\_\\_HamFra.htm](http://triggs.djvu.org/global-language.com/ENFOLDED/BIBL/___HamFra.htm).

<sup>155</sup> Carlos Drocchi, “Shakespeare in Argentina” (World Shakespeare Conference: Transcultural Shakespeare, Translation, Performance, and Adaptation, London, August 1, 2016).

important critical essays on *Hamlet* in South America in the same year. He wrote in the introduction, "...we will attend to a revolution. *Hamlet* is a revolution. A soul in crisis, a spirit in progress, a moral revolution, an inner struggle to make progress the triumph of the being in itself; the cataclysm of a soul: this is the most worthy sight that can be offered to the human conscience. This is the performance that Shakespeare offers us in *Hamlet*."<sup>156</sup> Shakespeare's great tragedy of interiority clearly held a prominent place in the culture of Argentina if it inspired such a passionate response. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the works of Jorge Luis Borges, the most famous Argentine author, continued the attention to Shakespeare. His interpretations of Shakespeare were significant contributions to the Argentine Shakespeare tradition. Additionally, a great variety of Shakespeare's works were staged in Buenos Aires. The Teatro San Martín became an important site for the productions beginning in the 1960s. Yet, every production's play script was drawn from French sources of Shakespeare, usually translated into Castilian Spanish.<sup>157</sup>

In 1980, everything changed. Luis Gregorich translated his *Hamlet* into *castellano*, the Argentine dialect, prompting a localization of Shakespeare. Gregorich's *Hamlet* began a process of "transculturation." Transculturation refers to the evolution of theories and cultural practices and how they travel and function in different contexts, but also "how the socio-economic and political power of one culture also impacts, without altogether determining, another."<sup>158</sup> Coined in 1940 by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, transculturation denominates, among other cultural changes, the fusion of the indigenous and the foreign to create a new, original cultural product. In its essence, transculturation is a political process that involves shifting socio-political

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<sup>156</sup> Drocchi.

<sup>157</sup> Versani Galéry and Stegh Camati, "Shakespeare in Latin America: Appropriation Politics and Performance Practices," 81–84.

<sup>158</sup> Taylor, "Transculturating Transculturation," 90.

borders and collective and individual identity.<sup>159</sup> It reframes politics and aesthetics to assail, engage, challenge, and prod the political status quo. In creating a revolutionary cultural product, by localizing Shakespeare, Gregorich not only made it “accessible to [Argentine] sensibilities,” as was his professed intention, but also fashioned a powerful new platform that fused the cultural capital of Shakespeare with the critical project of the counter censorship movement.<sup>160</sup> This action explicitly launched the critiques of the underground movement into the public and vilified the junta safely from behind the walls of Shakespeare.

### The 1980 *Hamlet*<sup>161</sup>

Like the critical counter censorship works, *Hamlet* to Gregorich was first and foremost a play about the individual and family conflict. Although Gregorich promised that the *Hamlet* he created “had been transformed here as a different type of presenter, without betraying its original function,” his translation highlighted the play’s elements of political criticism and established new themes of nationalist action, political injustice, and collective memory that were acted out in a background of family drama.<sup>162</sup> Using the guise of family and Shakespeare, Gregorich took every opportunity to make the action clearly about fighting the Argentine dictatorship. Instead of the opening scene of *Hamlet* with the guard’s famous line, “who’s there?,” this Argentine *Hamlet* began with a prologue by Horatio: “Friends of this land and vassals of the king of

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<sup>159</sup> Taylor, 90–91.

<sup>160</sup> Luis Gregorich, “La Version,” in *Hamlet*, 2006th ed. (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1983), 17.

<sup>161</sup> This analysis would be made better by access to production photos, accounts of the audience, reviews, and interviews with the actors about the production, none of which have presented themselves to me in my numerous searches through and for archives.

<sup>162</sup> Gregorich, “La Version,” 18.

Denmark, good evening!”<sup>163</sup> Though he is merely copying a Shakespearean convention used in many other plays, Gregorich implicates the audience by making this parallel between the viewers, Argentine citizens, and their assumed roles, citizens of Denmark. From the opening lines of the play, it is quite clear that whatever is about to be depicted will affect the viewers directly. Immediately, every line and action on stage becomes a code for what the viewers experience in their lives outside of the theater. Furthermore, Gregorich made other significant changes to lines throughout Act I. Importantly, he edits Hamlet’s conversation with the Ghost. In the original script, Hamlet promises, “remember thee?/ Ay, though poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat/ In this distracted globe. Remember thee?”<sup>164</sup> In Gregorich’s script, Hamlet professes, “yes, yes, I will remember you, you can be sure. I swear to remember what passed in Denmark....”<sup>165</sup> Understanding themselves to be the citizens of Denmark, the audience should recognize that Hamlet is really saying, “I swear to remember what happened in Argentina.” After the dictatorship fell, political and collective memory as proof of the atrocities became one of the most important projects of the citizens of the renewed democracy. This mandate for memory is a key facet of current conceptions of citizenship. The most important inheritance of the dictatorship for Argentines is the need to remember the disappeared and their experiences in the dictatorship. Though the idea of collective political memory and the need to document atrocities did not begin with this production of *Hamlet*, this central facet of the new memory-nation citizenship is clearly conveyed.

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<sup>163</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, trans. Luis Gregorich, 2006th ed. (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1983), 23.

<sup>164</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 3rd edition (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), l. 1.5.95-97.

<sup>165</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1983, 33.



The argument for political action, including the construction of political memory, lay within a larger nationalist narrative about defense of the nation, which made the mandate to form collective memory a pro-Argentine act. In Horatio's opening monologue, Gregorich makes it clear that not only is something rotten in the state of Denmark, but that the testimony of the ghost is crucial for understanding the "destiny of Denmark, gravely threatened."<sup>166</sup> This assault on the monarchy—the assassination and usurpation of King Hamlet's throne—is more than just an attack on a family structure with political consequences; it is clearly an attack on Argentina vis-à-vis Denmark. Claudius is the dictator; the murdered King Hamlet is the ghost of democracy; and, the quest to remember and avenge him is the struggle for democratization. This theme is repeated throughout Gregorich's adaptation. The ghost says to Hamlet, "do not let injustice be empowered in Denmark" in place of the original, "let not the royal bed of Denmark be/ A couch for luxury and damned incest."<sup>167</sup> From the establishing scenes of the play, the plot clearly concerns a threat to the nation framed by the search to maintain the memory of injustice. In no uncertain terms, this Argentine *Hamlet* presented an individual besieged by political injustice and established the search to correct that injustice, anticipating the efforts of citizens after the dictatorship ended and, perhaps, mirroring the secret wishes of the audience members.

Having established the national impact of this political injustice in the first act, Gregorich crafted the other four acts of *Hamlet* to mirror Argentine political reality, either keeping Shakespeare's language or embellishing with his transformations. For example, Polonius' demand that guards follow Laertes to France to spy on him and spread false rumors at the beginning of Act II takes on a new meaning given that Gregorich implicated an audience constantly under state surveillance and living in a society where one rumor of subversive activity

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<sup>166</sup> Shakespeare, 24.

<sup>167</sup> Shakespeare, 33; Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2006, l. 1.5.82-83.

could see them disappeared. What originally seemed to be an example of Polonius' exhaustingly intrusive tendencies took on a deeper, more urgent connotation. Claudius and Gertrude's hiring of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet undergoes a similar transformation.<sup>168</sup>

Furthermore, Hamlet's question, "what crimes have we committed that fortune sent us to this prison?....Denmark is a prison," can be reconstrued as a direct reference to the clandestine prisons in Argentina where the disappeared were held and, often, tortured.<sup>169</sup> More importantly, Gregorich adds a phrase to Hamlet's "what a rogue and peasant slave am I" monologue:

"Oh, my vengeance! I, the son of a dear murdered father, only know to appoint myself and speak poorly like a prostitute. *This is all I can do to benefit my country!* How disgusting! Up, brain! ....the actors will present something like the death of my father and the disgrace of Denmark...."

Gregorich, *Hamlet*, 49, emphasis mine to show the added portion.

The original reads:

"That I, the son of a dead murdered  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words  
And fall a-cursing like a very drab  
A stallion! Fie upon't, foh! About my brains!  
....I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle...."

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.518-31.

Hamlet's lamentation that he is failing to support his country and the connection between the king's murder and an embarrassment to Denmark are notably absent from the original script.

Here, again, Gregorich continues to reinforce the nationalist project of this search for revenge.

The audience, inducted citizens of Denmark, were clearly supposed to understand that Hamlet represented an Everyman who sought to correct the political injustice and national

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<sup>168</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1983, 35, 37.

<sup>169</sup> Shakespeare, 43.

embarrassment that was the illegitimate usurpation of power through violence: a military coup. Horatio, again breaking from the traditional role, ended the play with the same invocation with which he opened: “friends of this land and vassals of the King of Denmark, good night.” The crimes against Hamlet were not only theatrical crimes represented on stage, but supposed to be interpreted as crimes against the Argentine populace. The assassination of the King, like the disappearances, was felt on a personal level but had a national importance. In an interview 26 years later, the then-artistic director of the San Martín, Kive Staiff, confidently stated, “the public understood it marvelously.”<sup>170</sup>

### Argentina Post-Hamlet.

Since the fall of the dictatorship in 1983, Shakespeare’s plays have been crucial to securing a new democratic culture. The plays act as a unifying cultural icon, a site of co-spectatorship, and a forum to debate dictatorship and post-dictatorship narratives.<sup>171</sup> As Argentine author Carlos Gamerro argues, it is “no accident that the literature of many of [the children of the disappeared]...has been written in the shadows of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.”<sup>172</sup> Hamlet reenacts the same process that the post-dictatorship citizens must grapple with: “Hamlet doubts. He constructs—justice, truth, and revenge—by doubting. And his memory is always,

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<sup>170</sup> Alberto Catena, “Kive Staiff: ‘Como gestor soy un buen crítico de teatro,’” *Picadero: Publicación Cuatrimestral del Instituto Nacional del Teatro*, 2006, 6. I have yet to find discussions from the time period about this *Hamlet*, or even a review in a newspaper because none of the major papers have digital archives going back this far. Unfortunately, this seems to be the only proof of the public’s reaction to the play.

<sup>171</sup> Fundación Shakespeare Argentina, “Shakespeare in Argentina: From Dictatorship to Democracy,” *Shakespeare & Beyond*, January 5, 2018, <https://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2018/01/05/shakespeare-argentina/>.

<sup>172</sup> Carlos Gamerro, “Hamlet and the Disappeared,” *English PEN*, May 7, 2015, <https://www.englishpen.org/pen-atlas/hamlet-and-the-disappeared/>. I am still trying to track down more information on this assertion.

relentlessly, at work.”<sup>173</sup> He strives to remember his father, and honor him. Shakespeare’s work presents a way past the dictatorship that would be realized during the transitional justice period. Beyond the obvious metaphors and call to action that *Hamlet* presented to its audience, the general plot of the play was crucial for the transformation of society because it presented a new way of thinking. Leading up to the 1976 coup, battle lines between civilians and military were not neatly drawn. Militarism was present in nearly every political party, and large sectors of society, especially the upper and middle class, supported the military’s takeover as a last resort to ending the country’s civil violence. *Hamlet*, in contrast, is fundamentally a play about an individual’s inability to take revenge and his perpetual search for the proper form of justified vengeance. The titular character does kill Polonius in a murderous passion; however, he stabs what he thinks to be a random stranger, neither knowing the man hiding in Gertrude’s chamber is Polonius nor suspecting that it is Claudius, the target of his revenge. As 20<sup>th</sup> century American author Denton Jaques Snyder eloquently comments, “Hamlet, acting blindly through impulse, slays the wrong one; the result is guilt. This warning, therefore, speaks from the rash act: Let no rational being give up control to impulse which cannot see, cannot distinguish, the nature of a deed. Man must, therefore, reflect before proceeding to action.”<sup>174</sup> This, of course, is Hamlet’s curse: he reflects too much; but redundant reflection provides a satisfying alternative to the violence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina. *Hamlet* presented an alternative to civil violence: thinking, searching for proof, the construction of memory, and justified death before a group of people who also agree on the condemned’s guilt (the dying Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet provide the three voices of consent needed for a conviction before a tribunal). This was exactly the process of the transitional justice. As Gamerro writes, “if the logic of revenge had paved the

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<sup>173</sup> Gamerro.

<sup>174</sup> Denton Jaques Snider, *The Shakespearian Drama* (Ticknor & Company, 1887), 320.

way to dictatorship, it could hardly be deployed again in order to unpave it once a line under that period had been drawn....why was not a single act of personal revenge perpetrated against those indirectly or directly responsible, who, unlike King Claudius, made no bones whatever about their crimes, and that without a trace of remorse?"<sup>175</sup> Argentina's first local *Hamlet* presented an alternate logic to the violence-weary population.

Though we cannot draw a direct line necessarily between the resolution to political injustice that *Hamlet* proposes and the specific legislation that was created after the fall of the dictatorship to judge the crimes of the participants, we can make a strong case for some sort of relationship. Since the dictatorship, Shakespeare has become part of political discourse. The previous presidents of Argentina Nestor and Christina Kirchner were frequently referred to by their opponents as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth; the newspaper *Página 12* regularly features political cartoons that rely on Shakespearean characters for political commentary; and, *Clarín*, another newspaper, frequently publishes editorials with Shakespearean character references.<sup>176</sup> In the public sphere, alternative theater groups now cannibalize Shakespeare to make political commentary, from a Richard III set in a concentration camp to a *Midsummer Night's Dream* with a utopian forest free of political corruption to a *King Lear* that portrayed the vicious and insidious cycle of power that defines modern Argentine politics still.<sup>177</sup>

#### A New Citizenship and Memory-Nation:

Through the assistance of *Hamlet*, the culture of silence, state terrorism, and Nationalist citizenship that the military junta worked to create yielded a powerful unintended consequence:

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<sup>175</sup> Gamarro.

<sup>176</sup> FSA, "Shakespeare in Argentina."

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

the rebirth of Argentine identity free of the culture of political violence that had plagued it in the century before. That rebirth was ultimately realized at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1983, the Dictatorship lost all legitimacy and, therefore, the ability to enforce the fear and silence they demanded. Their economic policies had brought the country to the brink of another financial crisis and their military had just embarrassingly lost the Falklands/Malvinas war to the British by woefully underestimating Margaret Thatcher's response to invasion. The rich landowners that had allied themselves with the military abandoned the junta and protests to bring back democracy swept the country.<sup>178</sup> Finally, the intense conflicts that had triggered the '76 coup led to a fragile, but nascent democracy. The military tradition of authoritarianism disappeared with the modern government and the armed forces were wrenched of any independent power and eventually subordinated to the elected executive.<sup>179</sup> As scholars Brenda Pereyra and Pablo Vommaro assert, "the political, social, economic, and cultural crises...transformed collective action in the country into a motor that had permitted the phoenix to rise from the ashes."<sup>180</sup>

For the state, the new vision of citizenship took the form of specific policy measures. Under pressure from the human rights community, the first democratic administration after the fall of the Dictatorship, led by Raúl Alfonsín, began large-scale trials of the military officials, despite their protestations. This made Argentina the first country in Latin America to conduct domestic trials for the human rights violations of the former regime. Furthermore, the crimes of the Argentine junta, along with the other dictatorships in Latin America, led to the codification

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<sup>178</sup> Dill, "The Riders Get off the Horse: David Viñas and the Demise of the Authoritarian Argentine Military," 54.

<sup>179</sup> Dill, 53.

<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Jost-Creegan, "Debts of Democracy," 172.

of disappearances as an international crime.<sup>181</sup> With the Commission of Investigation of the dictatorship and the Trials of the Military Junta, the official role of witness to the atrocities was born and, with it, the transition to democracy. In order to prevent the justification of repression, the junta trials attempted to depoliticize the *desaparecidos*, removing them from their previous affiliation with any political group. During the 80s, the figure of the disappeared that served to redignify democratic process also marked the definition of a citizenship deprived of meaningful militancy, at least as it was understood in the preceding years.<sup>182</sup> Their memory of the dictatorship became central to the narrative of Argentine identity and the national reckoning. The country's challenge, however, became uniting differing testimonies and accepting a holistic vision of the state terrorism. As political scientist Pilar Calveiro describes in her book *Política y/o violencia*,

“El asunto es ése: no acallan las voces discordantes con la propia sino sumarles para ir armado, en lugar de un puzzle en cada pieza tiene un solo lugar, una especie de calidoscopio que reconoce distintas figuras posibles.”<sup>183</sup>

*The trick is this: not to silence the discordant voices with your own, but rather to combine them to put together, in place of a puzzle with pieces that have only one place, a kind of kaleidoscope that recognizes multiple possible figures.*

The major project in the transition to democracy was to tease out the many experiences of the detained and attempt to compliment the vision of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo with their stories. To that end, the human rights group Memoria Abierta (Open Memory) created the first

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<sup>181</sup> Jost-Creegan, 172. Carlos Menem, Alfonsín's successor, stopped the trials. He also implemented various amnesty laws at the urging of the military. Eventually, the laws were overturned by Nestor Kirchner and the trials began again.

<sup>182</sup> Ros, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, 17.

<sup>183</sup> Ana Fornicinto, “Testimonial Narratives in the Argentine Post-Democracy: Survivors, Witnesses, and the Reconstruction of the Past,” in *Post-Authoritarian Cultures: Spain and Latin America's Southern Cone* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 77; the translation is my own.

oral archive that gathers testimonies about the dictatorship in an effort to reconstruct collective memory. Parsing through the “discordant voices” forced a transformation of political culture and a redefinition of what it meant to be Argentine, to have lived through the dictatorship, and to have been complicit in the culture of silence. These tortured figures of the disappeared, detached from their revolutionary project, became central cultural characters in the reconstruction of democracy. The cultural redemocratization was linked the respect for human rights that led to the trials and was established around the memory of this figure of the innocent *desaparecido*.<sup>184</sup> This is the exact argument for memory that *Hamlet* made. Thus, the project of all citizens—the mode of political being necessitated by the inheritance of the dictatorship—became to search for a streamlined collective memory of the disappeared and continue to seek justice within a human rights framework.

This transitional justice period was by no means smooth and universally accepted. In 1987, Final Point and Due Obedience Laws began to limit the people who could be accused of committing crimes associated with the dictatorship. On one hand, this was a result of pressure from the military. On another, it came from the efforts of some to shorten the process of making memory and seeking justice and move on to other matters. Alfonsín’s military advisor Jaime Malamud captured both aspects when he said, “Look, this is a fascist society. We have to change its authoritarian structure....and in the process we have to let a lot of people get away with [crimes].”<sup>185</sup> The Dirty War did happen, in some measure, because every sector of Argentine society allowed it to. Nonetheless, the generation that inherited the memory of the dictatorship

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<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Ana Fornicinto, “Testimonial Narratives in the Argentine Post-Democracy: Survivors, Witnesses, and the Reconstruction of the Past,” in *Post-Authoritarian Cultures: Spain and Latin America’s Southern Cone* (Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 92-93.

<sup>185</sup> Qtd in, Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture, Revised and Updated with a New Epilogue* (Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26,.



instead of having lived through it demanded further justice. Struggle for transitional justice continued and, even in the chaos of a terrible economic crisis, the Due Obedience and Final Point laws were declared unconstitutional by a federal judge in 2001, reopening the trials. In 2003, Nestor Kirchner was elected to the presidency, and in his first speech before Congress, which he reprised at the United Nations, he declared, “we are all sons and daughters of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo,” acknowledging them as the ultimate moral reserve of Argentine society.<sup>186</sup> The use of ‘ultimate moral reserve’ stands out particularly because it is the exact phrase that the military used to use to describe themselves. Thus, the symbol of peaceful resistance, the mandate to remember, and the ongoing search for justice became the icons of the fully formed citizenship in a new memory-nation.

We can see the result of this transformation in modern political events. The period of transitional justice, and crystallization of the memory-nation ensured that a broad societal commitment to civil liberties and an extensive infrastructure of civil society committed to their defense came into existence. Human rights organizations, media watchdogs, and civil society demanded that the government respect individual rights. The rhetoric used in fights for issues such as same-sex marriage (legalized in 2010) and abortion (strictly controlled and only allowed in cases of rape or if birth endangers the mother’s life, yet under discussion) was connected to frames of civil justice that arose as a direct result of the search for institutional, non-violent justice after the dictatorship, tapping into public emotion about the atrocities of the dictatorship and the disaster of neoliberal reform. Political rhetoric began to circulate centered on questions related to civil and individual rights; the definition of Argentine citizenship transformed from the Nationalist, quasi-fascist, 20<sup>th</sup> century paramilitary to the defender of human rights and

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<sup>186</sup> Qtd in, *Ibid* 245.

individual liberties. Again, this emphasis on non-violent, measured reactions was articulated in *Hamlet*.

Civil society has realized the changes for which Gregorich's *Hamlet* called. The repressive regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were replaced by others more open to the acts of individual and collective agency, which has expressed itself not only in formal political participation, but also in new grass-roots movements.<sup>187</sup> Most important are the social groups that organized around the creation of collective political memory—the promise that *Hamlet* makes at the beginning. Transitional justice—or “a multifaceted practice enacted through a combination of legislative action, judicial measures, and cultural production responding to outrage and calls for accountability after a period of repressive violence”—memory narratives, and cultural production are inextricably linked in post-dictatorship Argentina.<sup>188</sup> Theater scholars have long written about the extraordinary output of theater in Buenos Aires and the theater's engagement with memory and politics.<sup>189</sup> That discourse began with the 1980 *Hamlet*. Theater practitioners in Buenos Aires continued to create memory narratives designed to engage audiences in the politics of post-dictatorship, and after the remainder of the powerful military interfered in the transitional justice laws, forcing amnesty and a presidential resignation, civil and cultural production became the most important framework to explore the implications, effects, and emotions of the dictatorship.<sup>190</sup>

Citizenship in the post-dictatorship memory nation has further realized its demands for memory, justice, and non-violence through social accountability networks. General society and cultural products have become the site of popular political power since the fall of the

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<sup>187</sup> Puga, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>188</sup> Francesca Lessa, qtd. in Montez, *Memory, Transitional Justice, and Theater*, 5.

<sup>189</sup> Montez, 15, 12.

<sup>190</sup> Montez, 108, 7.

dictatorship. Despite democratic gains, scholars generally agree that both horizontal (governmental checks and balances) and vertical (voting) mechanisms of accountability in Latin America are weak.<sup>191</sup> Sumlovitz and Peruzzotti 2000 proposed a new model of accountability in Latin America: social accountability. It relies on citizen action aimed at overseeing political authorities and a redefined relationship between citizens and their elected representatives. The emergence of rights-oriented discourse and politics, media exposes of government scandals, social movements organized around demands for due process laws, and theater productions designed to critique all aspects of government, methods absent earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are only some of the examples of politics of social accountability.<sup>192</sup> Whether or not social accountability is as potent a force as its theorists believe, it does transform theater from a site of cultural production with political connotations to an official platform of the expression of political power.

In this tradition of social accountability and theaters as the site of protest, certain forms of public demonstration have become far more performative. The intertwined critique of government, memory making, and search for justice that these performances involve demonstrates the twin aspects of the new citizenship informed by the collective memory of the dictatorship. They are fundamentally connected to the new citizenship. Taylor 2003 describes in great detail loud, festive, and mobile acts of public shaming organized by the group H.I.J.O.S in Argentina. These sons and daughters of the disappeared, gather between three hundred and five hundred people together in guerilla performance that targets the criminals associated with the

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<sup>191</sup> Catalina Smulovitz and Enrique Peruzzotti, "Societal Accountability in Latin America," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 149.

<sup>192</sup> Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 147.

Dirty War. Called *escraches*, are carnivalesque protests that lead the participants directly to the home or office of a perpetrator or the site of a clandestine torture center.



*A truckload of protesters exhibit their signs and banners. The banner on the truck exclaims: 'If there is not justice, there will be an escrache.' Photos owned by H.I.J.O.S.*

Roughly a month before the *escrache*, H.I.J.O.S members will canvas a neighborhood in which the perpetrators live, handing out photographs and giving information. “Did they know that their neighbor was a torturer? How do they feel about working with him? Or serving him lunch? Or selling him cigarettes?”<sup>193</sup> They will plaster the walls of public spaces with posters. Then, Carrying giant puppets, military pigs-on-wheels, and at times huge placards with the photo ids of the disappeared, the H.I.J.O.S. members, human rights activists, and those who are incensed to learn that they live so close to torturers jump and sing through the streets, drawing as much attention to themselves as possible. When they reach their target, they will paint the repressor’s

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<sup>193</sup> Diana Taylor, “‘You Are Here,’ H.I.J.O.S. and the DNA of Performance,” in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (161-189: Duke University Press, 2003), 165.

name in yellow paint on the sidewalk in front of the building. The police (always forewarned) look on as the protesters peacefully go about making the crimes visible in an effort to rewrite the sociohistorical geography of Argentina.<sup>194</sup> Inspired by the protests of *Hamlet*, searching for collective memory and justice through performance has come to pervade all aspects of political protest. The 1980 *Hamlet* inaugurated a use of mainstream theater and theatricality to not only critique the government and demand collective action, but also its proposed solution has come to define citizenship in the memory-nation.<sup>195</sup>

Furthermore, society placed constraints on political behavior, preventing what before would have been happily ignored. Between 1999 and 2000, Argentina passed through its worst financial crisis in history. The economy shrank by 28% and 50% of the population lived under the poverty line. In 2001, the president, Fernando de la Rúa was forced to resign and fled the Casa Rosada in a helicopter. The country passed through five presidents in two weeks. In the 2001 midterms, 22% of voters cast blank ballots; in 2002, public confidence in the political parties had dropped to 4%, a record low. There was a widespread perception that the government had not only misdirected the country, but was unresponsive to voters' demands.<sup>196</sup> This crisis, however, instead of leading to a dictatorship, as it would have in the previous century, merely triggered the collapse of the party system. The UCR, the party of Hipólito Yrigoyen and Antonio

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<sup>194</sup> Diana Taylor, "'You Are Here,' H.I.J.O.S. and the DNA of Performance," in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (161-189: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>195</sup> Unlike Mexico, there is no state-driven process of propaganda here, so the timelines and causal relationship between *Hamlet* and the definition of citizenship is less clear. It could be possible that this *Hamlet* actually did invent a completely original kind of citizenship and proposed logical methods for dealing with the legacy of dictatorship without outside influence; and, it would be equally possible that the play merely succinctly and publicly makes an argument for a proposal of citizenship that had previously existed in protest circles.

<sup>196</sup> Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo, "Argentina: From Kirchner to Kirchner," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 2 (April 3, 2008): 21–22.

de la Rúa, lost all legitimacy, collapsed, and none of the new parties that emerged could fill the gap. Furthermore, the spread of mass-media technology had reduced politicians' willingness and need to invest in the party organization.<sup>197</sup> The current party system is a mixture of weak parties and personalist vehicles. Ephemeral party labels abound and are "all but meaningless."<sup>198</sup> This is a strong departure from the party system of the height of the Peronist period, in which a single party could hold members with incredibly diverse political views—the Montoneros and the Peronist paramilitaries—and still maintain its identity. Most importantly, however, the new version of Argentine citizenship did not allow for violent military takeovers to solve problems. *Hamlet* seems to have taken hold.

Through all this fragmentation, the nebulous and powerful name of Peronism has persisted, but it has not remained unscathed; the once invincible movement has lost its ability to sway power. The most recent Peronist presidents, Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (CFK), found their ability to concentrate power limited by robust democratic institutions, a strong civil society, and the whims of their ruling coalitions.<sup>199</sup> Despite the fact that Nestor's presidency was characterized by a significant concentration of executive power and governance around the margins of the legislature with an average of 4.3 executive orders per month, he was constrained by other elected officials, especially governors, and party bosses.<sup>200</sup> It was rumored that Nestor and Cristina planned to subvert the constitutional amendment allowing no more than two consecutive presidential terms by alternating the presidency and forming a de

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<sup>197</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, 18, 36.

<sup>198</sup> Noam Lupu, "The End of the Kirchner Era," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 2 (April 15, 2016): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0033>.

<sup>199</sup> Peronist, as in belonging to the Peronist political party.

<sup>200</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, "Argentina," 20-21.

facto authoritarian regime.<sup>201</sup> Nestor, however, died in 2010 during CFK's first term, which ruined the plan. Cristina was able to capture 45% of the vote, with the largest margin in Argentine history, and continued her husband's work in her two terms. Though she was well liked, her party (PJ—Partido Justicialista) failed to win enough votes in the 2011 midterm elections to amend the constitution to allow for three consecutive presidential terms.<sup>202</sup> The voters seemed to lose the will to give complete control of the government to the Peronists, even without a credible party alternative.

Moreover, Cristina has not been awarded the same impunity as previous Peronist leaders. State-sanctioned violence was not limited to dictatorships during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and political murder was not uncommon. Under Perón's first term, the labor organizer Cipriano Reyes was arrested and tortured for pushing back against Perón's decisions regarding unions; in 1955, the members of the military that ousted Perón bombed the presidential palace, killing hundreds of protesters that had gathered outside to express their displeasure at his removal; and, Isabel Perón was closely associated with right-wing death squads that disappeared leftist activists before the 1976 coup.<sup>203</sup> CFK called for the murder of Alberto Nisman, a prosecutor investigating her involvement in a government cover-up of Iran's participation in the 1994 suicide bombing of a Jewish community center by Hezbollah. Found to have apparently committed suicide the morning of his appearance in court, Nisman was poised to give testimony that CFK had a hand in arranging the cover-up in exchange for a trade deal with Iran. The authorities quickly ruled that his death was a murder. Despite being recently elected as a senator, Cristina faces charges of treason for arranging his murder and participating in the cover-up. A judge has requested that the

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<sup>201</sup> Lupu, "The End of the Kirchner Era," 37.

<sup>202</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, "Argentina," 16.

<sup>203</sup> Feitlowitz.

senate call for her arrest.<sup>204</sup> Their decision remains to be seen, but the independence of the judiciary and the willingness to investigate the connection to a well-liked Peronist figure speaks to the transformation of the political system.

Finally, the voters seem to have inaugurated a new vision of electoral politics absent of violence and military control, a direct result of the demand for institutional justice and stability after the violent chaos of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On 25 October 2015, Argentina experienced its first ballot runoff, between two Peronists and Mauricio Macri, the candidate of a coalition of non-Peronist opposition parties under the label of “Cambiamos”—Let’s Change. Macri won in the second round of voting. It was the first time that the Argentines had chosen neither a Peronist nor a Radical (of UCR) as the president.<sup>205</sup> This election served as a distinct mandate from the majority that something needed to change. Since the presidential election, the Cambiamos coalition swept the midterm elections in 2017, though it still lacks a majority in the congress.<sup>206</sup> Miraculously, Macri’s party, PRO (Propuesta Republicana—Republican Proposal) is poorly institutionalized and does not seem to have a clear vision for the future.<sup>207</sup> Their main argument, however, is that “all have the right to a better life.”<sup>208</sup> This assertion speaks directly to the new political culture of individual rights that grew out of the transitional period.

In the crucible of state violence and oppression, what it means to be a citizen in the Argentine memory-nation was refashioned along the lines of institutional justice, peaceful

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<sup>204</sup> Daniel Politi, “Judge Seeks Arrest of Ex-President of Argentina on Treason Charges,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 2017, sec. Americas,

<sup>205</sup> Lupu, “The End of the Kirchner Era,” 35–37.

<sup>206</sup> “Argentine Leader Wins Key Mid-Term Vote,” *BBC News*, October 23, 2017, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-41719074>.

<sup>207</sup> Cristian Altavilla, “New Political Parties and the Challenge of Institutionalization in Argentine Party System. An Analysis of Propuesta Republicana Party” (Workshop on Institutionalization and De-Institutionalization of Political Organizations, Scuola Normale Superiore, Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna and University of Pisa, April 28, 2016), 17.

<sup>208</sup> “Qué Creemos,” Pro Argentina, , <http://pro.com.ar/que-creemos/>.



protest, and the development of collective memory of atrocities. The state terrorism and repression of the 1976 Dictatorship triggered a Level Three reset of political time that ended the escalating culture of military and non-military violence that had defined citizenship. The attempts to assert political rights under the dictatorship by organizations like the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and process of reckoning with the atrocities of the dictatorship refashioned citizenship as a rights-focused relationship with the state. The previous institutions began to deteriorate and the electorate no longer accepted old patterns of politics. The new political parties and political movements that tapped into this rhetoric of individual rights became highly successful. Though we cannot claim that a specific performance of the 1980 *Hamlet* caused Businessperson X to renounce his or her alliance with the dictatorship or Citizen Y to demand redress for human rights abuses, this production had a fundamental impact on political participation, citizenship, and the 1976-83 dictatorship in Argentina. The adaptation itself highlighted the importance of individual action to address political injustice while laying out a path of investigation, memory-formation, and justified action that provided a way to deal with the aftermath of the dictatorship.

Transitional justice did not begin with *Hamlet*, but this production provided the seeds of a new vocabulary of citizenship in a wide public forum and had an impact on the production of collective memory and cultural products by the post-dictatorship Argentines. By mainstreaming subversive theater under the dictatorship, the play provided a new, theater-centric model of collective citizenship that saw the stage as a location for the exercise of popular political power in the co-spectatorship of the political body. This performance of *Hamlet* in 1980, localized due to the demands of the shift in Level Three political time, established the seeds of a new identity in Argentina. Rooted in the inherited collective memory of the dictatorship, citizenship in the

Argentine memory-nation focuses now on clarifying that collective memory by making and remaking history and physical space to remember the disappeared and acknowledge crimes and seeking justice for those crimes. These twin processes of memory-making and justice-seeking, informed by the human rights atrocities, have manifested themselves in a rhetoric of human rights for political action, social accountability measures rooted in theatrical performance, and an intolerance of political impunity and violence. The localization of Shakespeare to articulate this new citizenship had a nationalist and anti-imperialist result, as in Mexico. Here, the appropriation of Shakespeare into the Argentine context to protest the dictatorship and articulate a consciously anti-dictatorship identity repudiated the American allies of the junta. The practitioners and audience members were most certainly conscious of the large role the U.S. played in the dictatorship and the general culture of authoritarianism in Latin America during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from military training to financial assistance of Operation Condor to diplomatic support of the human rights violations. Therefore, the production was also a repudiation of the imperialist interventions in Argentina. Again, the appropriation of Shakespeare was an anti-anglophile political act.

### **Conclusion: Not Of an Age, But For All Time**

The appropriation of Shakespeare serves as an anti-imperialist political act that marks the crystallization of a new nationalist political identity rooted in a renewed collective memory. In Argentina, theater practitioners localized Shakespeare to advance a new identity defined by the collective experience of the dictatorship, didactic lessons which became the basis for non-violent, justice-seeking, and memory-making modes of political being. In Mexico, the localization of Shakespeare was part of a much larger program directed by the post-Revolutionary government to indoctrinate all Mexicans and form a new identity rooted in the memory of the Revolution, emphasizing *lo mexicano* over all things foreign and the love of the Revolution as a struggle against oppression. Furthermore, in both cases, the appropriation of Shakespeare in order to present a new nationalist identity repudiated the Anglophone world powers that had facilitated the oppression to which that identity responded. In Mexico, these Shakespeare films directly advanced a pro-Mexican identity, rejecting the previous valorization of the ‘superior’ northern European cultures, specifically the protestant U.S. and U.K. In Argentina, the adaptation of *Hamlet* was a direct reaction to a dictatorship supported operationally, diplomatically, and financially by the United States. By using an Argentine-ized Shakespeare to protest the regime, the practitioners and audience members were using the professed greatest cultural artifact of their imperialist oppressors to undermine their anti-communist project. Whether the anti-imperialist nature of the appropriation was intentional or not, together, they seem to say, “we can take your culture, make it better, and use it to fight you.”

This focus on the role of Shakespeare in the formation or reformation of political identity relies on a cycle of regeneration. Building on ideas about political time, collective memory, and identity, this theoretical cycle proposes that political identity, like the norms of national

governance, national identity changes through a cyclical framework. Driven by certain actors, processes, and other forces, the population reckons with the past, parsing through the collective memory of events, which become the founding myths of a new memory-nation. Then, the new identity rooted in events solidifies. Eventually, this identity is popularized either organically or through propaganda. This identity becomes a kind of citizenship that informs modes of political action, thought, and speech. From protest to speeches to individuals' position vis-à-vis the events of collective memory, the citizenship in the memory nation shapes how national citizens act. Ultimately, the identity becomes obsolete and a new identity will be formed in a new cycle. The cycle is founded in the inherent instability of collective memory. As certain events are commemorated and become part of a hegemonic collective memory, marginalized groups with a different commemorative framework present counter-memories. This counter-memory can obliterate older collective memories to become the official memory, supporting new political, social, and economic orders. Major events, too, may trigger the reset of the cycles of identity, such as revolutions and dictatorships.

In Mexico and Argentina, the appropriation of Shakespeare appears between the stages of identity formation and identity popularization. Reshaped and recast, his powerful stories and compelling characters are put to use in a didactic project. He always serves as a vehicle for articulating the new characteristics of identity to a mass audience, who learn how to act in accordance with the inheritance of certain events preserved by collective memory. Though the *Hamlet* in Argentina may not have led directly to the fall of the Dictatorship and the creation of tribunals and the recitation of poetry in *Peñon de las ánimas* may not have inspired a deep passion for education among all children that led them to the new public schools, Shakespeare in

these cases had a powerful political role in showing citizens exactly how they should act and what they should value.

### International (Cultural) Relations

Shakespeare provides particular insights into the nature of political identity and the role of cultural exchange in international relations. In the globalizing world, the question of political identity is complicated. How does the free flow of information and culture affect local identity? What does it mean to be a “global citizen” if you are politically a citizen of a specific nation? Political, ethnic, and cultural identities cross political boundaries, so what does this mean for national identities? I do not attempt to answer these questions here, except to say that the appropriation of Shakespeare to create identities rooted in highly national collective memory results from a global flow of information. The movement of Shakespeare across the globe, from the first translation into French in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to his use in colonial schools throughout the British Empire to his arrival in Latin America and Africa via the French, makes this canonical text particularly universal. At its heart, the plays carry a specific political and cultural history of England, the translation and adaptation of Shakespeare stamps the texts with another layer of cultural, linguistic, and social politics. The attempt to draw out the essence of Shakespeare and convey it in another language is by nature a process of revision by the translator. Therefore, foreign productions of Shakespeare are Franken-texts that contain multiple worlds within them. By the inherently political nature of culture, the movement of Shakespeare is international relations at its best. He is a shared cultural asset who can be used to assert power (appropriation), convey information (layers of history), and even unite states with shared values (cultural appreciation). In the original Star Trek film, the peace accords between the Klingons and the

Federation is brokered over a discussion of Shakespeare, who apparently is better “in the original Klingon.” Within conversations about the meaning of power in the international system, the causes of war, the frameworks for international laws, it is worth remembering that the first arena of interaction for individuals across political borders is cultural exchange. Further research must be done into the exact role of the exchange of cultural information and its impact on international politics.

### Continued Use of Shakespeare

In Argentina and Mexico, Shakespeare is still used to comment on politics. It would be reductive to say that Shakespeare plays must be understood as political statements over their ultimate role as art, whose political contents need not be blatant or propagandistic.<sup>209</sup> Nonetheless, many productions make political arguments, a characteristic incredibly common in theater. Shakespeare remained popular in Argentina after the fall of the dictatorship and now engages in debates about the proper functioning of government, serving as a social check on the operations of the state. According to Argentine scholar Jorge Goldenberg, “the relevance of Shakespeare is sustained...where conduct and norms are permanently in tension, in debate.”<sup>210</sup> In this sense, Shakespeare is used to interrogate society. The choice to bring political subtext to the foreground makes the plays more meaningful to Argentine audiences. It is said that politics is the Argentine national dialogue. In seeking to create their own Shakespeare, [they] recovered the material as stimulus, as an element that allowed [them] to develop [their] own opinion, thus

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<sup>209</sup> Margarida Gandara Rauen and Alfredo Michel Modenessi, “Shakespearean Tragedy in Latin America and the Caribbean,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk, 2016, 869.

<sup>210</sup> Jorge Dubatti, ed., *Peregrinaciones de Shakespeare En La Argentina: Testimonios Y Lecturas de Teatro Comparado* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural Rector Ricardo Rojas, 1996), 59.

projecting upon the text very Argentine associations and opinions.”<sup>211</sup> Thus, Shakespeare in Argentina has showcased a kind of militant theater. According to Juan Bautista Alberti, “the theater of our day is called to carry out an austere duty...As an admirable instrument of propaganda and popular interaction, it ought to agitate the core of all relevant issues of its time and present...suitable solutions to the opinions, the needs, the interests, and the most complete and encompassing demands of society.”<sup>212</sup> Themes of national identity, tradition, and politics are emphasized in Shakespeare but the “superstitious faithfulness to the literal which sometimes hides an indolent ignorance of the deeper meaning of the text” is pushed aside.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, according to Omar Aíta, an Argentine theater practitioner, “you can do what you want to do. Shakespeare gives to everyone....the idea of disrespect to Shakespeare does not exist.”<sup>214</sup> One practitioner even went as far to say that “you gain very little in translating Shakespeare when you know English.”<sup>215</sup> Clearly, there is a general consensus in the Argentine theater community that the importance of Shakespeare lays outside of its explicitly poetic words but rather in a preference for its free adaptation.

In that free adaptation, stinging government critiques arise. To return to the story with which I began, in the winter of 2015, Teatro El Convento in Buenos Aires produced *Rey Lear* (*King Lear*). I had the distinct pleasure of seeing this production; and, the director was kind enough to send me the script, which allows this lengthy analysis. Director Martin Barreiro fundamentally altered the play to further emphasize this brutal Machiavellian world and gives

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<sup>211</sup> Maria Clara Versani Galéry, “Identifying Strategies for the Production and Reception of Shakespeare in Brazil and Argentina” Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001, 130, 144.

<sup>212</sup> Juan Bautista Alberti, qtd in *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>213</sup> Luis Gregorich, qtd in *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>214</sup> Dubatti, 149.

<sup>215</sup> Bernice W. Kliman and Rick J. Santos, eds., *Latin American Shakespeares* (New York: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 57.

the story a uniquely Argentine spin. *Rey Lear* differs from the original version of *Lear* in key ways. For example, the two brothers Edmund and Edgar are transformed into one person with a split personality. The final lines are altered so that Edmund is victorious. Traditionally, this struggle between the two brothers represents the general struggle between a “toxic hunger for power” and true honor and chivalry. In Barreiro’s version, this dynamic becomes an internal struggle to be good in the face of gaining potentially great power, which has important political implications. First, Edmund’s chief complaint that motivates his quest for power in the original version is that he is denied it by the system of primogeniture, in which the father’s rank and property would be passed on the first-born legitimate son. In the Argentine version, however, the line, “Edmund the base/ shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper;/ Now, gods, stand up for bastards!” becomes the insane musings of man who has a threateningly good alter-ego; as if Mr. Hyde had created Dr. Jekyll out of some unresolved deep internal identity crisis.

The most significant result of this transformation is that Edgar is unable to confess to the audience his plan to disguise himself as a Bedlam beggar in private. He must confide in Edmund, which destroys the aforementioned wheel-of-fortune dynamic and the possibility that Edgar could kill Edmund. Instead, their relationship comes to crisis when Edmund has won the battle against Lear. Edgar warns, “we can die here or there... time is the supreme arbiter,” which faintly echoes Edmund’s line in the original as he lies dying, “What you have charged me with, that have I done;/ and more, much more; the time will bring it out.”<sup>216</sup> Instead of battling, however—as you can imagine, that might be quite difficult—Edmund simply shouts, “Get out! Do you not understand, legitimate brother? My only interest is to defend myself and not to

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<sup>216</sup> William Shakespeare, “The Tragedy of King Lear: A Conflated Text,” in *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 1. 5.3.161-2.



challenge.”<sup>217</sup> This line seems somewhat out of character for the Edmund we know, but this does seem to be the appropriate final line for a Mr. Hyde-identity crisis. At that moment, the two exit, and we only see Edgar after that point. As far as we know at that moment, and in the final scenes, Edgar has won and destroyed the machinating alter-ego. We hear the last lines of *Lear*: “The weight of this sad time we must obey;/ Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say./ The oldest hath born most; we that are young/ Shall never see so much, nor live so long.”<sup>218</sup> We prepare to clap, as Edgar turns to go, but he stops. He turns around and Edmund, returned, declares, “But despite ourselves, we must concede to the necessity of these disastrous times. The wheel has come full circle. I am here. My name has sufficient authority to draw the hearts of the people and to stop the men we employ from turning their lances on us. Take these bodies away; the common misfortune now reclaims my concern.”<sup>219</sup> Thus, the wheel of fortune has turned again, but rather than ensure the destruction of the powerful, it elevates and strengthens the already powerful in their position of control. To be sure, the only phrase in these lines present in the original are “The wheel has come full circle! I am here”: Edmund’s dying words.<sup>220</sup>

The collapse of Edmund and Edgar transforms the power dynamics. This rewritten ending, more than any other change, however, is what truly makes this version Argentine; this is the truth Martín Barreiro saw under the text. This truth would not be lost on the Argentine audience. In keeping with the tradition of manipulating Shakespeare to make it “closer” to local audiences, Martín Barreiro transformed *Lear* into a political reflection of a world that is all too current. In using the story and characters of *King Lear*, Teatro El Convento has created a work of

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<sup>217</sup> Martín Barreiro and William Shakespeare, “Rey Lear,” 2015, 23.

<sup>218</sup> Shakespeare, “The Tragedy of King Lear: A Conflated Text,” l. 5.3.322-5.

<sup>219</sup> Barreiro and Shakespeare, “Rey Lear,” 26.

<sup>220</sup> Shakespeare, l. 5.3.173.

political protest, not unlike the famous 1976 *Hamlet*. It exposes and condemns politics in Argentina

In Mexico, Shakespeare has moved on from its role in government propaganda to become political critique like that in Argentina. In November of 2017, Mexico City's great Shakespeare director Mauricio Garcia Lozano opened a haunting production of *Macbeth* that commented on the deterioration of Mexican politics. According to Garcia Lozano, "*Macbeth* is current in Mexico today because it explores the corruption of a conscience that violates the natural order in the search for power.... We can make a direct connection between how political ambition is destructive not only for the character, but also for the entire country. This is something, unfortunately, perfectly recognizable. It reminds us of a twisted world and it makes us to confront our own values in order to understand them."<sup>221</sup> His actors echoed these sentiments. According to Lisa Owen (Lady Macbeth), "with *Macbeth*, I had the feeling that we were talking about a country at war." Juan Manuel Bernal (Macbeth), claimed that the play "tells us something just in time for the 2018 elections." It was impossible to escape from the play's political message. Not only for the practitioners, but for all audience members. The review of the production in the newspaper *La Jornada* called it a *Macbeth* that speaks to modern Mexico.<sup>222</sup> In another newspaper, *El Financiero*, the critic described how "the plot narrates the trajectory of a politician that forgoes completely any moral filter to gain power. Any Mexican can recognize some of the current heads of state in that unconscionable ambition."<sup>223</sup> She went further to say that "...this almost cosmic paradox that appears in *Macbeth* is the paradox that we live now in

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<sup>221</sup> Qtd in Reyes Martínez Torrijos, "Montan Versión de *Macbeth* Que Habla Al Mexicano de Este Tiempo," *La Jornada*, November 19, 2017.

<sup>222</sup> Reyes Martínez Torrijos.

<sup>223</sup> Rosario Reyes, "Macbeth, Reflejo de La Realidad Mexicana," *El Financiero*, November 23, 2017, Mexico City edition.

our country.”<sup>224</sup> This *Macbeth* is clearly free of the propagandistic characteristics that defined the first appropriated Shakespeare in Mexico. Nonetheless, Juan Manuel Bernal’s comment about the upcoming elections suggests that Shakespeare still has a didactic purpose that proposes to the audience modes of being according to political realities.

Through political critiques, Shakespeare in Mexico and Argentina continues to present arguments about political identity as citizens of modern nations. The *King Lear* in Argentina argues that the population should demand rigorous democratic rights from its government, engaging with the modes of action defined by the post-dictatorship memory nation. By pointing out the abuse of power within the democratic regime, the play insinuates that the struggle to achieve the right to self-governance has yet to be realized. Conversely, in Mexico, the play serves a different purpose in regards to the memory-nation. While engaging in the core pro-Mexican, pro-Revolutionary identity, the use of Shakespeare has matured from conveying the code values of a new identity based on the inheritance of collective memory to a wider-ranging art form that can critique specific aspects of political life. This evolution points to the further development of the third level cycle of political time: the challenging of official discourses. Presented at a much later stage in the cycle of the memory-nation, the Mexican *Macbeth* refuses to accept the post-revolutionary government as the vehicle through which the egalitarian promises of the Revolution will be realized, painting a bleak and realist vision of politics in Mexico. Clearly, Shakespeare gives us a means with which to track the regeneration and degeneration of political identity.

#### A Global Framework Outside of Latin America

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<sup>224</sup> Rosario Reyes.

If Shakespeare marks the development of a new memory-nation, then we should be able to see this proverbial flag outside of Latin America. In 2014, a group of children in the Zataari refugee camp in Jordan performed a production of *King Lear* spliced with scenes from *Hamlet*. The months-long project orchestrated by director and famous television actor Nawar Bulbul culminated in performances in a makeshift arena in which the young actors had to contend with dust and a passing water truck. After Lear's descent into madness, the cast exited the stage chanting "to be or not to be" in English and Arabic. The parents of the actors describe the project as a "rare point of light in a bleak camp existence."<sup>225</sup> Like the ancient theater in Athens, these tragedies provided a release from the uncertainty, poverty, and boredom of the perpetual waiting that defines refugee camps. Within the framework of the development of identity, however, one must wonder what the appropriation of Shakespeare means for this community, especially the children. In an interview, with the *New York Times*, Bulbul held the show up as proof that the least fortunate Syrian refugees can produce the loftiest theater. His statement echoes the ethos of anti-imperialist appropriation that was so prevalent in the Latin American cases. The vision of displaced Syrian children performing Shakespeare serves a sharp reminder, to the powerful nations in the West that claim Shakespeare as their own, of the continuing suffering of millions of refugees. "To be or not to be" is a haunting cry for a generation of Syrian children who seem to have lost everything because of war. What new identity are these children adopting as they inherit the collective memory of displacement?

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<sup>225</sup> Ben Hubbard, "Behind Barbed Wire, Shakespeare Inspires a Cast of Young Syrians," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2014, sec. Middle East.



Screenshot of encore performance. Source: *Shakespeare in Zaatari*, vimeo.



Screenshot of original performance. Source: *Shakespeare in Zaatari*, vimeo.

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