

**PLURINATIONALITY AND MULTILOCALITY:
SOME EXPLANATIONS OF IDENTITY AND
COMMUNITY BEFORE AND AFTER NAFTA
IN MEXICO AND THE U.S.**

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Plurinationality and Multilocality: Some Explanations of Identity and Community Before and After NAFTA in Mexico and the U.S.¹

There is a contradiction between increasing assertions of cultural and political pluralism and national unity in the social and political context opened, for better and worse, by NAFTA. I argue in this paper that NAFTA has necessitated both arguments for political organizing across national boundaries (or "plurinational" movements) and an increase in representations of national unity (or hypernationalism), and that both have resulted in calls for the creation of political communities which challenge national governance. This, of course, is not exactly what those negotiating NAFTA had in mind. In this article, I use the term plurinational as it has been used by the Indian Nations of North America to raise a distinction between a form of cross-national politics which would include political accountability and the kind of unaccountability associated with "transnational," a term having now come to stand for transnational corporations, in whose interests NAFTA was negotiated. In this distinction between the words plurinational and transnational, I see a much more significant debate about the forms of reasoning and legitimation applied to various levels of governance.

According to Julian Castro Rea, a Mexican sociologist who studies Canadian policy, Canadians call themselves "gringos in the country." But that self-perceived marginality is not

¹ Guillermo Delgado, whose article on binational social movements appears also in this issue, inspired me to frame this analysis in terms of plurinational political organizing. I would also like to thank Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma Klahn, and other members of a reading group on cultural identity in Mexico and the U.S. for their ongoing intellectual support, as well as Ivelisse Rivera Bonilla for her work in organizing the conference in which our papers were presented. The Chicano Latino Research Center and the Committee on Research at UCSC provided support for continuing this research project in Mexico, which I appreciate. The comments of Nancy Chen, Alison Leitch, Annapurna Pandey, and Mark Whitaker toward revision were very helpful.

why Canada seemed to be practically left out of the discussions of NAFTA in Mexico and the U.S. in 1993. I think it was because Canadians were busy dealing with their own political pluralism (after having set the terms for thinking about multiculturalism in the decades before). One example of this was evident in the strong assertions of nationhood in 1990 by both the province of Quebec and the Mohawk Nation (the former appeased somewhat by the Meech Lake Accords, the latter faced with armed conflict with the larger Canadian national forces at that same time). Another illustration could be found in the strong differences in Canadian opinions – largely negative – about NAFTA. The Canadian-U.S. free trade agreement of 1988 was seen to be linked by many to the Canadian economic recession of 1990-92. By 1993, then, the New Democratic Party wanted to break that accord and forget NAFTA; the Liberals wanted to renegotiate the Canadian-U.S. free trade agreement; and the Conservative government wanted to push neoliberal policy even further in the negotiation of NAFTA (Cameron 1993:ix). The Conservatives got their way, but not irrevocably; there is considerable political pressure, still, within Canada to break both free trade agreements, and considerable participation in trilateral lobbying organizations whose aim is to do just that. In this article, I will leave Canadian plurinational arguments largely aside, because the peak moment for public discussions of sovereignty vis-a-vis continental free trade policy in Canada was before the 1988 free trade agreement with the U.S. and in the years between the passage of that agreement and of NAFTA. The debates about ethnic sovereignty within the nation of Canada and transnational trade policy foreshadowed, however, debates that grew stronger in Mexico and the U.S. with the negotiation of NAFTA.

It has only been with the discussions immediately before and after the passage of NAFTA that a public space has opened in Mexico and the U.S. to put words together with anxieties about how jobs move around, what continuing migration means for national and ethnic identities, and what economic globalization means for national (or plurinational) sovereignty. It is that public space of debate in Mexico and the U.S. which I want to focus on in this article. To do so, I will reconstruct here, in fragments, my visits to that "public space" at

three important moments in the history of NAFTA negotiations and implementation in which proposed policies called attention to, or were even perceived as threatening, national identity in Mexico and the U.S. These moments were: (1) the summer of 1993, when NAFTA finally began to be news in the U.S. (after being in the news for years already in Mexico) months before it was ratified; (2) the fall of 1994, when President Salinas finished his sexenio (six-year term) and Governor Pete Wilson proposed California Proposition 187; and (3) August and September of 1995. During that period in 1995, those voting in the Consulta Nacional² voted for the EZLN (the Zapatistas) to become a national political force in Mexico, President Zedillo announced in his first annual national address that the economic depression had hit bottom (just before it dropped even further), and in the U.S. an even more conservative, national version of Proposition 187 was proposed (which was compared in the Mexican press to the construction of a "Berlin Wall" between the U.S. and Mexico). I have not chosen the obvious moment for studying popular contestation of NAFTA in Mexico – that of January, 1994³ – because the twin public birth of NAFTA and the EZLN has been already so well documented. Instead, I have chosen three moments in which there were representations in state discourse of social, political, and economic conditions and the policies necessitated by them, and some counterrepresentations of public conditions and policy in popular discourse.

The interviews drawn on here were done at the three moments I have mentioned. The interviews were collaborative, in two senses: first, because those agreeing to talk with me have fundamentally shaped my analysis here; and, second, because the overall methodology for documenting popular explanations of NAFTA in Mexico was designed in collaboration with Jorge Carrasco Araizaga, an economic journalist in Mexico City, and Miguel Morayta, an

² This was a poll of citizens paid for by the nongovernmental Alianza Civica (Civic Alliance) in Mexico in August of 1995 in which, among other questions, Mexicans were asked whether they supported the aims of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or the Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

³ January 1, 1994, was the day in which the North American Free Trade Agreement began to take effect. It will be a full fifteen years from that date before NAFTA is fully implemented, if it proceeds as proposed.

anthropologist who works in rural areas in the state of Morelos.⁴ They are also writing about this documentation project. They and I think collaboration – across national contexts, disciplines, and between those in and out of the academy – is vital to understanding those current changes so often simply glossed as "globalization." Hence, we are experimenting with multivocal and "multilocal" ethnography, in which we mix images and perspectives drawn from interviews done over time with people in rural Morelos and rural Kentucky, Mexico City, and northern California, as well as from official and popular discourses. For this project, forty people were interviewed, some in each of the three years. They were situated differently by class, region, ethnicity, age, occupation, gender, and political views. In the 1993-95 interviews, consistent questions have been about how people have informed themselves, and formed opinions, about NAFTA; about the effects people anticipated and have experienced in their lives and work that they see as related to NAFTA; and about possible changes in national and transnational identities related to NAFTA.

National identity is understood here to mean perceptions of the social composition and goals of the nationstate, but also alternative versions of nation and identity which are asserted in nationalist movements within nationstates or across the borders of nationstates, as in the Mohawk Nation's struggle for political sovereignty. This article includes only a selection of views of national and transnational (as in North American) identity expressed by people speaking at the three historical moments described in this article. One of the forms popular discourse pertaining to NAFTA also took was political cartoons, and examples are included to represent currents of criticism in the Mexican press of state policy.

⁴ During the summer of 1993, five students from Lawrence University also participated in the interviewing: Adriana Sandoval, Erika Rand, Bill Aurand, Aaron Howe, and Steve Spellman.

Moment 1: Summer 1993

[Figure 1. "Waiting for the miracle." El TLC, or el tratado de libre comercio, signifies NAFTA, here represented as a milagro, or a physical representation of a prayer.]

President Salinas de Gortari and his team of neoliberally, ivy-league trained advisors spent over 30 million dollars in promoting NAFTA (Heredia 1993:27), after he initially proposed the policy to the administrations of the other two North American nations. The North American Free Trade Agreement arrived, but not the miracle. By the fall of 1995, there were those among the neoliberals saying that it was still a matter of time: that small enterprises which could not compete went under as a matter of course, and that by the time NAFTA has gone fully into effect – 15 years from January 1, 1994 – it will mean that Mexico will have the same wages and standard of living as the other two North American nations. I heard others say that by the year 2,000, NAFTA would be broken, and the PRI (the party of De la Madrid, Salinas, and Zedillo – those Mexican presidents who have fostered most the privatization of industries and free trade) would be out of power. In any case, an economic miracle did not arrive within NAFTA's first three years. According to figures from the Economics Department of the UNAM, reported over Radio Red on Oct. 4, 1995, minimum wage in Mexico was the lowest it has been since President Cardenas established a minimum wage, and unemployment was the highest it has been in 50 years in Mexico.

But in 1993, the miracle of NAFTA was imagined by some as the imminent arrival of factories⁵ and jobs in Mexico. This process was anticipated not only by promoters of NAFTA in Mexico, but also by those against NAFTA in the U.S.: some labor unions, for example, and Ross Perot, whose notorious phrase "the giant sucking sound" referred to jobs going south across

⁵ According to one campesino couple we interviewed in eastern Morelos in 1993, a factory might literally have arrived in their corn plot, with the pending sale of ejido, or communal, land and the threats to agricultural cultivation posed at that time by extended drouth and the unavailability of credit. They said they had valued being campesinos, but they no longer cared if a factory replaced their corn crop or not, and in fact it might as well so people could go on eating.

ESPERANDO EL MILAGRO ■ Ahumada

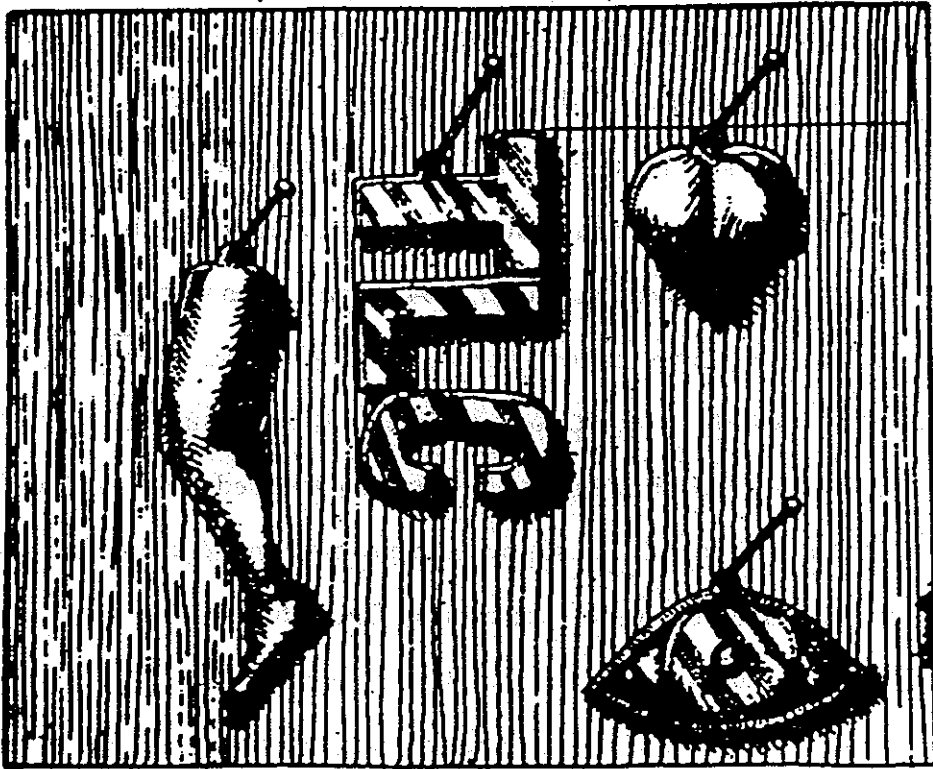


Figure 1
La Jornada
28 July 1993

the U.S.-Mexican border (see Perot with Choate 1993).

The summer of 1993 was an epoch of reductionist imagery. Indeed, some portrayals of Mexico and the U.S. in discussions of NAFTA were dangerously reductionist, as Claudio Lomnitz has pointed out (Lomnitz 1993), since representations of these nations that collapsed their residents into a single class or ethnic position ignored simultaneous public acknowledgment of multicultural national identity. (This "racialized"⁶ current has been continued in reference to Proposition 187 in 1994 and its successor proposition in 1995.)

There have been waves of contradiction in representations of national identity and class in relation to NAFTA. For example, in the summer of 1993, a news director at one of Mexico City's television stations said at one point in our conversation that 50 years hence, all of the nations of the American continents would be a single country. For the time being, however, he put his views of NAFTA in very nationalistic terms – for both Mexico and the U.S. He pointed out that in the U.S., a "very racist current exists against Mexico," and said that NAFTA would bring some results that would surprise those in the U.S.: for example, that in 10 years, a Mexican would buy the Empire State building.

I would like to note, here, that there has been serious play with national imagery in articulating the relations between Mexico and the U.S. There was a diplomatic incident, for example, between the governments of Mexico and the U.S. in 1984 and 1985, when – after the U.S. DEA official Enrique Camanera Salazar was assassinated in Mexico – U.S. newspapers published "a cartoon showing the Mexican national shield, with its Aztec eagle and serpent smoking marijuana" (Carrasco A. and Torres 1992:19). In this 1993 interview, I think the news director's reference to the U.S.' symbol of modernity, the Empire State Building, was a way of reminding the listeners that NAFTA was, for its promoters, more about attracting Mexican capital back to Mexico (and also about making investment in other North American nations

⁶ Later, in the rhetoric of some supporters of California Proposition 187, in particular, Latino "difference," or otherization, was reinscribed in Anglo-dominated political discourse in ways that resonate with Omi and Winant's (1994:55) definition of "racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed."

more possible for the many Mexican millionaires) than about attracting U.S. employers to Mexico's work force.

In reference to whether NAFTA would mean a decrease of national sovereignty or identity for Mexico in relation to the U.S., the news director had this to say:

Mexico has 3,000 years of history – the U.S. has little more than 200. It is going to be difficult to lose national identity. We've had U.S. [radio and television] programs for 40 years. Half the population is under 25, and it's a generation formed by television. We are products of television, yet we continue recognizing the tricolor flag. English is part of the language, for example "hot dog," like "taco" is now part of English, but it does not affect national culture or identity. [author's translation]

There was some difference of opinion among those we interviewed in Mexico in the summer of 1993 about whether NAFTA, if passed, would affect national identity. While the news director articulated the view of the majority of those with whom we spoke, a 20-year-old student gave her opinion, which differed:

Maybe NAFTA will benefit Mexico economically and politically...by opening up to other markets, the economy of Mexico will probably grow, because through competition with Canadian and U.S. goods, the quality of Mexican goods will go up too. But the negative side of NAFTA is that it will Americanize Mexico a lot. Already, there are a lot of U.S. companies here for the cheap labor, or whatever, and a lot of Mexican products are copies of U.S. products. This will happen even more with NAFTA. And we might even lose some of our national identity. Love for what is Mexican will go down little by little... that's what I think. [author's translation]

Another student, 18 years old, told us that he thought whether NAFTA would affect Mexican nationalism and perceptions of national identity in relation to other North American nations depended on what Mexicans did:

It depends on whether we allow or don't allow a lot of new traditions and material goods to come in. There is a different kind of mentality that one has to adopt in order to adapt to free trade... We might keep saying "Viva Mexico!", and being traditionalist, but seeing tradition from a different perspective. That is to say [NAFTA won't change our national identity] if we search for ways to change, to develop, through NAFTA without adopting bad customs, or customs that might be good in themselves, but would hurt our national identity.

When asked how Mexican national identity could be harmed, he replied:

It would be hurt if we started valuing foreign things over Mexican things... because there are high-quality Mexican goods that we don't appreciate, because we would rather buy foreign goods even if they are of lower quality. [author's translation]

All of the young people we interviewed in Mexico in the summer of 1993 referred to the fact that even though they constituted a majority of the population, the government did not take into account their views. One said that if he could talk to the President, he would tell him to listen to young Mexicans, or for that matter, any Mexican citizens, in making policies like NAFTA.

In both Mexico and the U.S., it was extremely difficult for the public to get access to the NAFTA document itself in order to form an opinion of it. So, in the absence of the document, there grew up a large social and political space for speculation about its "real" contents and their relevance to people's lives, identities, and work. In Mexico, the SECOFI (Secretariat of Commerce and Industrial Development) made a summary of the NAFTA document and its implementation available for free to business leaders (SECOFI 1992), but this was not publicized outside the business community. In 1993, for example, Mateo Zapata, the son of revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata and an agricultural labor leader himself, said that he was

unable to obtain a copy of NAFTA or any information about it⁷. As one young person put it, the more you hear about NAFTA on the radio, the less real information you have about it – you're left dangling. Similarly, in the U.S., the Government Printing Office was charging public libraries over \$200 for a copy of the document at a time when most states had cut library budgets, and private companies were making the document available for sale to mostly corporate clients. For \$99, for example, you could buy a copy of NAFTA on CD-ROM in October 1993 (Business Week 1993). Then-candidate Bill Clinton said that he could not obtain a copy of NAFTA until the night before he needed to make a public statement on the policy. The point here is that before NAFTA was passed, it was not only fast-tracked by the U.S. Congress, it was elite-tracked as a document, in both the U.S. and Mexico, so public opinion was formed on whatever was broadcast about it, and through personal networks. That in itself, as has been pointed out to me, is not unusual when it comes to the way national policies are made. What I think is unusual is that this particular policy became the occasion for national publics to call into question the right for governments to make decisions without actual public consent – in other words, the whole political electoral process, especially in Mexico. Perhaps the proliferation of popular explanations of what NAFTA was and what it meant was due to its very inaccessibility.

Among those we interviewed who were for and against NAFTA in 1993, there was agreement that it would affect small businesses adversely (those who supported NAFTA saying that that was healthy competition). There was disagreement about what else might happen if NAFTA was passed.

A farmer in his nineties in rural Morelos predicted (rightly, as it happens) that there would be war. In that rural region at least, people were not talking about NAFTA. They were

⁷ This was reported to us by his colleague, who said that even though their collective had not been able to view the documents, Sr. Zapata was asked by President Zedillo to take a stand on the changes in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in preparation for the passage of el TLC / NAFTA by the Mexican legislature. Similar predicaments were observed in the U.S., as when candidate Bill Clinton said that he was unable to get a copy of NAFTA but was being asked for his opinion.

talking about the changes Salinas and the legislature had made in the Mexican Constitution in order to facilitate NAFTA – particularly the change in Article 27, which made possible the sale of ejido lands, overturning the very thing Emiliano Zapata and so many others had fought to guarantee Mexican citizens. The farmer, with his own historical memory, said this in the summer of 1993:

Well, according to anyone, maybe the government has finished with Mexico.... All of us adults think that people are going to start selling their ejido lands in order to buy something to eat, and I myself do not understand why the government has applied [the changes in] Article 27....the government says now that it has the right to sell land at the price it wants, to whoever it wants....Our president tells us that he is going to help the community with the change in Article 27 and in the currency. He lies. It's a big lie.... [Without agricultural land] how will the parents survive? If everybody goes away, are the parents supposed to eat air? One would have to be a balloon! There will be war. [author's translation]

As evidence of a cycle of fears about the advantage going always to the other countries in North America, I will mention here that the farmers I interviewed in rural Kentucky in that period were also against NAFTA. One couple, who had just begun to hire Mexican migrant workers to help them with their tobacco crop, said that their farm magazine informed them that if NAFTA passed, Argentinian tobacco would flood them out of business (Bickers 1993:60). Since they also worked in factories, they were concerned too about that side of their livelihood. She said:

I guess basically what I'm saying is we as farmers, in our organization, basically are against everything that NAFTA stands for at this point. There isn't anything that is going to benefit me or anybody like me and it's totally not to my advantage. It's totally to my disadvantage, and even to my entire community. Not just because I'm a farmer, but if the factory which supports most people in this county and community.... if those jobs are lost as well, they're completely out. This entire community is just going to be wiped off of the map. Basically, people are just going to struggle along if they happen to have some type of means of support and I see no good. Anyways, in its structure right now, and I'm going to fight it tooth and nail.

We have no way of knowing whether a majority of U.S. or Mexican residents were for or against NAFTA, or had an opinion at all, but we do know that it was passed and went into effect on

the memorable January 1, 1994. As the year proceeded, whatever belief may have been sustained by Mexican or U.S. residents that NAFTA would bring an economic miracle lost ground.

Moment 2: Fall 1994

[Figure 2. "In hell..." "To Wilson!" says a figure representing Hitler, with California Governor Pete Wilson being recognized in the corner of Nazi hell as a distinguished alumnus in this political cartoon. During the California deliberations about Proposition 187, I saw many powerful equations of anti-Mexican or anti-undocumented-immigrant sentiments and actions in California with either Nazi or Ku Klux Klan imagery in Mexican political cartoons.]

On November 2, 1994, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari gave his sexto informe, his final annual address to the Mexican nation. Within a week, on November 8, the registered voters of California had the option to vote on Proposition 187, and passed it. The relationship between Mexico and the U.S. was very much mirrored in those two political events.

Both Salinas and Wilson, while having earlier applauded the multicultural qualities of the bodies they govern (Salinas in the reform of Article 4 of the Constitution in 1992, Wilson in a speech made to the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council also in 1992), negated the pluralism of their polities strongly in the fall of 1994. For example, in his sexto informe, Salinas de Gortari did not mention the Zapatistas or the pueblos indios movement in Chiapas and throughout Mexico for autonomous regional governance. Instead, he invoked the more unicultural term campesinos in referring to rural Mexico:

In the countryside, through dialogue and joint efforts, we have made far-reaching reforms to reactivate production with greater freedom and justice. Peasants now have full rights over their lands through amendments to Article 27 of the Constitution.... Peasants have become the engineers of their own transformation. (Salinas de Gortari 1994)

The President did not say how much agency he thought campesinos had accrued. But he did find it necessary to have the national military throw indígena activists (also identifying themselves as campesinos) out of the zócalo on the very day he went there to give the speech

EN EL INFIERNO



Figure 2
Los Caricaturistas
4th week of October 1994

cited above.

One of the hunger strikers forcibly removed from the Plaza de la Constitución made these remarks the next day:

We are from the National Committee of Indian Peoples, from Veracruz, from Chiapas, from Oaxaca, and from Guerrero. We come from those states because right now, that is where the most problems are....some of us have been hunger striking for more than twenty days....

We say that the Constitution of the United Mexican States gives us the right to demonstrate publicly, without hurting anyone. And when we go without food, we demand with our hunger that there be justice, that the corruption end, that abuses of power end, and that there be security in our country. We make this demand legally and reasonably. And our demand is supreme because there is no gift that matters more than life itself. And with our lives we demand justice. We demand liberty. We demand our right to govern ourselves according to the decision of our peoples. We will not conform to decisions that are imposed on us by some government, only to those made by our own peoples....

In the Imperial Valley of California, all the modern agriculture is mechanized, and they only want Indians to go pick cotton, and harvest tomatoes and vegetables in the north. Mechanized agriculture is to make food for the gringos, because the gringos want good, pretty, cheap things. They come to rent our land and they take the produce, but they pay the labor power very badly....

The majority of Indians work the land. There are Indians who are lawyers and engineers and everything, but they are acculturated. What I was talking about does not only happen in Mexico. It also happens in Canada and in the United States. I attended a congress in Canada in which they said, "Here, we Canadian Indians are in institutions." And we said, "What is an institution?" And they said, "It is a jail.".... There has been a lot that has happened here in Mexico that has lowered the standard of living since the changes in Article 27.... We do not need to sign treaties like the gringo government signed with the tribes of the United States – treaties which they have never respected....

If the gringos respect us, there will be peace. If the gringos want to rob us of our oil and rob us of our land like they have already robbed us of our labor, there will always be war. War breaks out when those who have money abuse those who do not. And the Governor of California is abusing his power. Yes, with Proposition 187, because the Californians will turn around and elect him governor again. He says we are going to get rid of the nasty Mexicans. We are no longer going to give education or other services to Latin Americans. But they do not know that they have wealth thanks to those nasty migrant workers.

There will be war, because we are not going to allow them to kill us with hunger. We will fight. Those of us here choose to fight with our lives, for all to see. But there are others that do not think the same way... they have formed the Zapatista National Liberation Army, and they are armed. They say, "We prefer to die fighting against those who are killing us with hunger." [author's translation]

The demands of these hunger strikers, and the actions of many, many others (both within the Mexican nation and in North American plurinational movements of indigenous rights, labor,

and environmental activists) could be seen to have led to negotiations between the EZLN and the Mexican government in the fall of 1995. The contestation continues, as is discussed in the next section.

In regards to California Proposition 187 in 1994, even President Salinas, who strove throughout his six years in office to create closer ties with the U.S. through, one might argue, weakening nationalism in Mexico (at least economically, by denationalizing 16 industries), denounced the proposed policy in his national address the day before I spoke with the hunger strikers. He said, about Proposition 187:

Local political interests in California tend to blame Mexican workers for that society's problems. Mexico affirms its rejection of this xenophobic campaign and will continue to act in defense of the labor and human rights of our migrant workers.

The existence of 50 Mexican consulates in the United States makes it possible to provide systematic legal support to Mexicans in an unprecedented degree. We are also intensifying the dialogue between our two countries through the Bilateral Working Group on Migration and Consular Affairs, the Binational Commission, and the High-Level Meetings on Border Violence, in order to prevent incidents. We have seen that there is room for respect, cooperation and mutual benefit in the complex, and historically sometimes traumatic, relationship with the United States. While developing our relations with the United States, we are also launching new initiatives aimed at other regions, because when the decision is made to intensify relations with such a powerful nation, an effort must also be made to bring your faraway friends closer. Through this strategy, we are diversifying our international relations. (Salinas de Gortari 1994:5-6)

And he goes on in the speech to discuss strengthened ties with Canada, after NAFTA, which he deemed successful. This was one month before the crash of the peso in December 1994.⁸

An economic journalist described conditions in Mexico after a year of NAFTA this way, in November 1994:

Like in the film, this has been the year in which we have been living dangerously. Whatever positive effects NAFTA might have had have been cancelled out by the political situation.... [author's translation]

⁸ Also in the portion of the speech cited, President Salinas is foreshadowing negotiations with Chile to join NAFTA. These negotiations began officially in the fall of 1995, with a debate over fast-tracking such an agreement in the U.S. Congress (an attempt which failed).

He explained that NAFTA should not be satanized as a policy in itself, but that he thought one would have to pay careful attention to the way it was interpreted over time, and the effects it was having in the country. He went on:

Nationalism has not been overflowing in this past Mexican presidential administration, nor do I think we will hear nationalism as a word used very much by the next administration. Which brings us back to the subject of (class) divisions. There are those who have the information and the access to become part of this globalization, and they are the ones for whom there is a change in national culture, because they are the consumers of (global) culture. For example, they can afford to go to McDonald's in Mexico City. And on TV, we now have the U.S. National Basketball Association. Some are consuming these things in Mexico, but then we still have the Day of the Dead (which was being celebrated at the time of the interview). (With NAFTA), there are more Halloween products being sold, but we still make our Day of the Dead offerings....So consumption of other cultures goes up, but there are aspects of this culture that are never going to go away.... Those with money (and he explained that the division between rich and poor is greater now in Mexico than at any other time in this century) will buy modernity here, or will go to California or to Texas shopping. But those who don't have money are in the majority.... [author's translation]

A majority of those I talked with in Mexico in the fall of 1994 shared this position that NAFTA was not changing national culture in the three countries. But there were definite pluricultural crosscurrents swirling, sometimes in at least tangential association with NAFTA. For example, a sociologist at UNAM explained to me that in reaction to NAFTA Indian nations of North America had been meeting, and had established a plurinational council to arbitrate conflicts. He said:

When the Chiapas rebellion began, a commission of Canadian Indian nations came to Mexico. They observed the situation, and concluded that the Indian peoples of Chiapas were right in their actions. A new (plurinational) commission was created to fight for more respect for Indian peoples in Mexico. They have made joint declarations. Here in Mexico, the government "took the natives for granted" (spoken in English), basically. "They're here, they'll follow us, they're Mexicans," etc. (The government) wants a passive Indian population. That is what the government counted on with respect to NAFTA, in accordance with the fatalism myth, that (the Mexican people) would believe that there was no other option, and accept it. [author's translation]

As with the plurinational commission of Indian nations, I also saw evidence of plurinational political activity in the lead that northern California activists in opposition to Proposition 187 took from Mexican activists in deciding which businesses to boycott for having funded the promotion of the policy, in November 1994.

And now, how have people been talking about national identity and plurinational politics nearly two years into NAFTA?

Moment 3: Fall 1995

(Figure 3. Two eagles, two national symbols... Instead of Estados Unidos Mexicanos, United Mexican States, the caption on the coin reads "We Mexicans are sunk.")

Again, we come to the powerful statements that images can make over words, as one American eagle flies off with another, after the crisis of December 1994 and with the embodied perception that the U.S. is profiting from NAFTA at Mexico's expense.

There was also an interesting dance going on in the Mexican press in the fall of 1995 between Uncle Sam and the Statue of Liberty. It was Tío Sam who imprisoned Mexican characters in his hat in depictions of Independence Day. In one caption, Uncle Sam allowed Mexicans to go on with the grito⁹ of independence (which President Zedillo shortened) on September 15th, but it was implied that with the bailout of the peso, the U.S. had bought Mexican dependence, and thereby its national identity. On the cover of one Mexican political magazine that week, the caption referred to the perversion of the grito by saying "Viva México! or what's left of it." On the other hand, when Governor Pete Wilson announced his campaign for the U.S. presidency, there was strong criticism in the Mexican press of his use of the Statue of

⁹ The grito is the traditional cry commemorating Mexican independence from Spain in which the heroes of that revolution are named by a crowd in the Plaza de la Constitucion, the central plaza in Mexico City (as well as zocalos throughout the nation and in Mexican embassies throughout the world), on the evening of September 15. The grito is led by the President after he has rung a bell on a balcony of the Palacio Nacional (where the Mexican legislature formerly met).

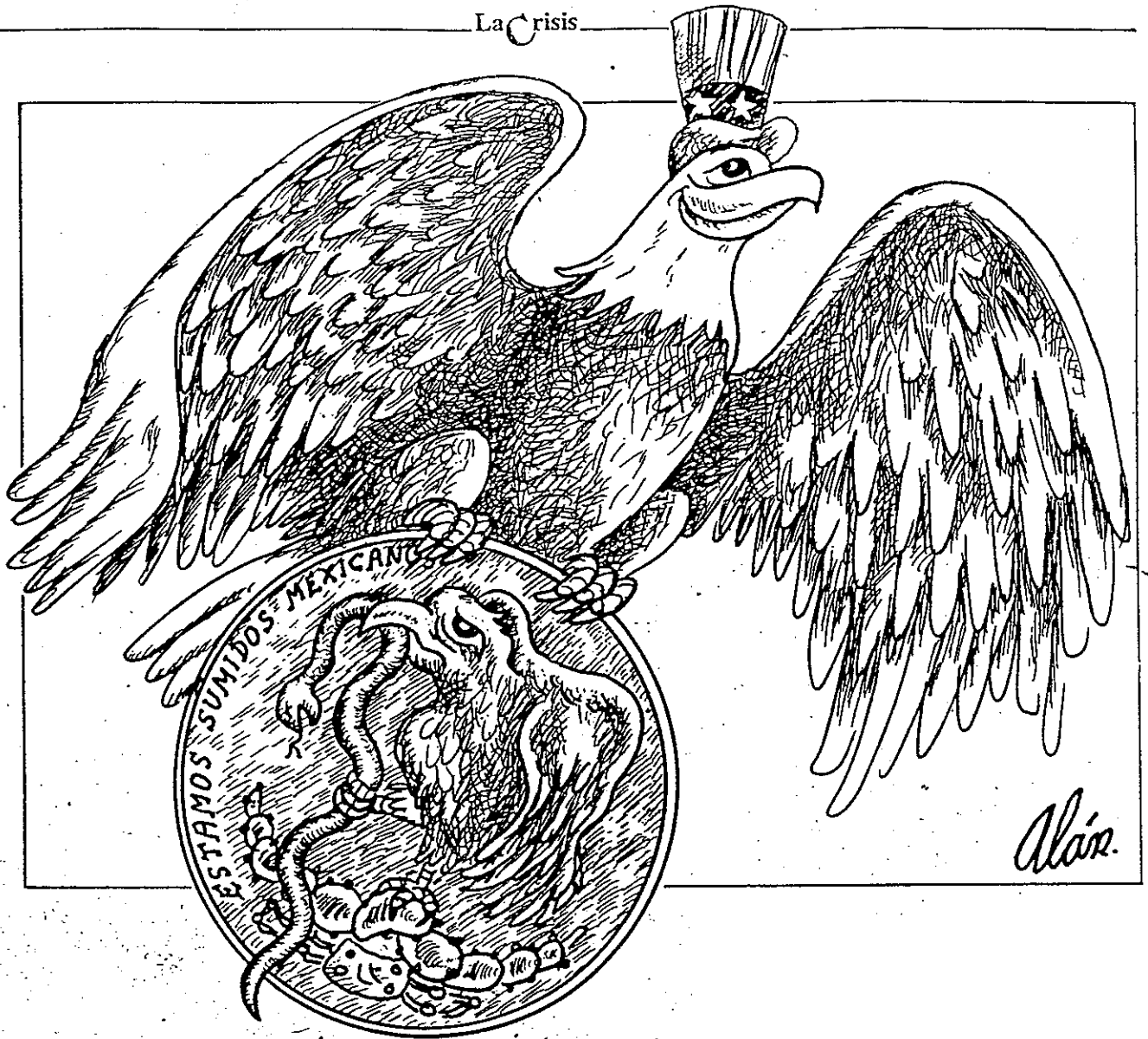


Figure 3
Boletín Mexicano de la Crisis
23 September 1995

Liberty in campaign ads, since he has so obviously manipulated the significance and symbolism of migration (that contradiction being so very much there to exploit in representations of the U.S.' self-representation as an open nation and its increasingly anti-migration policy). One newspaper's account referred to Pete Wilson as abusing the Statue of Liberty, in an interesting reversal of accusations of machismo. I think that gender does come into play, as well, in this dance of Tío Sam and the Statue of Liberty.¹⁰

The economic crisis of December 1994, which continues, has been the most significant event in Mexico that people I interviewed in the fall of 1995 have brought up as changing Mexican society between 1993 and 1995, whether they attribute it to NAFTA or not. The current Mexican economic depression is being compared to the U.S. depression of the 1930's. The economic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico appears to confirm the views of those who worried that Mexico would lose at least economic sovereignty through NAFTA, and plurinational labor alliances' fears that NAFTA would eventually pull wages in all three countries down rather than bringing Mexican wages up to equal those in the U.S. and Canada.

A labor activist had this to say about current events and the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. She is one of the leaders of the Red Mexicana Frente al TLC, an anti-NAFTA coalition of over 40 Mexican organizations, which remains very active. In fact, at the time of this interview, the Red had just convened a plurinational meeting of North American and Pacific Rim labor and human rights monitors to discuss the relationship between the global neoliberal project and the human rights of workers: Here is what she said about the ongoing, plurinational activities of anti-NAFTA activists:

(Since 1993, participation) has changed in some respects, yes. Obviously, participation was greater during the negotiation of the treaty. Groups had a lot

¹⁰ In addition to the collapsing of class and ethnicity of nations in NAFTA-related rhetoric, I think there continues to be a strong tendency to frame this as a male-governed debate because of the prominence of male national leaders proposing and negotiating the policies. Across the grain of this can be seen the prominent work of women in organizing plurinational movements, although there, too, representations centrifugally single out men for media focus. An example of this is the equation of Subcomandante Marcos with the leadership of the EZLN, even though women also serve as comandante and subcomandantes of that army.

more interest, and an immediate objective which was to be allowed to participate in the negotiations of the treaty. That is, to try to introduce into the negotiations aspects of the social agenda, and treaty features that would actually benefit the people of Mexico, not just the transnational corporations. I think that today, participation (in the Red Mexicana Frente al TLC) is less. Nevertheless, there is ongoing interest because of the economic crisis, and the relation the crisis we are living through might have with the NAFTA they signed. So the work we are developing currently is that of monitoring the effects of NAFTA, and we continue elaborating an alternative.

The participation (in this work) continues to be trilateral. Nevertheless, in the U.S. and in Canada, there has also been a decrease in activity. The organizations are restructuring themselves. In the U.S., there have appeared new groups working on the same themes. And today the challenge is to try to establish relations between all the groups that are concerned with free trade and the process of economic integration, which are two complementary issues. The work of monitoring is work we are doing through various routes. One is the collaboration of the different organizations within the Red Mexicana itself, each one in its own subject area. For example, the labor groups have concerned themselves with whether the transnational companies which have benefited from the commercial opening have been complying with labor regulations. The environmental groups have each been monitoring conditions in their own community or region. The organizations along the border, for example, on both sides, are studying the impact of the neoliberal model's opening (of the economy to free trade) on the environment. [author's translation]

I think it is interesting that while official trilateral¹¹ monitoring bodies that were proposed as part of NAFTA were seen as a challenge to national sovereignty by many in each North American nation, that work has been taken over by plurilateral ethnic, labor, environmental, and human rights citizens' alliances. This perhaps lends credence to the theory of many social scientists (e.g., Luccisano 1995) that nongovernmental organizations are becoming more important political bodies than national governments themselves.

Both the state and national governments of Chiapas and Mexico are responding to the political agenda of the EZLN, the Coordinadora de Pueblos Indios, and plurilateral organizations to reconsider the Constitutional reforms made in 1992 (to facilitate NAFTA), including in Articles 4 and 115 (cf. Propuesta del Poder Ejecutivo 1995), and to consider means of establishing autonomous governance for pueblos indios. In October 1995 there began a series of talks between the EZLN and the government of Chiapas, and the first round of talks will be

¹¹ Trilateral here refers, of course, to Mexico, Canada, and the U.S.

concerned with the autonomy of pueblos indios.

An artisan who worked with the Alianza Cívica (Civic Alliance) to administer the Consulta Nacional (National Poll) in August 1995, said this about national identity in Mexico:

I think there is a plurality. But I could not venture an opinion about what percentage is interested or not in (the work of the EZLN, from different regions of Mexico). Because I, for example, am worried about the Tarahumaras¹² and I want to do something. But I also have to worry about my own area, right here in D.F. I cannot resolve the problems of those in Chiapas, nor of the Tarahumaras, because I live here. In this city, I am worried about assaults, about public insecurity. So, I think each person in his or her own place, own community, has to be concerned with his or her community, no? I am worried about the country, but... those of us who live in the capital district, also have to solve our problems....

It is not only here, but the whole world is in crisis. But this country needs a change. It needs to turn over a new leaf, because there are intelligent, talented people in this country, but the nation does not give them any opportunities. And politically, not in any sense. So right now, I think that historically, and on all levels, this change is coming. Whether we want it or not, this change has to be. I hope it goes for the better! None of us wants a war. But I'm not going to be passive, either. Because although one works, there is no option but to just barely survive. Right now, there is still food, but when there is even more unemployment, even less food... when you are hungry, you have a stomach for action. But it doesn't have to come to that. Right now would be a good time for a peaceful change. But a reasonable one, with conscience, no? Right now, everybody's talking about conscience, but I think this word is very difficult to understand precisely, and in all its vastness... does it mean to act with reason? in what country? wherever one is, as a Mexican, as a human being, one has the right to live well. And this country is too rich to have people that have nothing to eat, children who can't go to school. This country has an immense wealth that we are only using 10% of, but they don't think we deserve it. We are accomplished, but with a sense of inferiority that makes us believe we are worthless. This is the time to rise up and say hey, I belong to this country and this country belongs to me. [author's translation]

All this was in answer to a question about national identity, and I think her words merit much study in that regard. For her, identity itself is in the process of change, of revalorization, and is inextricable from the political process. National identity might be seen in this way as a focal point for praxis -- to see always the failures and possibilities of a national project (including attention to who speaks for/as a nation and who is silenced by the very articulation of a

¹² At the time, this indigenous community in northern Mexico was suffering from a prolonged drouth and a dearth of food supplies from any source.

national identity) or political projects which may be supplanting nationalisms.

A member of the government, in the banking sector, interpreted national identity in much more narrow terms than this. When I asked him if he thought NAFTA had affected national identity or culture in Mexico, he responded:

Yes, I think there have been important changes. For example, in this area, in the financial field, one of the important aspects of NAFTA has been that it opened financial services to external competition. Because for more than 60 years, even when banks were private (not nationalized), foreign banks were not allowed to operate in Mexico. So NAFTA is the first policy that allows this. And since it passed, foreign banks have opened a number of branches in Mexico. Now, in terms of national culture or identity, which was the theme of your question, I think that it has not been permeated as much, and that the influence of other countries already existed before NAFTA. Because basically that happens through TV programs, through the radio, etc., where there is foreign programming. And that already existed. So, NAFTA has encouraged those kinds of changes, but they were already happening before NAFTA. [author's translation]

When I asked him what Mexico's position is vis a vis globalization, he said this :

We think that the new international tendency is to have greater integration between all countries, and that's the direction things have been going in, isn't it? So we have been trying to increase our commercial relations not just with the U.S. and Canada, but the idea is also to make agreements of that kind with other Latin American nations. There has already been one signed with Columbia and Venezuela. We have another one with Chile. We have another one with Bolivia. And we think that this will continue to be the tendency. Nevertheless, I think that economic interchange, and even more strongly, cultural interchange, will continue to be most strongly with the other North American countries because they are closer and because they offer different kinds of economic support. [author's translation]

In October, 1995, I reinterviewed the young farmers in Kentucky about NAFTA and national identity. The Argentinian tobacco has not arrived to displace theirs, but the bottom has fallen out of the beef market in their region (and cattle production subsidizes the labor costs of their tobacco production). They blamed this drop in cattle prices on Mexico, saying that cheaper beef was being produced in the U.S./Mexican border region due to changes facilitated by NAFTA. They also said that the U.S. is losing its agrarian identity because of national interdependence in North America.

So national identity is as different to different people, according to their work and political lives, for example, as NAFTA has been constructed in the absence of the document itself.

In conclusion, NAFTA has catalysed increased talk of national identity in Mexico and the U.S. at the same time as it has catalysed plurinational activity that the negotiators of NAFTA probably never anticipated. Plurinational activity, through alliances of sovereignty movements across nationstates and continents, for example, or through nongovernmental organizations, presents very interesting possibilities in terms of changing what we understand nations and political communities to be.

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