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Contemporary Hi(stories) of Mexico: Fictional Re-Creation of Collective Past on Television

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The term historical soap opera can be defined as a regular domestic soap opera in the sense of a television melodrama with the basic elements of a fictional narrative created through language and mimesis: story, characters, discourse and theme. A historical soap opera, however, is primarily characterized by the representation of a specific period of collective history and its main heroes in plots that depict wars, conspiracy, heroic feats, the public deeds of the heroes and national unification. As a complement to that essential historical component, non-historical characters enact interconnected subplots of passion, love, jealousy, betrayal, and intrigue.¹

With variations and specifications, historical soap operas blend historical characters with common people, and historical events with scenes of everyday community life. Historical soap operas emphasize the integration of the ordinary citizen as an anonymous but active and loyal companion of the historic figures in order to advance the idea of equality of heroes and common people as coexistent protagonists in the making of the nation. These are the fundamentals of historical soap operas, or, as I have suggested elsewhere, historical kinetic murals.²

Kinetic murals portray the interaction of the past in contemporary issues and illustrate the diversity of versions of the collective history created with a variety of resources that appeal to mass audiences. The nature of these expressions is rooted in the awareness that narrating the past constitutes a discursive form, an arbitrary interpretation mainly from documental sources and exemplifies a process that embraces the craft of fiction, language, education, politics, imagination and representation.

There is an extensive bibliography of critical studies about soap operas in Latin America that investigate them from a variety of perspectives.³ However, the historical soap opera remains unexplored in these studies. This is mainly due to the fact that historical soap operas are produced in considerably fewer numbers, more sporadically, and tend to be shorter than the domestic soap operas; they are not regularly in the mind and in the eyes of the

audiences. The constant and multiple presences of the domestic type and their effects in the market and on their audiences call for a larger number of studies and a variety of approaches.

The three most recent historical kinetic murals, *La antorcha encendida* (1996), *El vuelo del águila* (1994), and *Senda de gloria* (1988), were produced and distributed by Televisa, the largest telecommunications company in Mexico and Latin America and aired during prime time on weekdays. These productions incorporated the collective past into the daily routines of their audiences. Historical kinetic murals contain a pedagogical profile of collective participation intended to perform the binary education-entertainment by appealing to the basic concepts of national history instilled in the social imagination. The pedagogical enterprise can be viewed as utilization of the media as effective instrument to convey the ideological messages of hegemonic groups. The kinetic murals however, even if considered as advocates of the groups in power, also present a contesting feature to the traditional version of the official history, especially in the re-creation of the traditional heroes, such as Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos in *La antorcha encendida*, and Porfirio Díaz in *El vuelo del águila*.



Courtesy of Photo Archives.

Televisa's "kinetic murals: contest official history of official heroes, Miguel Hidalgo, Jose Maria Morelos, and Porfirio Diaz.

Considered by their producers as valuable cultural commodities and meant to last, *La antorcha encendida*, *El vuelo del águila*

and *Senda de gloria* were created with a specific purpose in mind: to be treasured and sold as collectibles. *La antorcha encendida*, *El vuelo del águila*, and *Senda de gloria* have been sold as a series of videotape collections in a chain of luxury stores throughout Mexico. The collections have been very limited in number and expensive relative to the buying power of the average Mexican.⁴

In order to establish a trusted and appealing version of the past in a soap opera that qualifies to be considered a pedagogical tool to be treasured and consulted, executives of Televisa hired professional historians as advisors in the production process of *Senda de gloria*, *El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*. The historical episodes and the biographies of the heroes were conducted under the guidance of well-known Mexican historians, such as Enrique Krauze, Jean Meyer, and Fausto Zerón-Medina. Based on historical texts, the interests of Televisa, and their own vision of the past, historians became actively involved in every aspect of the creative process: the script writing, character building, artifacts, costumes, make up, and stage design. These fictional creations included careful production, archive research, ample funding, a variety of filming in historical landmarks, sophisticated technical equipment, and a casting of prestigious actors.

These components contributed to create a respected and credible image of history through fiction. However, the role of Televisa in the production of the historical series cannot be trusted as a tool of impartial information and generous education. While screenwriters and historians such as Zerón-Medina claim absolute independence from executives of Televisa, absence of censorship commissions, respect for his work and for the version he was interested in showing on television, Televisa reserved the right to decide exactly “the what” and “the when” of his historical kinetic mural.⁵

The most recent historical kinetic mural, *La antorcha encendida*, was written by Fausto Zerón-Medina and produced by Ernesto Alonso. It depicts the conspiracy and the wars fought in 1810 by royalists and insurgents for Mexican independence from Spain. It recreates the leading heroes of the period: Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos, Vicente Guerrero, and Josefa Ortíz de Domínguez, among others. The plot covers the social, political and economic situation of the Colony from 1785 to 1821, describing the corruption and disintegration of the Spanish system that resulted in the Indian insurrection led by the Creole elite. An event that happened one hundred years after the independence, and undoubtedly one of the most transcendental turning points in history is portrayed in *Senda de gloria*: the revolution of 1910 and the so-called revolutionary period (1917-1940).

Senda de gloria by Miguel Sabido, Carlos Enrique Taboada, Antonio Monsell, Eduardo Lizalde and Fausto Zerón-Medina presents a series of historical events and the parade of Mexican presidents who came to power during the revolutionary period after

the armed struggle of 1910. This kinetic mural illustrates the chaotic situation of Mexico in various fronts that include the national situation and the consequences on individuals: the chaos of the economy, the need to organize the army, the devastation of the countryside, the tragedy of thousands of families who lost loved ones in the war, the separation of lovers, crime, illiteracy, and poverty. *Senda de gloria* recreates the historical reality as an orderly flow, as a continuity of causes and consequences of the revolution, and as an examination of leaders’ conducts and attitudes but, more importantly, as legitimization and preservation of the current political regime.

In an attempt to accomplish the goal of both literacy and indoctrination, *Senda de gloria* stresses the importance to know how to read and write in the 1920s in Mexico to study the Mexican Constitution. *Senda de gloria* highlights the philosophy of the Partido Nacional, which developed into what today is known as the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), explaining its ideals of unity, continuity and justifying its aim of political control. Not only does *Senda de gloria* explain the creation of the official contemporary political party PRI, but it also advocates its preservation. The rationale to create the party and to maintain it is to assemble capable and visionary leaders under the same banner to respond to the party interests and thus concentrate the power to effectively administer the resources of the nation and solve the immediate challenges of the historical moment in the way the party deems convenient.

Through the characterization of the revolutionary presidents, especially Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles, the message of *Senda de gloria* is to underline the need for peace after seven years of civil war and to discourage the punishable and undesirable resource of violence and illegitimacy. These forces, the protagonists insist, erode the institutions and jeopardize the present and the future of the common well-being. Within a context that emphasizes the need for peace, *Senda de gloria* proudly displays the benefits of progress and praises the legacy of the heroes.

Senda de gloria is the pedagogical par excellence of the three most recent kinetic mural. It was planned by Televisa coupled with the participation of the government through the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS). The IMSS, as a federal agency, funded this fictional version of history of Mexico. *Senda de gloria*’s very specific goal to educate the population about the past is done through the lead of its main non-historical character: the prestigious General Eduardo Álvarez, who is also narrator of the story and commentator of history. With the tone of a wise and generous father, General Álvarez volunteers to educate an orphaned, illiterate young man. He teaches him how to read and write and how to interpret the history and politics of Mexico. Through the lessons imparted in the rich private library of his opulent residence, the main non-historical character aims to teach the whole audience through the education of his protégé, who is

also intelligent, hard working and honest. Álvarez succeeds in transforming him from poor, illiterate, and unemployed into a well-known, respected, and progressive journalist.

Senda de gloria's paternalistic tone, especially, insists on the need to preserve the institutions created by the groups in power, justifies the motivations to reinforce the principles of continuity of those groups, and urges the audience to observe the law as the only acceptable way to introduce social change and, therefore, to achieve peace and prosperity. Also, *Senda de gloria* as well as *La antorcha encendida* are vivid reminders of the destruction of wars, and function as advocates to the pursuit of peace, territory and justice. The recreation of history presented in *Senda de gloria* and *La antorcha encendida* is structured as an entity capable of organizing the chaos of historical events and as the providers of this unfailing formula: order = peace = democracy = progress = happiness. A clear lesson of manipulation can be drawn here: if the audience knows, observes, and peacefully exercises the law, they can also be exemplary citizens and happy, progressive individuals who effectively function in society.

Whereas *Senda de gloria* narrates the period following the revolution of 1910, *El vuelo del águila* explores the life of the historical figure who, among other things, prompted that civil uprising: General Porfirio Díaz. With the expertise of the historians at Centro de Estudios del Porfiriato, Enrique Krauze and Fausto Zerón-Medina wrote the script of *El vuelo del águila*. This kinetic mural presents an alternative version of the life of Porfirio Díaz, the dictator of thirty-three years at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. Similar to what *La tormenta* did in 1968 to restore the image of President Benito Juárez, although in different circumstances, *El vuelo del águila* provides an image of Díaz that highlights his intelligence, his loyalty to his country, his bravery and his accomplishments during the wars of the French intervention and his later contributions to industry and transportation during his many years in office.⁶

Essentially, *El vuelo del águila* reevaluates the figure of Díaz as strong leader and a human being with forgivable flaws and wrongdoings who was also at some point a believer in democracy. *El vuelo del águila* focuses on the personal life of Díaz and the circumstances that influenced his upbringing, the details and complexities of the times he lived as a young man, his devotion to his mother and to his wife, his children and the difficulties and intricacies of leading a country as a mature man. *El vuelo del águila* reminds the audience of the human dimension of General Díaz, justifies his ambitious hold of power and explains it in the context of the complex social, cultural and political situation at the beginning of the 20th century.

El vuelo del águila is an example of the single vision construction of the past that was created purposely to tell a different version from that of the traditional official story, which considered Díaz only as the terrible tyrant. *El vuelo del águila* can also be read as a defense of a political regime that stays in power longer

than democracy permits. Díaz's thirty-three years in office can be translated as a metaphor of the seventy years of political control exercised by the contemporary PRI.

In this context it is interesting to consider to what extent producers, script writers and historians have the freedom, the initiative and the resources to create an alternative version of collective history for the masses, especially when that adaptation is both an attempt to build an official version and, at the same time, a breaking with the traditional account of the official history of Mexico. The story by Krauze and Zerón-Medina shows the life of Díaz based on one point of view, that of the dictator himself. Also, because the nature of this story, a fictional biography, *El vuelo del águila* presents the case of only one main historical character that does not call for the participation of a parallel fictional plot, nor a variety of points of view of the past through non-historical characters as in the case of *Senda de gloria*, *La antorcha encendida*, *La Constitución* or *La tormenta*.

Although conceived in very different circumstances about a hero who was, unlike Díaz, already considered by the public as one of the greatest men in Mexico, *La tormenta* was the first historical kinetic mural created with the specific purpose of responding to a previous production and in order to restore the image of a national hero. What were the circumstances that urged the creation of *La tormenta* by explicit request of the Mexican federal government? In order to answer that question, I need to provide some background information about the first experiments of Mexican history through fiction on television.

Mexican television officially started in the 1950s, and by 1951 the first soap operas were aired. From then on, the production of soap operas has been uninterrupted. Jorge A. González in *La cofradía de las emociones (in)terminables* (1998) reports 700 teledramas between 1952 and 1978. As television became more and more popular, soap operas with trivial topics such as love stories and domestic intrigue proliferated. According to Ernesto Alonso and Miguel Sabido, producer and screen writer of soap operas respectively, the production of soap operas with historical themes appeared as a response to counterbalance the overflow of trivial topics of domestic soap operas and created what was considered of cultural and educational value such as the national past and heroes. In 1959, the mini series *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*, about the life and adventures of Francisco Villa, the revolution leader, was aired. Pedro Armendáriz, a well-known actor in Mexican cinema starred in this series of which not much is known. Although *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*—formulated with the cinematic technique—was not a historical soap opera, the theme of the collective history was of paramount importance for producers and proved to be especially attractive to the public.

In creating soap operas with historical characters, Ernesto Alonso also mentions his fascination with the history of Mexico he studied as a child. His main motivation to recreate the past originated in the traditional way textbooks presented the history

of Mexico. The inherited version of those textbooks was written in a clearly dramatic nationalistic tone and inflammatory rhetoric from the 1950s up to the early 1970s. The aim was to root in the reader—typically children from 7 to 13 years of age—a feeling of loyalty and commitment to the nation by creating admiration of and gratitude for the heroes, and to produce citizens respectful of the law and proud of their institutions. The foundation for national identification through kinetic murals derives from these versions of the collective past already present in the social imagination created mainly in school textbooks of the history of Mexico.

After *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*, historical kinetic murals start in 1961 with Productora de Teleprogramas, later known as Telesistemas Mexicanos, today identified as Televisa. *Vida de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* was aired in 1963 as the first attempt of a soap opera with a historical character. The colonial period and, especially, the Spanish literary Golden Age are portrayed through the life of the Mexican nun Sor Juana, the most celebrated poet of that time. It was a failure. It seems that the problem with this soap opera in captivating the audience's interest was with the government censorship commission.

This commission did not allow the kinetic mural to explore the conflict this nun had with the Inquisition, the issues with her confessor, her intimate connections with the viceroys, nor her rich life and privileges in the convent. As a consequence, the story resulted in a monotonous account of Sor Juana with no possibility to tell a story with the elements of a soap opera: passion, love, complications, intrigue, antagonism, and mystery. After Sor Juana, another kinetic mural was produced. This time, passion, love and intrigue were personified as the main, if not the only, ingredients. The formula “history + love” proved to be problematic.

Maximiliano y Carlota (1965), by fiction writer Guadalupe Dueñas, tells the love story of Austrian emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg and his wife Carlota Amalia. *Maximiliano y Carlota* enacts their short and turbulent empire and their tragic end in the context of the French intervention in Mexico (1862-1867). Margarita López Portillo, secretary of Radio, Television and Cinematography during the office of President José López Portillo, supported the project of this historical kinetic mural and supervised its production.

In *Maximiliano y Carlota* the protagonists are presented as innocent victims of destiny, as romantic heroes who die for and in a foreign country. In *México sentimental* (1999), Reyes De la Maza, a soap opera writer and critic remembers: “The soap opera *Maximiliano y Carlota* was a big hit. It narrated the romantic story of a beautiful but naïve European prince and princess whose only flaw was to love each other in a land of indians”(45). President Benito Juárez, mastermind of the Reformation Laws and the Restoration of the republic after the French invasion is portrayed as the bad guy in *Maximiliano y Carlota*. President Juárez—who was a Zapotec Indian—is the one to blame for the separation of the aristocratic lovers and for destroying their lives. The fact that

a president of Mexico is presented in this light had its consequences. De la Maza reports:

The secretary of State, which was the agency in charge of the Cinematography and Television Censorship Commission demanded that changes be made to the script in order to restore Juárez's image. Too late. The fact presented in the soap opera was that the Indian President sent the blond god who loved the sweet Miramar princess to the grave. To the audience, Juárez was clearly the bad guy. So, in chapter 51, out of the 80 originally planned, the soap opera had to be abruptly terminated. The producer of *Maximiliano y Carlota*, Ernesto Alonso, hoped this historical and political faux pas would be soon forgiven and forgotten. (45)

Miguel Sabido, soap opera scriptwriter, was asked to help mend the incident caused by *Maximiliano y Carlota*. Sabido recalls: “There was a government non-official protest. Miguel Alemán, then vice president of Telesistemas, requested that a soap opera about the legacy of Juárez be created. Ernesto Alonso, the producer in charge, called Eduardo Lizalde and me”.⁷

La tormenta (1968) was the title of that historical kinetic mural by Lizalde and Sabido. The plot explores the war of the so-called Reformation period starting in 1857, the French invasion (1862-1867), the Porfiriato, and the Revolution (1910). The first chapter of *La tormenta* provides the context of the government of President Ignacio Comonfort and the changes in the Mexican Constitution of 1857. Miguel Sabido talks about *La tormenta*, his first participation as a scriptwriter of a historical kinetic mural:

La tormenta was divided into two parts: the first tells the story of Juárez from his exile during the French invasion (1862) to his death. The second part was from 1907 to 1917. Each part consisted of 50 chapters of 30 minutes each. I created the structure of the story based on dramatic theory with a specific hypothesis for the first part: it is possible to write a soap opera showing the audience how the collective history of a whole country can directly affect the life of the individuals of that country. Also, my intention was to remind the audience that our heroes are not marble sculptures but human beings with weaknesses, passions, faults and desires.⁸

La Tormenta recovered the respectable image of President Juárez as a relevant national hero. In addition to that, Reyes de la Maza observes that José Carlos Ruiz, the actor who played the role of President Juárez, delivered a stunning performance thus making *La Tormenta* a specific message aimed at erasing all con-

fusion and misunderstandings about the role of Juárez and his circumstances during the French invasion. De la Maza says that after *La tormenta*, Mexican television viewers had a very clear idea that “Juárez was not the xenophobic bad guy, but a dignified, remarkable man who led his country through one of the toughest and most turbulent periods of the history of Mexico” (49).

La tormenta was an ambitious project because of the complex and long historical periods that it contained, from 1857 to 1917: Reformation, French invasion, Restoration, Porfiriato and Revolution. In addition to that, the reconstruction of some collective events such as the 5th of May battle and the 2nd of April battle implied a huge challenge for the producers who had to handle a variety of difficulties such as how to organize and train a great number of doubles and extras in outdoor locations, and how to effectively introduce the use of horses and how to fire weapons, which scared horses and actors alike. One advantage of these early productions of collective history was that the film was black and white. The dullness of black and white on the television screen and the fixed focus of the cameras diluted some of the mistakes, accidents and omissions such as details in the stage design and construction, and peculiarities in make-up, costumes and props.

In *La tormenta*, the plot is developed through a non-historical fictional character who is created specifically as the axis of the plot along the whole story. This fictional character stays in the story from the very beginning to the very end in order to act as an active and reliable witness of the realities, needs and evolution of the country. This same technique of a central fictional character as close companion of the historical figures, as main and active participant in historical events, and as wise commentator of people and circumstances is used by Sabido in his *Senda de gloria* twenty years later. The main fictional character is personified, in both *La tormenta* and in *Senda de gloria*, by acclaimed Mexican actor Ignacio López Tarso.

After *La tormenta*, Sabido wrote the script of *Los caudillos* (1969) about the independence wars of 1810, and then *La Constitución* (1970), which is a continuation of the historical period started in *La tormenta*. *La Constitución* intended to accurately recreate the discussion and writing sessions that produced the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Reyes de la Maza points out the basic and maybe only merit of *La Constitución*: the participation as protagonist of Mexican movie diva María Félix. Félix, who had starred in films with the biggest names of the so called Golden Age of Mexican cinema—Pedro Infante, Pedro Armendáriz, Emilio Fernández y Dolores del Río—was the big attraction for the audience in *La Constitución*, and her first and last participation on television.

Around the personal happenings of the character played by María Félix—a young, beautiful widow whose husband died fighting in the revolution—the collective history unfolds describing the circumstances in which the Constitution was composed in Querétaro in 1917. The kinetic mural resulted in a tedious series

of discussion sessions of the government parliament in the process of writing the Constitution, which were rendered boring, and monotonous to the audience, however appealing Félix might have been; the rating plummeted, especially in the last episodes.

After *La Constitución*, *El carruaje* (1972) was produced. Miguel Sabido created the general structure but the actual scripts were done by Carlos Enrique Taboada and Antonio Monsell. *El carruaje*, about the exile of Juárez, the execution of Emperor Maximilian, and the Restoration of the republic, was the last of the tetralogy of historical kinetic murals and the last one in black and white. These four—*La tormenta*, *Los caudillos*, *La Constitución* and *El carruaje*—provided valuable experience for the creators of the later productions in the 1980s and 1990s: *Senda de gloria*, *El vuelo del águila* and *La antorcha encendida*. That valuable experience is related not only to the technical aspects, but also to the specific approach to the account of the collective past: the recreation of the personal, intimate side of public figures.

Constructing collective history on television underscores the fact that the narration of the past is only possible through its reincarnation in characters. Historical kinetic murals highlight the interaction of historical and non-historical characters as the preferred vehicle through which contents are expressed. Characters then appropriate history and act upon it according to their subjectivities—perceptions, values, individualities—and external historical circumstances. In this way history is embodied and evolves from the personification of the fictional characters and the historical figures to incorporate themselves as persons into the lives and routines of the public. The way to connect the past to modern audiences through fiction in historical kinetic murals has been by recreating the human drama, that is, through reflections, doubts, errors, anguish, regrets, accomplishments, concerns, joys and pleasures, the little mundane things as well as the transcendental historical moments.

Kinetic murals show the evolution, the organization, the needs, the realities of Mexico as the confluence of opposites and moments of crisis. These personified conflicts seek to show the direct consequences on individuals and their reactions upon those circumstances. Kinetic murals then reconstruct specific events of the past motivated by struggling social forces, the urgency of change and the need to exercise the basic human rights such as respect, dignity, liberty, and justice.

Kinetic murals, through narrative structure and mimetics, reflect the intimate peculiarities of the human condition and public collective events. They recreate everyday life situations and celebrate the feats of heroes by incorporating these accounts into the daily routines of their audiences. Historical kinetic murals, as interpreters of the past, guide the audience and shape its imagination through the chaos of historical events. In this way, the kinetic murals are constructed as effective tools of social control. Kinetic murals underline the idea that development is possible only in an

atmosphere of concord and equity. In order to advance such an ideal, kinetic murals vividly portray the destruction and misery entailed in any war in order to highlight the need to maintain peace at any cost and to make any suitable social change through the nonviolent exercise of the law.

Traditional domestic soap operas have had the stigma of not having any artistic merit, any intellectual intent or any historical value.⁹ But their presence and proliferation in our cultures signals a contemporary reality of universal and ancient origins. Modern television, as a means of popular and massive entertainment, through historical kinetic murals, reproduces the ancient tradition present in all the cultures around the world that, during the leisure period after work, assembles a group of people around a narrator to listen to stories. Through technological and human resources, television, as a massive narrative medium, plays the metaphorical role of the primeval narrator who tells epic stories about the origins of a community, about values and traditions, about gods and heroes, about the ideals of romance, about the battle of good and evil, and the creation of and obedience to the law.

As a contemporary expression of technology and social development, television and, in this case, historical kinetic murals, represent a powerful element of affiliation that reinvents its own version of the ancient vehicle to construct concepts of identity, and community. Kinetic murals are constructed as messengers of specific versions of interpretations of present and past realities seeking to represent and share collective and individual experiences and to incorporate those into the routines of large audiences.

The act of narrating is rooted in the human need for generating stories, for retelling variations of the basically same story, for the creation of more stories and also, for the conservation of power structures. The production of kinetic murals graphically expresses the idea of a necessary order to explain reality, excuses, and motivations that prompted heroes and common people to act the way they did and with their acts, as specifically orchestrated by the cinematic narrator, to explain and connect past with present, emotions with actions, actors with spectators. By combining the public and the private with human drama, history on television proves that the past is always present, is always in the making, as an important constituent of their audiences' routines. But also important is the fact that historical kinetic murals exercise the essential magic of storytelling through an electronic device. The power of a narrative that draws people together creates an emotional connection with the audience by illustrating their origins as a group, their collective achievements, their individual liberties and the way they envision their future.

Notes

1 Nora Mazziotti, in *La industria de la telenovela* (1996) points out the essential

ingredient in a soap opera: a love story. In addition to this: the search of the origin and identity of the protagonists as well as rivalry between siblings and the questioning of the paternal authority which implies the conflict of the son and the father (14).

- 2 In "Telenovela histórica: el mural animado de la historia de México" (Historical soap operas: or the kinetic mural of the history of Mexico) in *Genealogías Imaginadas. Los Discursos de la Cultura Hoy*. Edited by Javier Duran et al. Michigan State University, the University of Louisville, 2003 pp 99-114, I describe historical soap operas as *kinetic murals*. In that article, I propose the term *kinetic murals* based on the commonalities between Mexican traditional murals of the 1920s in the walls of public buildings, and soap operas with historical components. I perceive the animated television and the static colorful mural paintings as correspondent cultural expressions that share essential characteristics in intent and composition. Although they are deeply divergent in the means by which they are manifested, the process of production, the ways they are consumed, and the number and quality of audiences they reach, they reveal, however, basic interconnections that suggest a continuity of a national cultural project started after the Revolution of 1910. The main connections I identify between *historical kinetic murals* and traditional murals relate essentially to the primary intent of those projects and to the visual composition as narrative devices. These affinities can be summarized in four basic components: both depictions of history are intended to 1) reach multiple and heterogeneous audiences; 2) to provide a specific vision of particularly relevant historical figures and events as periods of intense social change such as the Independence and the Revolution; 3) to convey the ideal binary mission of education and leisure; and 4) to underline the concept of history as a collective undertaking where national heroes and representatives of the common people unite. If historical soap operas are conceived as *historical kinetic murals*, what can be observed is, on the one hand, an entertainment-education enterprise for the masses that seeks to transmit nationalistic values and perpetuate sociopolitical hegemonies. On the other hand, *kinetic murals* are also capable of integrating into the daily lives of audiences the past as a meaningful element of community building and belonging, and as a present and living entity.
- 3 Domestic soap operas have been extensively studied as cultural products of social change (González y Mugnaini, 1986; Nariman, 1993); as an industry of entertainment (Mazziotti, 1996), as indicator of domestic and economic activities (López Pumarejo, 1987; Martín-Barbero, 1987); their popularity and fixation in the audience's preferences (López Romo, 1987); the process of production and interpretation (González Molina, 1988; González, 1991; Chávez, 1992); their impact on domestic responsibilities and their influence in the dynamics of family relations (Covarrubias, 1998; Klindworth, 1992; Uribe, 1991), among others.
- 4 *La antorcha encendida*, a collection of eight videotapes of 100, 120, or up to 140 minutes each cost 900 pesos (reduced price) in 2000. *El vuelo del águila*, a collection of twelve videotapes of 150 or 170 minutes each, cost 1,300 pesos in 2000. *Senda de gloria*, a collection of ten videotapes of 180 minutes each cost 1,200 pesos in 1999. These collections in VHS are no longer in the market. New in the market (as of December 2003) are the DVD collections. *La antorcha encendida*, four DVDs of 300 minutes each; *El vuelo del águila*, six DVDs of 210 minutes each; and *Senda de gloria*, five DVDs of 360 minutes each. Each collection costs 1,099 pesos.
- 5 Personal interview with Fausto Zerón-Medina in Mexico City, 2001. After *Senda de gloria* was aired the first time on weekdays in 1988, a second running was planned for the weekends. In the last episodes, *Senda de gloria* presents the relevant legacy of President Lázaro Cárdenas and the achievement

for which he is most famous: the nationalization of foreign oil companies in 1938. Also portrayed in *Senda de gloria* is his character as a brave, intelligent, trusted, honest and beloved president, a man of convictions, and a strong charismatic leader. These features proved dangerous for the official party PRI, Televisa's traditional and non-official supporter. *Senda de gloria* was being aired on television at the time of political campaigns for presidential elections. What was dangerous for the PRI was the fact that the actual son of former President Lázaro Cárdenas, Cuahutémoc Cárdenas, was the candidate of the opposition party PAN. So, without any warning for the audience, Televisa cancelled the second running of *Senda de Gloria*.

6 Personal interview with Ernesto Alonso, Mexico City, 2000. Ernesto Alonso reports about *El vuelo del águila* and Porfirio Díaz: "To me, Porfirio Díaz was a very important man, and I am very proud to have produced a soap opera about what I have always thought of him. He is indeed one of the brightest men in the history of Mexico. In *El vuelo del águila* we get to know him as an individual. We see how he grew from very humble origins to become a very powerful man: the president of Mexico. His only flaw was to have become a dictator when he was an old man, but I think that was basically a mistake of the old age. Apart from that, I really think he was indeed one of the men who most contributed to his country, one of the most outstanding men that Mexico has ever seen."

7 Personal interview with Miguel Sabido in Mexico City in 1999.

8 Personal interview with Miguel Sabido in Mexico City in 1999.

9 In my interview with Miguel Sabido in Mexico City in 1999, Sabido remembers: "Here's an anecdote: Don Daniel Cosío Villegas started watching *La tormenta* in the early 1970s and, as a reaction, he wrote an article in the newspaper *Excelsior*. In his article, he complained about the fact that the government would have allowed a soap opera to narrate the life of President Benito Juárez, one of the greatest men of Mexico. He said that it was an outrageous lack of respect to the image and the legacy of Juárez. I admired him very much, but I had never met him in person. Two weeks later, Don Daniel Cosío Villegas wrote another article saying something like this: "I am writing to apologize to Miguel Sabido, whom I have not met in person, because of what I said in a previous article. In that article, I said that it was a stupidity to write a soap opera about Benito Juárez, because I always thought soap opera was just an easy, weepy, inferior genre for maids, and that it was a complete waste. However, I am now very happy to congratulate Sabido because he has created a truly dignified, creative and unique version

of Juárez." Don Daniel Cosío has been one of the most prominent figures of Mexican culture so, his article really made people consider that soap opera as a valuable vehicle to learn about the history of Mexico. Of course, his comments also helped raise the rating. After that, many more people watched *La tormenta*. And they loved it!"

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