State Infrastructural Power and Nationalism: Comparative Lessons from Mexico and Argentina

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Abstract This article focuses on the nexus between state infrastructural power and legitimacy. A comparative case study of nationalism in mid-twentieth-century Mexico and Argentina provides the basis for theorizing the impact of state infrastructural power on transformations of official understandings of nationhood. Both countries experienced a transition from liberal to popular nationalism. The extent to which popular nationalism became a regular product of state organizations varied between the two cases, depending on the timing of state development. The temporal congruence between the expansion of state infrastructural power and ideological change, as exemplified by Mexico under Cárdenas, facilitated the full institutionalization of the new official ideology, whereas a disjuncture between state development and ideological change, as exemplified by Argentina under Perón, inhibited such a comprehensive transformation of nationalism.

Keywords Argentina · Infrastructural power · Mexico · Nationalism · Latin America · Legitimacy

Introduction

Michael Mann's (1984, 1993) concept of state infrastructural power captures a crucial attribute of the state: its capacity to permeate social life and implement its decisions throughout the territory it claims to govern. As highlighted by Hillel

This research was supported by an IDRF fellowship from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). A previous version was presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago. I would like to thank Matthew Lange, Daniel Schensul, Dan Slater, and Daniel Ziblatt for helpful comments. I also greatly benefited from the continued intellectual exchange with Hillel Soifer.

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Soifer's introductory article to this issue, state infrastructural power is based on a set of institutions that enable states to radiate out from the center and penetrate society, most prominently administration, education, and the means of transportation and communication. It is also grounded in elite interest to employ these "logistical techniques," and in the relationships between central state authorities, those institutions, and local communities. Infrastructurally powerful states are thus able to draw upon the social control technologies necessary to name, register, tax, police, educate their subjects, and they do so both in the capital and the farthest points of their territories.

Even states endowed with the necessary technological, motivational, and institutional underpinnings may not be able to effectively exercise infrastructural power. For the central state to control and coordinate activities throughout society also requires some legitimacy in the eyes of societal actors. These supporting beliefs and ideological justifications of state power ease the presence of state organizations and facilitate local cooperation with nonstate groups. In other words, legitimating state authority may reinforce the effects of the organizational forms and relationships constitutive of state infrastructural power, thereby expanding the capacity of states to implement their projects.¹

This does not imply a one-way relationship. In fact, the legitimacy of the central state may be equally a *product* of infrastructural power. Infrastructurally powerful states marshal the organizational infrastructure and territorial presence necessary to actively intervene in the socialization of their citizenry with the aim of instilling a belief in the legitimacy of state authority. Beyond enabling direct ideological and cultural work by state organizations, infrastructural power may also foster legitimacy indirectly. For instance, infrastructurally powerful states are more likely to deliver a wide variety of public goods, the provision of which may in turn positively bear on the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of nonstate groups.

This article focuses on the effects of state infrastructural power on the construction of legitimacy, based on an analysis of nationalism in mid-twentieth century Mexico and Argentina. In framing collectivities as sovereign, equal, and inherently limited nations, and a state as their political embodiment, nationalism is critical for the construction of legitimate state authority.² States employ nationalism as a discursive "toolkit" to draw the boundaries of national community and cultivate a sense of belonging among the resident population. As such, studying changes in the content of state-sponsored nationalism and the extent to which these discourses gain broader resonance provides a window on the nexus between state infrastructural power and legitimacy.

During the twentieth century, Mexico and Argentina experienced major transformations of official nationalism. In the late nineteenth century, the two countries exhibited *liberal* nationalism as a dominant state ideology. These national discourses

¹ See Rueschemeyer (1983, chap. 4) for a more general perspective on the relationship between legitimacy and formal organization.

² This point does not neglect that nationalism is equally important to contest state power. Yet the role of social movements in constructing national narratives and fashioning ideological transformations is beyond the scope of this article. See Itzigsohn and vom Hau (2006) for a theoretical and empirical treatment of this issue.

adopted a political-territorial understanding of the nation and imagined national unity as realized in the advancement of “civilization.” Liberal nationalism also conceived national history as driven by enlightened leaders and envisioned a small state and an export-oriented economy as the proper institutional structure to secure national progress. During well-defined periods in each country, *popular* nationalism replaced the reigning liberal nationalism as official national ideology. These national discourses promoted a cultural understanding of the nation and depicted national unity as achieved through a homogeneous national identity. Popular classes appeared as protagonists of national history and a corporate state and inward-oriented economy appeared as ideal underpinnings of national organization.

The extent to which popular nationalism replaced liberal nationalism varied among the two countries. In Mexico under the government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), popular nationalism became institutionalized as a regular product of the state cultural machinery, facilitating its translation into everyday frames of reference. By contrast, in Argentina under Juan Perón (1946–1955), state authorities did not manage to turn popular national discourses into hegemonic conceptions of Argentinian identity and history that reinforce national identification.³

I seek to explain here these variations in the extent of ideological and cultural change. Why did the Cárdenas regime manage to turn popular nationalism into an implicit frame of reference, whereas the Perón regime—endowed with an infrastructurally more powerful state than Mexico—failed to secure the institutionalization and broad societal diffusion of popular nationalism? To answer this question, it is necessary to conceptualize transformations of nationalism more generally. I analyze the institutionalization and dissemination of state-sponsored national ideologies as driven by patterns of state development. In particular, to what extent popular nationalism became a regular product of state organizations depended on the *relative timing* of state development. Focusing on levels of state infrastructural power alone does not help to explain variations of ideological change. The temporal congruence between the expansion of the infrastructural power and ideological change facilitated the full institutionalization of the new official ideology, whereas the presence of an infrastructurally powerful state apparatus already in place before the onset of ideological change prevented the translation of popular nationalism into everyday frames of reference.

In both Mexico under Cárdenas and in Argentina under Perón, the establishment of new ruling coalitions with subordinate sectors induced state elites to infuse official national discourses with popular ideas about national identity and history. In Mexico, the incorporation of popular nationalism unfolded simultaneously with a dramatic expansion of state infrastructural power. The armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) entailed a temporary collapse of the central state apparatus, whereby state infrastructural power remained limited throughout the 1920s. Only under Cárdenas did central state power consolidate, and a substantial expansion of cultural and pedagogical state organizations began. In Argentina, an infrastructurally more powerful state did not manage to implement this change of nationalism. This

³ National discourses are hegemonic if they inform everyday understandings of the world. Defined that way, hegemony does not mean the consent of the governed, but refers to the presence of these discourses as “banal” reference points in daily life (Billig 1995; Gramsci 1971).

was because Perón confronted a cultural machinery already established. A major expansion of state ideological infrastructure had already taken place in previous decades, and well-trained and organized cultural producers exhibited the capacity to resist the institutionalization of popular nationalism as a regular product of state organizations and prevented its ideological hegemony. Thus, more infrastructural power did not automatically translate into broader resonance of state-sponsored nationalism. It was the temporal order of state development vis-à-vis the change of nationalism that ultimately shaped the extent of ideological transformation.

To develop these arguments, I adopt a comparative-historical methodology (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). I also anchor the macro-level argument about state development and nationalism, and evaluate the cross-national patterns against more fine-grained evidence by choosing one institution—public education—as the main analytic window.⁴ For analyzing nationalism as consciously articulated *state ideology*, I draw on a study of school textbooks, most important primary school textbooks on national history, literature, and civic education (vom Hau 2007).⁵ For tracing the translation of state ideologies into more implicit *everyday scripts*, I combine secondary sources with teachers' testimonials and periodicals from independent teacher associations.⁶

State Infrastructural Power and Transformations of Nationalism

This section develops a theoretical framework to explain variations in the ideological change of nationalism. Building on the idea that nationalism contributes to the legitimation of state authority, I present a conceptual model for tracing the extent to which official national discourses may change. The explanatory argument developed here focuses on the expansion of state infrastructural power and its relative timing.

Transformations of Nationalism

Nationalism here refers to a form of discourse, a way of thinking and speaking about collectivities in terms of nations and national identities (Calhoun 1997). The basic underpinning of nationalism is the idea that a political unit is congruent with an

⁴ This approach owes much to Eugen Weber's (1976) study of nineteenth-century France that carefully disentangles the role of schooling in the "nationalization" of the rural population.

⁵ In this larger project, I use textbooks because public schools are arguably *the* major nationalizing institution of the state during the twentieth century. State authorities put major efforts into regulating the content of these texts, for instance, through special approval commissions. The textbook analysis starts with the implementation of obligatory public schooling during the late nineteenth century, a period that witnessed the prevalence of liberal nationalism, and ends with the comprehensive (or contained) institutionalization of popular nationalism. This study traces trajectories of nationalism as state ideology over substantial periods, from 1884 to 1955 in Argentina, and from 1888 to 1960 in Mexico. In each country, the study reviewed between 50 and 70 textbooks for these periods, collecting at least five publications each decade.

⁶ For exploring teachers' role in this process, I focused on the activities and outlooks of primary school teachers during the main transformative periods: the transitions toward popular nationalism under Cárdenas in Mexico (1934–1940) and Perón in Argentina (1946–1955).

imagined community of nationals.⁷ It charges certain normative principles, cognitive schemata, symbols, myths, and rituals with emotions and collective meaning and fuses them into specific reference points for the construction of national inclusion. These boundary markers are historical fabrications, but they may be experienced as primordial elements of collective life (Eisenstadt 1998). By itself, nationalism constitutes a powerful tool for the cultivation of national identification, and ultimately, the legitimation of state power.

Modern states take an interest in both the content and the broader resonance of nationalism. States employ nationalism to represent themselves as an expression of a particular nation. How criteria of national belonging are conceived distinguishes the nation in question from others and delineates the rights and obligations of membership. Nationalism and its projections of the national community also help to frame state actions as following *national interest* and depicting the apparatus of rule as an extension of the national collectivity. By instilling a sense of national belonging, nationalism also shapes the interaction between central state authorities and nonstate groups. The prevalence of state-sponsored national discourses in daily life affects the extraction of resources, the functioning of legal institutions, and the extent of societal responsiveness to state leaders.

To trace transformations of nationalism, I draw a conceptual distinction between two distinct but interrelated discursive formations of nationalism (see Itzigsohn and vom Hau 2006). First, nationalism is a highly explicit and consciously articulated *ideology* put forward by the state to legitimate authority and achieve social control (Gellner 1983; Smith 1991). This form of nationalism is reflected in presidential speeches, school textbooks, monuments, and public ceremonies. Second, nationalism is a *cultural script* with almost self-evident plausibility that provides a lens through which social reality is framed in daily habits and routines (Billig 1995; Brubaker et al. 2006). This form of nationalism is, for example, reflected in taking the national framing of news for granted.

The two forms of nationalism are connected to each other in a dynamic process. State ideologies aim to become gradually translated into hegemonic cultural scripts, which help propel the pervasiveness of states in the life-world of their resident populations. At the same time, cultural scripts enjoy relative autonomy from state control. Based on this conceptual model, I argue that transformations of nationalism entail the reorganization of official ideas about the nation. A comprehensive transformation of nationalism, the trajectory followed by Mexico under Cárdenas, is associated with the *articulation* of new or refurbished understandings of nationhood in state ideologies, and the *institutionalization* of state ideologies into cultural scripts. In a contained transformation, the trajectory followed by Argentina under Perón, the content of state ideologies changes, yet these refurbished official discourses do not achieve broader resonance as regular products of state organizations.

⁷ This definition provides a basis for distinguishing between nationalism and other forms of discourse involved in the legitimation of state power. For instance, agrarianism is distinct from nationalism because it evokes an imagined community of peasants rather than nationals.

State Infrastructural Power and the Institutionalization of National Ideology

States cannot simply adopt new forms of nationalism and turn them into broadly diffused frames of reference. For a comprehensive transformation of nationalism to take place, new forms of national ideology need to become broadly diffused as a regular product of state organizations, and need to be embedded in roles and organizations across the national territory (see Wuthnow 1989).

State infrastructural power is key to explain variations in transformations of nationalism. As infrastructurally powerful states are able to reach into society, they are expected to achieve the institutionalization of new state-sponsored national ideologies as hegemonic scripts. The presence of *logistical techniques* across national territory, such as a largely literate population or road networks, allow state authorities to broadly diffuse new forms of nationalism. Moreover, infrastructurally powerful states can draw on a variety of social control mechanisms at their disposal to routinize official national discourses in organizational practices, collective rituals, and daily life interactions. Of particular importance here are educational and cultural state organizations such as schools or museums, but other state agencies such as tax offices and police stations also play a role in the institutionalization of new ideological forms. Finally, infrastructurally powerful states exhibit the capacity to provide evenhanded social services, thereby also enhancing the diffusion of their ideological projects among the resident population.

This study follows a *national capabilities* approach (see Soifer, this issue) and conceptualizes state infrastructural power by focusing (1) on the institutions of social control and (2) actors situated within these institutions and their relationship to central state authorities. The ability of states to radiate from the center and reach their subjects can be assessed by examining the development and internal functioning of those institutions.⁸

The dominant way to assess infrastructural power is to examine the ability of states to extract from society through the lens of taxation. Studying patterns of revenue collection reveals insights into the resources at the disposal of state elites to exercise control over society (Mann 1993; Lieberman 2003). Likewise, assessing the size and the territorial reach of the state administrative apparatus more generally provides the opportunity to gauge levels of infrastructural power. Examining the local presence of state agencies, such as police stations or health clinics, sheds light on the capacity to extend state control throughout the national territory. Moving beyond the organizational structure of states themselves, infrastructural power can also be traced by considering *logistical techniques* that shape the implementation capacities of state organizations. Those include for instance literacy or road networks.

⁸ This is not to neglect other possible avenues of conceptualizing state infrastructural power and its role in ideological change (see Soifer, this issue). Yet, taking a *weight of the state* approach runs into the danger of conflating *explanans* and *explanandum* as transformations of nationalism are the very outcome of interest. A *subnational variation* approach would be more suitable to investigate a different research question, such as local differences and similarities in the extent of ideological change in Mexico or Argentina.

States are also directly involved in *organized persuasion* (Gorski 2003; see also Loveman 2005). Cultural and educational state organizations therefore require analytical attention in their own right when assessing state infrastructural power. This *cultural machinery* of states includes the organizational facilities, resources, communicative networks, and rituals dedicated to regulating the production and diffusion of ideological products, and controlling cultural producers and their organizations (Berezin 1991; Wuthnow 1989). As a strategy to assess the reach of the state cultural machinery, I focus on various institutional domains engaged in the production and diffusion of ideological forms (e.g., public education) and corresponding state organizations (e.g., schools). While public schooling is certainly of critical importance, other relevant arenas for examining the ideological work of states include mass communication, art and entertainment, and public ceremonies and rituals.

State infrastructural power varies with respect to the scope of the cultural machinery. For instance, an extensive network of public primary schools facilitates the broader circulation of state-sponsored ideological products. Scope is also a function of the amount of resources dedicated to an institutional domain of the cultural machinery. For example, monetary patronage and subsidies for national history institutes facilitate control over these organizations and their intellectual production. Finally, the cultural machinery of states varies in their capacity to engage in the regulation of ideological products. For instance, state authorities may issue detailed guidelines defining the content of school textbooks or engage in the explicit promotion or censorship of art works or literature.

Another defining feature of state infrastructural power conceptualized at the national level is the relationship between state authorities and the institutions of penetration. Even if those institutions exhibit the size, scope, and resources necessary to reach into society, infrastructural power may be limited because of the lack of allies among the principal actors within those institutions. In the context of this study, the relationship between state elites and the cultural producers situated within the ideological infrastructure is essential for the ability to fashion transformations of nationalism. Strained relations may foster the opposition of cultural producers and thereby inhibit the production and diffusion of ideological forms from *within the state*. For example, public school teachers may resist the ideological orientation of the official curriculum designed and implemented by educational officials and employ a variety of strategies to subvert its transmission in the classroom. Thus, infrastructural power is not exclusively a function of the reach of state organizations and complementary *logistical techniques*, it is also based on the training and outlook of principal actors within those institutions and their alignments and contestations with central state authorities.

Finally, ideas about relative timing and historical sequence are useful for assessing state infrastructural power (Ertman 1997; Rueschemeyer 1973; see also Pierson 2004). I argue that the translation of state-sponsored national ideologies into hegemonic cultural scripts is facilitated when the development of infrastructural power is temporally congruent with discursive transformations. By contrast, a cultural machinery already established makes it more difficult for state elites to convert a new national ideology into a regular product of state organizations. An established cultural

machinery is marked by an existing production and diffusion of ideological forms, marshals a substantial geographical reach, and maintains cultural producers who were trained under the previous ideological regime. As such, an established cultural machinery is usually invested in the professional identity of these cultural producers, which in turn enhances their capacity to resist ideological changes proposed by executive authorities. Analogously, the extent of ideological transformation remains limited when state-sponsored national discourses change in the absence of any significant infrastructural power. In such a case, neither old nor new forms of official nationalism are regular products of the state cultural machinery.⁹

From Conceptualization to Measurement

To assess how state infrastructural power affects ideological change, I focus on the resources of state agencies to disseminate and routinize official national discourses. In particular, I explore the institutions of social control that shape the ideological presence of states throughout the territory they claim to govern. The advantage of this measurement strategy is to avoid conflating the effects of state infrastructural power with the *logistical techniques* at the disposal of state authorities to fashion changes of nationalism.

The first measure employed to gauge general trends in infrastructural power are the size and types of revenues extracted by the central state. Likewise, this study draws on information about the administrative involvement of state agencies in a variety of domains, most important, the economy and social policy. The second set of measures seeks to assess the scope of the state cultural machinery. Those include public schooling expenditures, the number of public schools and teachers, as well as data on the regulation of curricular contents. To complement and crosscheck such a focus on education, this study also explores other institutional domains within the state cultural machinery, such as mass media and the arts. Finally, a third set of measures assesses the relationship between central state authorities and institutions of penetration, and examines the activities and outlooks of teachers as key actors within the state cultural machinery.

Liberal Nationalism

During the late nineteenth century, Mexico and Argentina exhibited liberal nationalism as official national ideology. The broad-based institutionalization of liberal national ideologies as cultural scripts faced substantial limitations, as state infrastructural power remained limited.

This period, often described as period of oligarchic domination (Centeno 2002; Halperín Donghi 1993), was marked by the consolidation of the central state. Mexico and Argentina left behind the vicious circle of political turmoil and economic stagnation that characterized the immediate postcolonial era. Political centralization was closely intertwined with economic expansion, largely driven by

⁹ This latter trajectory is not explored empirically here, yet it constitutes a logical possibility.

foreign investment, the production of agrarian exports, and incipient industries.¹⁰ The rural economy was dominated by large estates, the main beneficiaries of the commercialization of agriculture. Oligarchic regimes in the two countries grounded their political power in an alliance with a narrow elite of large landowners and industrialists who were the main beneficiaries of the export boom. The majority of political offices went to members of these elites who ruled through a combination of clientelism, electoral manipulations, and repression (Botana 1998; Knight 2002; Oszlak 1982).

Mexican and Argentinian state elites advanced liberal nationalism with the aim of legitimating the reigning oligarchic order (vom Hau 2007). Official national ideologies depicted the respective constitutional framework, political territory, and civic rituals as the main sources of national belonging. Accounts of national history further reinforced this political understanding of national identity. Descriptions of the postcolonial period focused on the gradual formation of a binding legal order, while downplaying the struggles and civil wars between regional strongmen and political elites that characterized these countries during the early nineteenth century.

At the same time, liberal national discourses were deeply infused with Comtean ideas about biologically determined social hierarchies and engineered progress from above. Liberal nationalism advocated the spread of *civilization*—a category associated with whiteness, economic modernization, and an urban and cosmopolitan European culture—as the main vehicle for overcoming ethnoracial and political divisions. *Civilization* had to be protected and systematically expanded with regard to *barbarism*. The indigenous population living within the boundaries of the national territory appeared as the most prominent *uncivilized* other, posing a threat to the national fabric. Liberal national discourses portrayed enlightened elites as protagonists of national history. Official representations of national history were organized around major political leaders, whether Aztec rulers, colonial viceroys, or post-independence presidents. Thus, national discourses in late nineteenth-century Mexico and Argentina combined Enlightenment ideals of citizenship and popular sovereignty with highly exclusionary and hierarchical imageries of national membership.

State infrastructural power remained limited in oligarchic Mexico and Argentina. The reach and implementation capacities of the state cultural machinery were low, inhibiting the translation of liberal nationalism into hegemonic scripts. Oligarchic state elites constructed cultural and educational organizations with the explicit aim to *nationalize* the resident population. Yet, especially in Mexico, the development of a national education system was more an official project than a social reality. The effects of public schooling were small, even after two decades of substantially increased government spending. Low levels of school attendance and high illiteracy rates persisted. Moreover, little improvement was made in enhancing the quality of instruction. Teachers' salaries were low, leading to many absences and closing of schools, and the newly opened *escuelas normales* only trained a small fraction of teachers (Knight 2002; Vaughan 1982).

¹⁰ In Argentina, this economic bonanza was accompanied by the equally dramatic demographic reorganization of society based on massive European migration.

When compared to Mexico, state ideological infrastructure in late nineteenth-century Argentina probably exhibited a more extensive reach (Oszlak 1982). The national school system was more advanced, both in terms of organizational development and financial resources, and other cultural state institutions exhibited a greater presence, facilitated by comparatively well-developed communication and transportation networks. At the same time, the majority of primary school teachers did not have a normal school diploma and received only poor pay, while equipment and school buildings were often lacking (Bertoni 2001). Moreover, during the 1880s and 1890s, state authorities allotted only 6% of the national budget to education, even less than in Mexico (Spalding 1972). Even in Argentina, the state's infrastructural power was modest at best.

Transitions toward Popular Nationalism

In Mexico and Argentina, transitions toward popular nationalism were shaped by changing political configurations. The adoption of popular nationalism as official ideology was associated with the increased political weight of subordinate forces and the emergence of populist alliances.

In Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s, the revolutionary struggles had left behind highly mobilized subordinate sectors that remained a powerful oppositional force throughout subsequent decades (Rivera Castro 1983; Meyer 1977). The *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM) and the Communist Party subscribed to a class-based understanding of the nation and depicted peasants and workers as the protagonists of national history. During the same period in Argentina, socialists and communists, the main representatives of organized labor, marshaled considerable ideological reach (Horowitz 1990; Saïtta 2001). Their alternative national narratives reworked official story lines, portraying Spanish colonialism as the onset of imperial exploitation and depicting the *gaucho* as a wage laborer and symbol of subaltern revolutionary spirit.

Under Lazaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), a coalition between organized labor, peasants, and postrevolutionary state elites consolidated (Hamilton 1982; Knight 2002; Meyer 2000). This shift in the domestic balance of power was accompanied by a change in language about the political community. Postrevolutionary state elites selectively adopted themes and discursive patterns found in alternative popular narratives articulated by labor and peasant representatives. The reworked national ideology combined a cultural understanding of national identity with a focus on class. It also reinterpreted the *mestizo* nation as composed of peasants, workers, and smallholders, and depicted these subordinate sectors as protagonists of national history. Their resistance reverberated throughout Mexican history and culminated in the Revolution, setting the stage for a more egalitarian, industrialized, and economically independent society.

A comparable ideological transformation unfolded in Peronist Argentina (1946–1955). During this period, Juan Domingo Perón built a highly personalistic political movement grounded in a coalition with organized labor. Similar to Mexico under Cárdenas, this alliance entailed both the domestication of subordinate mobilization and far-reaching material and symbolic concessions (Sigal 2002; Torre 1990).

Official versions of national history incorporated alternative narratives and assigned subordinate classes a critical role in shaping national destiny, contrasting the actions of the dispossessed *masses* with the ones of the *oligarchy*. Perón and his wife Evita appeared as the embodiment of the nation, equating the political constituencies of the Peronist movement with the national community. While popular nationalism depicted Argentina as a *crisol de razas* of immigrants (the local version of the “melting pot”), it emphasized the Hispanic and Catholic roots of the nation.

In sum, popular nationalism eventually replaced liberal nationalism as official national ideology in the two countries during the mid-twentieth century. Yet the extent to which popular national discourses became institutionalized varied dramatically between Mexico and Argentina, depending on the relative timing of state development.

State Development in Postrevolutionary Mexico

Mexico under Cárdenas witnessed a substantial expansion of state infrastructural power during this period of ideological transformation. In particular, the parallel institutional development of the state cultural machinery enabled the institutionalization of popular national discourses as a regular product of state organizations. In a context of institutional innovation and growth, state elites more easily established new routines for the production and transmission of ideological forms and the training and control of cultural producers.

The Temporal Congruence of State Development

The armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) was characterized by temporary state breakdown. The already limited infrastructural power of the state apparatus collapsed, as the central state organizations had minimal ability to maintain their authority vis-à-vis the different revolutionary forces. Especially between 1913 and 1915, the interruption or destruction of railway and road networks severely constrained the capacity to exercise control throughout the national territory. Outside Mexico City, the majority of an already sparse network of rural schools closed down, while many teachers—who went without pay for months—joined the revolutionary struggles (Vaughan 1982).

State infrastructural power was slow to recover and remained limited during the 1920s. While postrevolutionary state elites viewed public education as the primary vehicle to pacify rebellious popular sectors and foster national integration, the cultural and pedagogical machinery remained in an embryonic state.¹¹ During these years, a handful of Mexico City intellectuals around José Vasconcelos, dominated the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP). Most notorious, these urban-oriented educators launched campaigns to distribute several hundred thousand copies of European classics such as Homer’s *Illiad* in the countryside. Yet the actual

¹¹ An exception to this trend can be found in the visual arts. Under Vasconcelos, the SEP provided many artists with generous financial and organizational resources to pursue their work, exemplified by Diego Rivera’s status as “official painter” (Azuela 2001: 67).

institution-building record was slim. The SEP lacked the resources and administrative effectiveness necessary to centralize control over schooling and expand education into rural areas (Loyo 1999). Throughout the 1920s, federal expenditures on education actually decreased,¹² and the increases in public schools and enrollment figures greatly reflected the rebuilding efforts after the revolutionary struggles (Vaughan 1982).¹³

During the 1930s, Mexico overcame the legacies of institutional destruction and state breakdown. Especially during the *sexenio* of Cárdenas (1934–1940), central state organizations extended their authority concerning regional and local forces, expanded their geographical reach, became more actively involved in the regulation of economy and society, and devoted substantial resources on developing state infrastructure. For instance, the organizational efforts involved in the agrarian reform fostered the permanent presence of state agencies in rural areas. State elites also implemented rudimentary forms of social provision and installed anti-poverty initiatives (Knight 2002; Meyer 1977). The expansion of infrastructural power was also reflected in public expenditures. While central government spending as a percentage of GDP increased from 6% in 1930 to 8% in 1940, per capita spending of the central government more than doubled during the same period (Knight 2002: 217–218).

The state cultural machinery followed these general trends of state development. Postrevolutionary state elites viewed public education as the primary mechanism to pacify rebellious popular sectors and foster the integration of a heterogeneous society marked by civil war and violence. The *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) absorbed many of the municipal and state schools and complemented them with the construction of new federal schools. Per capita education spending (in 1950 pesos) increased from 0.3 pesos in 1920 to 6.9 pesos in 1930, and to 11.3 pesos in 1940 (Wilkie 1970: 160–161), and the government dedicated between 12 and 14% of the national budget to public education (Knight 1994: 424). The number of rural primary school teachers working for the SEP was around 6,500 in 1930, and reached around 19,100 in 1942 (Vaughan 1997: 25). Increased resources and personnel in public education substantially altered school enrollment. By 1940, 70% of the children between six and ten attended primary schools, compared to a mere 30% in 1910 (Vaughan 1997: 25).

These patterns of public school expansion need to be treated with some caution. Many schools suffered from a shortage of resources and organization. While training institutes celebrated teachers as the vanguard of the postrevolutionary state, their pay remained poor and they often waited for months to receive their salary. As a result especially among rural teachers, turnover was frequent (Knight 1994). The actual attendance of public schools varied greatly across localities, largely depending on community response to them (Raby 1989; Vaughan 1997). Even accounting for such caveats, the overall record indicates a substantial expansion of public schools during the 1930s.

¹² In 1922, around 8.9% of the federal budget was spent on education, in 1928 it were 8.0% (Vaughan 1982: 149).

¹³ The number of primary schools decreased from 12,271 in 1907 to 9,222 in 1920, and reached 16,692 in 1928 (Vaughan 1982: 153).

Mass communication was another domain that witnessed increased state involvement. Under Cárdenas, radio became an authentic mass medium. Between 1930 and 1940, the number of radio sets increased from 100,000 to 450,000. Cárdenas' major political speeches were transmitted nation-wide, often reaching several million listeners. His government combined legal regulations with administrative measures and subsidies to extend control over radio broadcasting (Hayes 2000; Mejía Barquera 1989). Similar patterns of increased state intervention can be found in cinema. Under Cárdenas, state elites became more involved in regulating films by installing censorship mechanisms and expanding legislation that favored nationally produced films. Moreover, the SEP sponsored around a dozen documentary or educational films a year that primarily focused on rural and indigenous life (García Riera 1998).

Public rituals were another mechanism involved in the institutionalization of popular nationalism. Cárdenas was able to frequently secure mass attendance at civic ceremonies and political campaigns. The yearly celebrations of the *grito* for national independence began to draw more than a million participants to Mexico City's main square. Analogously, state elites introduced several new national holidays, such as the public commemoration of Zapata, which introduced the revolutionary into the pantheon of national heroes (Pérez Montfort 1994). Another crystallization of state-sponsored rituals was the public festivities celebrating the expropriation of Anglo-American oil companies in March 1938 (Knight 1992).

Overall, exploring postrevolutionary Mexican state development reveals a substantial increase of infrastructural power. The general growth of institutions of penetration was intertwined with the institutional development of the state cultural machinery.

Teachers and the Cultural Machinery

Micro-level evidence for domain of education complements the central finding of the macro analysis, that simultaneous state development, especially of the cultural machinery, facilitated a comprehensive transformation of nationalism in Mexico.¹⁴

Mexican teachers during the 1930s were mostly sympathetic to popular nationalism (see also Vaughan 1997). Most teachers followed official national discourses in portraying subordinate sectors as the main forces in shaping the fate of the nation, and viewed economic factors and the conflict between different social classes as decisive for Mexico's historical trajectory. Before the onset of Spanish colonial rule, "the Mexicans were the owners of the land," while subsequently "large Spanish landowners, together with the clergy, took away the lands of these people."¹⁵ Such an assessment of Mexico's economic situation during the colonial period blends into another major theme in teachers' visions of national history—the focus on imperialism. The majority of interviewees suggested that during the postcolonial period foreign domination over the nation's resources did not cease and Mexico developed in a situation of dependency.

¹⁴ This section draws on interviews with teachers from the *Archivo de la Palabra* and periodicals from independent teacher associations, combined with relevant secondary literature (vom Hau 2007).

¹⁵ Public secondary school teacher (history), Mexico City, March 6, 1979

Teachers' support of popular nationalism was likely to shape their teaching. While this study does not have the data necessary to directly show the content actually taught in Mexico during the 1930s, the evidence available strongly suggests a congruence between beliefs and practice. Teachers tended to embrace the new educational materials and did not show significant opposition against attending frequent training institutes in which the dissemination of popular nationalism constituted an integral part of the curriculum. To the contrary, teachers stressed in self descriptions that they felt "unprepared" and emphasized that "we were somewhat improvised teachers."¹⁶ Therefore, they welcomed such training as an effort to socialize a young and inexperienced teaching body into the profession. Even in cases where public school teachers complained about the top—down style of training institutes and lamented frequent supervision, they lacked the capacity to organize sustained opposition. Teacher unions only started to emerge during the 1930s and did not marshal the organizational infrastructure to effectively coordinate political activities and interest representation.¹⁷

In short, public school teachers in Mexico under Cárdenas were inclined toward popular nationalism and largely embraced the ideological change found in educational materials and teacher trainings. Moreover, these cultural producers lacked the professional socialization and level of organization that would have provided them with the capacity to successfully challenge Cardenas' nationalist project, indicating an education system in construction.

State Development in Peronist Argentina

In Peronist Argentina, state development was disjointed from transformations of nationalism. When Perón ascended to the presidency, the central state already exhibited substantial infrastructural power. The cultural machinery followed this general trend, and Peronist state elites confronted a cultural machinery already established. Well-trained and organized cultural producers exhibited the capacity to resist the institutionalization of popular nationalism.

State Infrastructural Power and an Established Cultural Machinery

Argentina had witnessed already a dramatic expansion of state infrastructural power between the 1900s and 1920s. State elites wrested power away from local authorities and state agencies became more involved in regulating market forces. To facilitate public sector intervention in the economy, executive authorities also modified the internal organization of the state apparatus, thereby improving the professional training of civil servants, fostering the specialization of state agencies, and installing more centralized control mechanisms (Rock 2002; Romero 2001).

Similar patterns can be observed for the state cultural machinery. State authorities expanded public schooling and teacher training facilities. For instance, education

¹⁶ Public primary school teacher, Villahermosa, May 3, 1979

¹⁷ Public secondary school teacher (history), Mexico City, March 6, 1979

expenditures almost quadrupled during the 1900s and 1910s, with the government earmarking 3% of the national budget for education in 1900, and 13% in 1914 (Spalding 1972: 52). At the same time, the number of public school teachers increased from around 8,600 to 21,500 (Gandulfo 1991: 314–315). As a result, in 1932 around 69% of the relevant population was already enrolled in primary schools. Throughout the 1930s, educational authorities further extended the reach of public schooling, especially in more remote rural areas. By 1942, the Ministry of Education oversaw around 13,200 public schools and 70,600 teachers (Secretaría de Estado de Cultura y Educación: 1966: 8–20). This expansion of the educational system combined with its internal organization. Educational authorities managed to centralize administration, mainly by enhancing the network of federal schools and bringing state and municipal schools under the control of the central state (Escudé 1990).

During the same period, teacher training across the various *Escuelas Normales* became more streamlined and uniformly organized (Puiggrós 1992). State elites tightened their grip on the regulation of curriculum content. Noteworthy was the appropriate “patriotic orientation” of the textbooks. State authorities also enhanced state control over mass communication. The Secretariat of Press and Information was founded to centralize the control and censorship of periodicals. Analogously, state authorities became more directly involved in radio broadcasting and filmmaking, establishing regulation, censorship, and subsidies for these new means of cultural production and mass communication (Escudé 1990). Finally, state support also went into establishing professional soccer league, whose clubs, especially those from Buenos Aires, soon transcended local and regional loyalties and became powerful symbols of national identification (Alabarces 2002).

Teacher Resistance

Micro-level evidence on teacher beliefs and practices provides additional support for the claim that prior state development inhibited a comprehensive transformation of nationalism in Argentina under Perón. The Peronist government failed to gain support among teachers. Executive authorities faced substantial resistance from these cultural producers situated *within the state* because the education system, which already was consolidated, had nurtured well-organized and professionally socialized teachers that objected Perón’s ideological project.

Most teachers active during the Peronist years opposed the new educational materials infused with of popular nationalism.¹⁸ Public school teachers voiced concerns about the glorification of the masses found in the new textbooks, noting that “mass politics and the theory of the dominant majority” would bear the danger of fostering “intolerance and coercion.”¹⁹ Teacher opposition had real consequences for their classroom activities. During the Peronist years, educational authorities

¹⁸ To reconstruct the activities and outlooks of public school teachers under Perón, I combined semi-structured interviews with a textual analysis of *La Obra* as a periodical written by teachers for teachers (vom Hau 2007).

¹⁹ *La Obra*, No. 486, October 15, 1949, p. 58x

increased the direct supervision of teachers, primarily by sending inspectors for frequent surprise visits. Yet public teachers managed to circumvent or undermine the transmission of the official curriculum. For example, teachers used the new textbooks, but only dedicated minimal classroom time to discuss their content. “We knew that someone could drop by and say something. So we did a short thing in passing [with the textbooks], but we didn’t keep ourselves busy with it for long...so they [the students] forgot...this way we defended ourselves.”²⁰ Teacher resistance also focused on teacher training. Forms of opposition manifested themselves in frequent walkouts or refusals to actively participate in the training institutes.

A major factor in teacher opposition against popular nationalism was their already well-developed identity as members of a circumscribed status group. In contrast to Mexico under Cárdenas, where public school teachers welcomed more state micromanagement of the classroom, teachers in Argentina exhibited a strong sense of professional autonomy. They viewed the new educational policies as an intrusion into their profession. For instance, public school teachers saw the introduction of new textbooks as an offense against “the liberty to teach with the books we want [and pick] the topics we want.”²¹ Thus, Argentinian public school teachers’ resistance against popular nationalism was motivated by their own understanding of national identity and history, their opposition against the Peronist government, and a well-developed sense of professional autonomy. Significantly, these motivations were shaped by the fact that the state cultural machinery was already in place by 1946.²² In contrast to Mexico’s poorly paid and newly recruited public school teachers, Argentinian teachers had entered a well-established career path with a decent salary and clear guidelines for promotion, which placed them squarely in the middle class. Multiyear training institutes set the standards for socializing teachers into the profession since their routines and curricula had been established under the previous ideological regime. Moreover, a high level of organization contributed to teachers’ capacity for opposition. Independent teacher unions engaged in information work and interest representation.

In sum, well-trained and organized cultural producers exhibited the capacity to resist the institutionalization of popular nationalism. State institutional development before the adoption of a different national ideology impeded the translation of popular nationalism into everyday scripts.

Transformations of Nationalism and their Legacies

These contrasting trajectories of nationalism left important legacies in the two countries. In Mexico, the comprehensive transformation under Cárdenas resulted in the installation of popular nationalism as everyday frames of reference. Popular national discourses became “uncoupled” from immediate political conflicts. During

²⁰ Public primary school teacher, Buenos Aires, August 11, 2004

²¹ Secondary school teacher (history), Buenos Aires, August 25, 2004

²² Accounts from secondary literature provide additional support for these findings and paint a similar picture of teacher opposition against Perón and popular nationalism (e.g., Cucuzza and Somoza 2001; Plotkin 2002), and the grounding of the resistance in their professional identity and middle class status (Bernetti and Puiggrós 1993).

the subsequent decades, when the postrevolutionary regime was increasingly characterized by political authoritarianism, popular nationalism retained its hegemonic status as national ideology. But the contained transformations of nationalism in Argentina under Perón did not entail the hegemony of popular nationalism. Instead, popular national discourses remained fiercely contested and existed in a stalemate with the previously dominant forms of nationalism. After the fall of Perón in 1955, both Peronists and the anti-Peronists continued to represent themselves as the embodiment of the nation, translating conflicts over policy and office into contestations over national belonging and identity.

The different trajectories of nationalism had major implications for actual experience. In Mexico, the hegemony of popular nationalism contributed to the durability of a one-party regime. In Argentina, the contestedness of popular nationalism contributed to ideological polarization and political instability. Patterns of nationalism also shaped citizenship regimes and redistributive policies in these countries. For example, social services were more limited for those segments of the rural poor that did not fit the political identities of peasants and workers legitimized by popular nationalism (e.g., Collier and Collier 1991; Hamilton 1982; Plotkin 2002).

Conclusion

Mexico and Argentina experienced dramatic transformations of nationalism during the early and mid-twentieth century. In both cases, popular nationalism replaced liberal nationalism as an official national ideology, but the extent of this ideological transformation varied substantially. In Mexico under Cárdenas, popular nationalism became institutionalized as a regular product of the state cultural machinery. In Argentina under Perón, the popular national ideology advanced by state elites did not turn into hegemonic points of reference.

I have set out to explain the varying extents of ideological transformation in Mexico and Argentina by focusing on state infrastructural power. Findings indicate that the initial expectation—that infrastructurally more powerful states would be better able to successfully institutionalize and diffuse new forms of nationalism—requires some modification. The two case studies show that the expansion of infrastructural power set the stage for the broader transmission of popular nationalism when compared to the late nineteenth century. The greater reach of the state apparatus through society, indicated by increased revenues and expanded state involvement in economy and social welfare, was a necessary condition for the diffusion of state-sponsored national ideologies. Yet it was the timing of state institutional development that ultimately proved decisive for popular nationalism to become a regular product of the cultural machinery. More specifically, the temporal congruence between ideological change and the expansion of cultural and pedagogical state organizations facilitated the institutionalization of popular nationalism, whereas a cultural machinery already established impeded the broad-based dissemination of the new national ideology.

In Mexico under Cárdenas, the institutionalization of popular nationalism was facilitated by the relative absence of a well-established state ideological infrastructure in 1934. The dramatic expansion of cultural and pedagogical state organizations

only began with Cárdenas. In turn, this temporal congruence between state development and ideological change furthered the translation of popular nationalism into everyday scripts. In Argentina, the existence of a state ideological infrastructure already established posed severe limitations to the diffusion of popular nationalism. Professionally socialized cultural producers resisted executive authorities' attempts to rewrite the content of public education, and their professional autonomy and level of organization provided them with the capacity to successfully challenge Perón's nationalist project. Their opposition closed a crucial channel for translating popular national ideology into everyday scripts. Thus, the presence of a cultural machinery already established impeded the institutionalization of popular nationalism, leading to constant contestation between national discourses that were not able to attain hegemony.

These findings point to some tensions in Mann's definition of state infrastructural power, while also highlighting a crucial strength of the concept—its relational character. The ability to penetrate society and exercise control throughout the national territory is not necessarily related to the ability of the state to implement policy. When assessing the resources at the disposal of central state elites, it is evident that Peronist Argentina was an infrastructurally more powerful state than Mexico under Cárdenas. Even with the capabilities to institutionalize popular nationalism in place, the opposition of well-organized teachers professionally socialized under the previous ideological regime impeded the diffusion of this new national ideology. Thus, state infrastructural power also depends on the projects and objectives of executive authorities and the actors situated within the radiating institutions of the state. This pattern points to the inherently relational character of the concept. State infrastructural power is constrained or facilitated by the relationships between state elites and nonstate groups, and by the relationships between executive authorities and social control institutions (see Jacoby 2004).

By exploring the role of state infrastructural power in fashioning ideological and cultural change, this study also speaks to the very definition of what the state is. This article finds support for the contention of Gorski (2003) that state power is more than just "organized coercion" and the capacity to strip individuals from their resources. The dominant understanding of states as a "set of administrative, policing, and military organizations" (Skocpol 1979: 29) ignores important dimensions of the state apparatus. States equally include "pedagogical, corrective, and ideological organizations" (Gorski 2003: 165) engaged in fostering attachments, cognitive outlooks, and loyalties.

Finally, this study also points to the centrality of time and temporal order in understanding the dynamics and impact of state action. The relative timing of state development was crucial in explaining the extent of ideological and cultural change. This explanation builds on and supports more general arguments about the importance of timing for the analysis of the state (Ertman 1997; Rueschemeyer 1973). The argument about relative timing developed here might be applicable beyond the domains of culture and ideology. In particular, it might extend to changes in social and economic policy, domains in which institutional consolidation is marked by comparably high start-up costs of physical and human capital and where already existing forms of state involvement are likely to be resilient to rapid change.

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