

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST IN THE HISTORY MUSEUM.
VISITOR RESEARCH IN TWO MEXICAN MUSEUMS

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ABSTRACT

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This research analyses peoples' historical consciousness (how they make sense of the past) in relation to their visit to two history museums in Mexico City. Through the combined use of interpretative qualitative visitor studies and a historical perspective it was possible to identify five different approaches or ways in which people made sense of the past in the museum (remembering, imagining and empathising, explaining and interpreting, believing and belonging, and perceiving and experiencing the material). This finding will help broaden current debates about historical consciousness, which have tended to focus mostly on explanatory patterns developed through school history education. Furthermore, the research argues that although there is individual variability depending on how people use those five approaches, there is still an intimate connection with the historical culture (broader social patterns of history-making specific to the way people relate to the past). Through a holistic analysis that placed the museum within a social environment, coexisting with different agents of history-making (for example the State, school, family, the historical discipline and the media), the research shows how those connections impacted on peoples' interpretation of the past in the museum. It also shows the pervasive influence of present conditions on peoples' historical consciousness as they visited the museum. Thus, by bringing together theories and methodologies that had not been used together in this way, the research has contributed to the historical discipline, and to museum and visitor studies alike. The contribution is enhanced by addressing a particular context – Mexican museums – that is currently underdeveloped in both Spanish and English literature. Finally, the thesis allows further reflection on issues such as State intervention, family socialisation, nationhood, and knowledge and trust building.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPFCE – Comité Administrador del Programa Federal de Construcción de Escuelas [Managing Committee of the Federal Programme for Building Schools]

CONALITEG – Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos [National Commission for Free Textbooks]

EZLN – Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional [Zapatista Army of National Liberation]

GHMC – Galería de Historia. Museo del Caracol [Gallery of History. Spiral Museum]

INAH – Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [National Institute of Anthropology and History]

MNA – Museo Nacional de Antropología [National Museum of Anthropology]

MNCP – Museo Nacional de las Culturas Populares [National Museum of Popular Cultures]

MNH – Museo Nacional de Historia. Castillo de Chapultepec [National Museum of History. Chapultepec Castle]

MNR – Museo Nacional de la Revolución [National Museum of the Revolution]

Munavi – Museo Nacional del Virreinato [National Museum of the Vice Royalty]

PAN – Partido de Acción Nacional [National Action Party]

PRD – Partido de la Revolución Democrática [Democratic Revolution Party]

PRI – Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party]

SEP – Secretaría de Educación Pública [Ministry of Public Education]

INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

I have been interested in history museums for almost a decade now. When I started my PhD in 2011, my research project was going to be about analysing Mexican history museums in order to suggest possible ways of “improving” the way they related to their visitors – or, rather, to establish a relationship in the first place, since I assumed none existed. Four years later, I can still claim that I am interested in the relationship between history museums and their visitors, but my approach to the matter has changed significantly. I am more aware now of the complex and ubiquitous way in which the past plays a part in peoples’ everyday life, as well as in their visit to the history museum. This thesis presents the journey that brought about this shift in focus.

As far as I can recall, there has never been a major controversy in any Mexican history museum. Or, if there were any, they were not heard of as loudly as those in other places, such as the Enola Gay affair in the USA or the commemoration of the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery in the UK. It could also be that, in Mexico, discussions about museums in general do not feature in the headlines unless there is a blockbuster exhibition resulting in very long queues and media attention. But on the whole, and for whatever reasons, Mexican history museums seem to be “stable” places; ones where thousands of children go every year as part of school outings or assignments, or that families visit on Sundays – the day admittance is free – as part of both a leisure and a “civic” activity. History museums do not seem to be places for confrontation – or at least not openly.

In contrast, people talk heatedly and abundantly about present day politics. Debate and discussion, whether academic, journalistic or popular – even mockery – are daily phenomena. Moreover, in the last decade or so, political and social discontent have increased substantially as old national problems have intensified and new ones are emerging, all of which have triggered a new level of collective discussion. Mexico has, sadly, become headline news in the international media because of violations of human rights, organised crime and protests against a dysfunctional government.

For me, this mismatch between what looks like an apparently “stable” past in museums and a very unstable present – and future – is puzzling, not to say, disconcerting. There is something there that needs deciphering.

THE INTELLECTUAL PUZZLE

In this thesis, I have tried to understand this ‘intellectual puzzle’ (J. Mason, 2002). It is a thesis that is as much about the present as about the past. It is also a thesis that has focused on museums but that seeks to reflect on what lies outside their walls. I have thus taken history museums to be a departure point, so as to gain insight into how Mexicans – or some of them – relate to the past in their present context. More specifically, my analysis will be based on two case study museums: the *Galería de Historia. Museo del Caracol* [*Gallery of History. Spiral Museum*] (GHMC)¹ and the *Museo Nacional de la Revolución* [*National Museum of the Revolution*] (MNR). The main question that I have addressed in this research is:

How do visitors make sense of the past in the history museum?

This question involved addressing some related and more specific questions:

- How do people relate to the past more broadly – “outside” the museum – in the Mexican context?
- What is the particularity of history in the museum – the past as it is exhibited or “made” in the museum?
- How has history “made” in the GHMC and the MNR changed through time and how does this change impact on the history that visitors “make” today?
- How does visitor research in the history museum contribute to our understanding of the relationship between past and present?

The research thus seeks to contribute to the specific field of history museums, an area about which there has been insufficient academic research. Only a handful of authors have focused on analysing the phenomenon of history in the museum (Kavanagh, 1990; Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989; R. Mason, 2007; Moore, 1997; Schlereth, 1990b; Watson, 2010) and there is even less research about the impact of history in the museum amongst visitors. This lack of research about both visitor studies and history museums is more acute in Mexico: only a few authors account for most of the published production in the area – the most important of which is Morales Moreno (1994b, 2007, 2009). The research also seeks to contribute to the historical discipline more broadly,

¹ *Caracol* [snail] is a word that in Spanish refers both to the mollusc and to a spiral shape (due to the pattern of the mollusc’s shell). The use of this word in the museum name refers to its shape, not to the animal, and as such I have considered that the most appropriate translation for the GHMC is *Spiral Museum* instead of *Snail Museum*.

and to engage in a discussion with historians, who have – with some exceptions, of course – generally focused on the historiographical realm and on professionals’ understandings of the past. In conclusion, this research contributes to different areas precisely because it is located in a liminal space, a “border” territory that has largely remained a “no man’s land”.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In order to address the intellectual puzzle, this thesis is structured in six chapters. In the first (*Methodological underpinnings*), I present the overarching conditions and decisions that guided my research. It aims at clarifying my intellectual and personal stands in regards to the topic, and how I have decided to approach it. It briefly assesses why research about history in the museum has, in general, been a neglected area and how qualitative research can contribute to the field. It also assesses the importance of the cultural context in which research is carried out, by reflecting on the challenges and possibilities of using foreign frameworks to study Mexico. Finally, it presents the details of the data generation and interpretation, to familiarise the reader with the processes and specific decisions that were taken in order to produce the results.

In the second chapter (*Historical culture and making sense of the past*) I introduce the key concepts that have guided the research conceptually (historical culture and historical consciousness), both of which are defined in detail and compared to related terms. *Historical consciousness* – as understood by authors like Rüsen (2004a) and Seixas (2004) – refers to the way people make sense of the past; it is a natural and ordinary component of human life by which people understand the passage of time. As for *historical culture*, it is an encompassing term that considers all the different ways in which a society relates to the past; it thus includes processes, entities, actors and any element involved in history-making (Rüsen, 1994; Sánchez Marcos, 2009). Therefore, historical consciousness is part of (takes place within) the historical culture. Both terms are inclusive in that they go beyond the academic and professional historians’ domain. In order to further analyse how historical consciousness operates within a historical culture, the chapter addresses narratives as conveyors of ideas about the past.

In the third chapter (*Historical culture in Mexico*) I focus the reflection on the specific context of Mexico and the configuration of its historical culture. As advocated by qualitative research in general and also by the notion of historical culture, socio-cultural specificity is essential: in the specific case of this research, this means that the

way societies – and individuals within it – relate to the past is highly dependent on that specificity. This chapter also aims to “land” the conceptual framework presented in chapter two – which was developed mostly in Europe, the USA and Canada – in the particular Mexican context. It looks at some of the main actors, themes and dynamics of history-making in Mexico, among which State intervention in historical affairs and “official history” are some of the most prominent. A critical discussion of the last two is provided because of the implications they have for the research in general.

In the fourth chapter (*History in the museum: the case studies*) I analyse in detail the exhibition of the past in the museal context, and I exemplify it with particular aspects of the two case studies (the GHMC and the MNR). Despite the importance museums have in shaping public perceptions of the past and disseminating historical knowledge, there is not enough research about them; in other words, they have not gained the same level of attention as historiography or other forms of history-making. Following authors who claim that history in the museum is a special phenomenon, with its own way of exploring the past (Kavanagh, 1990; Schlereth, 1990b; Watson, 2010), the chapter suggests different ways in which this phenomenon can be analysed, for example: by historicising the institutions themselves – looking at their history; by analysing the particular ways in which they use material culture to explain the past; and by looking at the narratives and the contents of their historical interpretations – contradictions and tensions included therein. Looking at the particular configuration and history of how museums – specifically the GHMC and the MNR – have presented the past is central to understanding how visitors respond to them. Therefore, this chapter also acts as an introduction to the setting where the interviews took place.

Once there is a clarification of the key theoretical concepts, a definition of the socio-cultural specificity of the Mexican context and configuration of its historical culture, and an evaluation of how history is made in the museum, I set out to analyse the visitors’ interviews in chapters five and six. Whilst chapter four was about how the museal institution makes history, the last two chapters of the thesis focus on how people “make” history in the museum; that is, how they understand the past and develop their historical ideas. Chapter five (*History in the museum: visitors making sense of the past*) focuses on peoples’ processes of making sense of the past and looks at the different ways in which this takes place. Instead of establishing a single linear process, the chapter presents different approaches that visitors use during their visits, all related to the different roles that the past plays in everyday life, individual differences and, in certain instances, on

the particular ways in which the GHMC and the MNR exhibit the past. Chapter six (*Historical culture in the museum: insights from the visitor analysis*) takes a different approach, by going outside the museum and establishing connections between the exhibition and the broader historical culture. It looks at how the history presented in the museum and visitors' interpretation thereof are related to collective patterns, narratives and other aspects of everyday life in Mexico. This chapter also stresses the intimate connection that exists between the present and our understanding of the past.

Following the conclusion, a series of appendices provide complementary material, especially regarding the interviews protocols and results, as well as contextual information about Mexico – which will provide further guidance for a non-Mexican reader – including a chronology and a glossary of local names (characters) and terms.

Lastly, it is important to clarify that I myself translated the selected parts of the interviews, names and certain concepts that have no direct translation. In the specific case of the interviews, great care was taken to provide a translation that is as close to the original meaning as possible. In certain instances, adjustments had to be made for the sake of clarity. As for references, most of the Mexican literature on the topic has not been translated to English and, therefore, I have used and cited the Spanish version. When there is an English version, I have used this instead, to provide English-speaking readers with the possibility of consulting the sources, if necessary.

CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the key methodological aspects that shaped the conceptual framework of the research. It aims to present the standpoints from which the study was carried out, including the personal, professional and academic circumstances that have informed the decisions taken. The topics of historical culture and historical consciousness in the museum are practically non-existent in the Mexican context and, therefore, there is a significant opportunity to contribute to knowledge. However, precisely because of this lack of Mexican research, studies produced in and for other countries – especially Germany and English-speaking ones (namely the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia) – were used and adapted to the Mexican context. More broadly, there is, as yet, not enough research on history museums and on how the past is exhibited in the museal context. This chapter presents the way in which I have used and adapted the existing literature on this important, but under developed, field.

The chapter will also provide details on the design and implementation of the research, which is qualitative in nature, and based on two main strands of work: on the one hand, an interpretive analysis of semi-structured interviews, and on the other, a historical study of the institutions and of the Mexican context. For the research, I worked with 46 interviews with 81 adults (over 18) in two case study museums: the *Galería de Historia. Museo del Caracol* (GHMC) and the *Museo Nacional de la Revolución* (MNR), both located in Mexico City. The following pages will explain why and how the approach to the topic has been carried out, what its intellectual bases are, and how it has departed from them in the search for answers to the research questions.

1.1 WRITING ABOUT MEXICO FROM THE UK BETWEEN 2011 AND 2015

One of the first aspects regarding this project that requires clarification is my own perspective as a researcher, in order to understand the approach, arguments and conclusions presented in this thesis. The assumption behind this is that doing research in general, and more specifically research which involves interpreting other peoples' perceptions, requires a self-reflective practice that takes into consideration what I already know, my beliefs and affiliations and 'the conceptual tools' I have, based on my own culture and experiences (Denscombe, 2003, p. 88). It means being explicit on how

particular circumstances and contexts have shaped me and how this, in turn, has shaped my research.

I was originally trained as a historian – specifically, in 19th century Mexican cultural history. Although both my Master’s and PhD programme were in Museum Studies, I have not distanced myself from historical topics, theory or the historical discipline in general. However, my view as a historian has changed and adapted through time, partly because of the interdisciplinary approach of Museum Studies at a theoretical level, but also because of practical museum experience. I had the luck of working five years in a history museum – the 68’ Memorial – both as a curatorial assistant and as an education officer, experiences that have had a significant impact on my academic, historical and museological insight. Consequently, I am particularly interested in the relationship and tension between the historical discipline and the field of Museum Studies, and I have tried to carry out research that explores the connections between them. For example, I have sought to provide a study that establishes a dialogue between certain issues of current theories of history and more socially grounded audience research, which is common in museum contexts but not in historical research. Ultimately, I am influenced by the desire for both more socially active academic historians and a more critical and informed practice amongst museum professionals in Mexico.

The other aspects that require clarification are my social and political views of Mexico. I was raised in a family of social science and humanities academics, where political, historical and sociological discussions have always been central to our everyday life, as has been an active commitment to civic participation. My identity has been greatly shaped by this and, hence, to a great extent this research is a natural outcome of this personal history. My view of the country – and therefore the approach to the topic – has also been shaped by being raised in what we could broadly term an urban, middle-class family, with access to adequate private elementary and public higher education, both of which shaped my intellectual background in specific ways. More generally, however, as a Mexican, my views have also been built by everyday life and the sharing of a certain culture and nationality in public spaces, schools, social norms, media, etc.; they constitute another part of my intellectual background.

As a Mexican carrying out a study about other Mexicans, it could be said that I have been both an “insider” and an “outsider”. I have analysed a historical culture which is also my own. Looking back, it is reasonable that I wanted to position myself as

distant from it, in order to develop a more critical approach. Hence, this research was carried out in the UK, and from a Museum Studies perspective. This meant that I have been able to look at history, and at Mexico, through a different prism. The “intercontinental” condition in which the research was carried out encouraged me to rely on crossing – literally and physically – academic, cultural and geographical borders. And with each crossing, I gained a stronger sense of which things were particular to the Mexican context, by learning more about its differences from the British or other international contexts. I was unaware of the importance of essential aspects of the historical culture in Mexico – names, events, particular socio-cultural dynamics, expressions – for at least a year or two because they were too familiar; it was the constant dialogue with an international and British community which made me aware of their importance.

Finally, a consideration must be raised about what this research means in the country’s current political and social context (2011-2015). In 2012, the PRI – *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* [*Institutional Revolutionary Party*] – returned to power after a short gap of 12 years out of office, in which the right-wing opposition party PAN – *National Action Party* – dominated. When the PRI lost the 2000 presidential elections, after at least 54 years in government (longer if previous incarnations of the Party are considered), there was great social and political optimism surrounding the idea of “change”. There was a collective feeling that “things would be different now”, that a new era for Mexico was dawning and that the “old Mexico” and PRI were done for. Large sections of society celebrated “change” while politicians and intellectuals started to reflect on the new scenario.

In 2012, the PRI returned to power through dubiously legal elections, but most importantly, in a climate of tension, social defeat and political indifference: according to official figures from the then *Instituto Federal Electoral* [*Federal Elections Institute*], there has been a decreasing level of participation in elections (62.08% of the total population in 2012, compared to 77.16% in 1994). The political representation of the new president is low (he received 32% of the vote, which means that only three out of ten Mexicans who voted actually chose him) (Instituto Federal Electoral, 2012, 2013). The return of the PRI thus seems to have smashed to pieces the ideals of “change”, alternative approaches and renewal that were expressed in 2000. Despite claims by Party members of a “new PRI”, it seems that “old Mexico” is back after all, and in even worse conditions. Long-standing problems of Mexican everyday life, such as poverty, inequality, corruption and

organised crime, have worsened increasingly in recent years, now with the added element of violent repression of dissent. In a popular survey by *Reforma* newspaper, which is carried out every four months, the degree of social approval of the government is at its lowest level since 2012 – a mark of 4.7, where 0 is the lowest and 10 the highest (CNNMéxico, 2015). No wonder there is a sort of general sense of defeat, depression and helplessness regarding the possibility of improvement or “real change” in the country.

In this context, it is essential to think about the purpose, sense and meaning of this thesis, which in a broader way also means thinking about the meaning of history and the role of museums. Had this thesis been written 15 years ago, it would certainly have been different. But in the current context, it was impossible for me as a researcher to disassociate what is happening now from my practice as a researcher. To a great extent, this thesis has been as much an intellectual quest for understanding a particular subject – how do people make sense of the past in the history museum – as a personal means for trying to find some meaning and way out of this troubling present. It is a research that comes from the desire to explain why Mexico is where it is now, how we put ourselves here once again, and to figure out if there is anything I can start doing about it as a historian and museum professional.

1.2 HISTORY AND MUSEUMS

In 1996, Kavanagh synthesised her ideas about why history in the museum was a distinct phenomenon worthy of attention:

[...] historians working in museums have possibly the most creative and complex roles of all history-makers. They have a wide range of evidence on which to draw, including objects, oral tradition and observed social practice; forms of evidence often ignored by academic historians [...] Furthermore, the past is not just confined to producing histories in exhibition and educational or outreach programmes – the archive or collection has to be created too. Most other forms of history, including academic work and that of documentary film-makers, rely upon others to create the larger part of the archive.

(1996, p. 5)

At the time, Kavanagh was lecturer of history at the then Department of Museums of the University of Leicester. She was probably the main voice – a solitary one, though – that advocated for the need to understand the specificity of history in the museum and to ‘develop a museum-specific approach to history’ (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 174). In 1990 she published the book *History Curatorship*, which is, to date, in my opinion,

the main comprehensive attempt that has been written on the topic. In this book, she sketched a history of the relationship between museums and history and, more specifically, she suggested theoretical and methodological considerations to exhibiting the past in the museum. The main argument behind this book was that the medium of the museum created a very specific form of process which was distinct from historiography (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 54), and as such, that it had its own method of exploring the past (Watson, 2010, p. 205). The present research can be considered as part of this “tradition”, which is interested in recognising and analysing the specificity of history in museums.

However, the field of history in the museum has not produced, as yet, enough academic literature. Part of this could be due to the fact that there is no ‘intellectual unity about the nature of history in the museum’ (Kavanagh, 1990, pp. 3, 4). This includes the lack of clarification on related but different concepts, such as museum history, history in the museum and history of the museum. In this research I have sought to contribute to the area by using the terms with as much rigour as possible, by distinguishing *history of the museum* – the development through time (or genealogy) of the museum – from *history in the museum* – exhibiting the past in the museum. *Museum history* could mean one or the other, or both, so for the sake of clarity it will not be used in this thesis. In chapter four I will provide a more detailed discussion of these terms.

Another reason why history in the museum as a research area has remained under developed is because history curators have often remained practice-based and have not carried out theoretical analysis of their practice. This might often be the result of pressing financial and time constraints, since museums are generally under-staffed and there is mostly no time for anything that is not essential to the daily running of the institution. However, it might also be due to the fact that, unlike other communities of historians, the history museum community exhibited a ‘neglect of collective appraisal’ (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xii) well into the 1990s, at least. They have not managed to articulate their practice into a corpus of methodological and theoretical thinking, as there is not an integrated habit for documenting processes systematically (Moore, 1997, p. 41; Schlereth, 1990b). The best example of this is the lack of documentation about temporary exhibitions, which means that there is a constant loss of expertise – learning gained as a result of a particular exhibition, for instance.

But more importantly, the lack of research about history in the museum could be due to the fact that it has remained a sort of “border” area, not totally addressed by

museums studies academics – or not with the detail it would require – whilst also disregarded by orthodox historians, who are generally focused on analysing and producing written texts – historiography. In 2005 historian Randolph Starn wrote an article that provides an idea of the issue:

[...] museum history is still written and taught primarily by museum professionals and people working in cultural and visual studies. There are good historical reasons, if not necessarily good excuses, for these divisions of labor. Since the late nineteenth century, museum work and historical scholarship, often overlapping and interconnected before then, have followed different professional tracks. The academic historians had their archives and documents, the museum curators their objects and aura. Discursive prose was history's main medium, the collection and the catalogue were the museum's. Although the monumental "temples", "palaces", or "castles" of the great nineteenth-century public museums towered over their seminar rooms, the historians outflanked the competition; from their newly won university positions they relegated museum specialists, archivists, and other "auxiliaries" or "amateurs" to subaltern status as occasionally useful technicians. These tribal divisions persist behind the smiling face of interdisciplinarity. It is a safe bet that museum workers are no more likely to read the AHR [American Historical Review] than academic historians are to read Museum News.

(2005, pp. 69, 70)

Starn's account might have exaggerated the tone and level of this opposition between "academic historians" and museum curators, given that in practice – and increasingly more since the late 90s – clear-cut divisions are not possible; for example, increasing numbers of university-based historians are working in museums or with curators. However, his account does have a point in that history in universities and history in museums have followed a somewhat different path, more or less since the professionalization of history – which, depending on the context, took place in the mid 19th or first half of the 20th century. It is also true that one of the essential points of difference has been the museum's use of objects and collections for doing history. Although this condition is starting to change in the historical discipline, as shown by historian Neil MacGregor's work (2010) about objects as sources for historical narratives, there is still much to be done. Finally, Starn might have a point in that there are still certain prejudices about the nature and quality of the history produced in museums, partly due to the domination of historiography over other forms of history-making.

An increased awareness about the value of history in the museum has come, to a great extent, from those interested in material culture. Several academics have tried to

advocate for history made in museums, based on the idea that objects have a powerful and unique way of fostering peoples' historical consciousness (Kavanagh, 1990; Moore, 1997; Pearce, 1992; Schlereth, 1990a). More broadly, it has also come from scholars that consider that the museum is an engaging resource because of the variety of media it hosts, the use of space and the enhancing of socialisation, dialogue and emotional connection (F. E. S. Kaplan, 1995; Macleod, 2005; Watson, Kirk, & Steward, 2012). Literature about museums and nationalism has also explored the way in which the exhibition of history impacts on, and is impacted by, national identity (Dodd, Jones, Sawyer, & Tseliou, 2012; J. Evans & Boswell, 1999; F. Kaplan, 1994; Knell & et al, 2011; R. Mason, 2007; Morales Moreno, 1994b). Finally, the revaluing of history in museums comes from those that think that history in museums plays a central role of social provision that no other historical entity caters for (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989; Starn, 2005). In Starn's words, 'they deliver more history, more effectively, more of the time, to more people than historians do' (Starn, 2005, p. 68).

However, instead of setting up historiography and history in the museum in opposition to each other, we need to move beyond binaries. We must try to understand the roles and contexts in which different forms of history-making operate and, furthermore, to attempt to look more holistically at how they all interact in social life. After all, as Kavanagh claims, there is not one but many 'agencies involved in the social production of history' (2004, p. 349). The museum coexists not only with historiography but also with other history-making agencies such as schools, teachers and policy makers (Taylor, 2004). This is why the perspective of historical culture was considered the most appropriate to use; it has been one of the conceptual pillars of this research. As Leon and Rosenzweig state,

[...] museums cannot be isolated from the complex social, cultural, and historical context in which they are situated. Any effort to understand (and possibly change) museum presentations of the past must consider the constraints under which they operate. In other words, an examination of what they display and how they display it must also ask *why* [*sic*] museums tend toward certain representations (and sometimes misrepresentations) of the past.

(Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xix)

One of the risks of museum research is to analyse exhibitions as if they were separate entities, not connected in any way to the world beyond their walls or to the way visitors experience them. Whilst it is possible that certain forms of exhibition analysis might benefit from purposely isolating the museum, my research takes a wider

approach. Understanding how history is made in the museum needs to look both at visitors' perceptions of it and at the broader conditions of the historical culture in which they – the museum and its visitors – are immersed: other actors, entities and processes of history-making.

1. 3 RESEARCHING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST IN THE MUSEUM

If history in the museum is an under developed field of research, visitor studies that analyse the impact of history in the museum are even scarcer. This gap of knowledge is a serious issue because, as various authors have stated, museums 'shape much of the public's perception of the past' (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xii; Schlereth, 1990b, pp. 303, 304; Starn, 2005). However, not only do museums shape visitors; visitors themselves 'serve as an important constraint on how museums portray the past' (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xix), as they exert influence on the contents, whether through revenues or attendance figures which impact on policy or even on public funding.

The lack of research about visitors' understanding of the past in the museum is due to the same reasons as the lack of research about history in the museum in general, but they are more acute. On the one hand, the few available museum staff in charge of visitor research must focus on studies aimed at monitoring quality or addressing specific concerns; for example, seeking to change attitudes toward particular issues, such as the project to develop new approaches to the interpretation of torture and imprisonment at the Tower of London (Research Centre for Museums and Galleries & et al, 2013). As for history curators, they focus on the contents and interpretation issues, not on visitor research. On the other hand, most historians in academia are generally unfamiliar with audience research or with studying historical interpretation amongst non-specialists. Historical consciousness is an area that did not begin to develop a strand of practical and social research until the late 1990s (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Lee, 2002). This must also have played a role in the lack of studies on this matter before 2000.

To summarise, for museum practitioners and historians alike, researching visitors' understanding of the past (the way in which they make sense of it and form their historical ideas) has been a secondary – or in the worst case scenario, irrelevant – task. Therefore, it is necessary to produce more research about how visitors make sense of the past through the history exhibited in museums. As Kavanagh argued, the centre of the discussion about history in museums should not only be curatorial practice (what kind of history the museum offers) but also 'the visitor and the nature of his/her engagement

with the museum' (Kavanagh, 1996, p. 3). The present thesis seeks to contribute to this specific but under developed area, by building on what has been done so far. Although scarce or not directly related to my research topic, the use of a variety of visitor studies provided me with an intellectual ground on which to base this research.

In the first place, the design of the visitor study was based in a general way on studies of a qualitative and ethnographic nature that focused on visitors' experiences. Roughly speaking, making sense of the past can be considered part of the realm of visitors' experiences, hence the relevance of this body of research. Sharon Macdonald's *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum* (2002), Richard Sandell's *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (2007) and the EuNaMus research on visitors responses to national museums (Dodd et al., 2012) provided a general foundation for structuring the protocol interview, especially with regard to achieving a more conversational interaction between interviewee and interviewer, which was essential for the type of study I was to carry out. Macdonald's and Sandell's research are academically related in that they both come from an ethnographic research tradition, whereby the visitor experience is understood more holistically, and where qualitative exploration through interview and observation provides significant data to build knowledge.

The ethnographic tradition in museum visitor research is part of a broader shift that took place later than the 1970s, when the quantitative approaches that had been favoured so far (for example, socioeconomic surveys of visitors' profiles, behavioural studies based on the concept of *stimuli*, closed-ended questionnaires about knowledge "acquisition", among others), were challenged by new qualitative and interpretive methodologies and theories of learning (for example, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology and constructivism) (Fyfe & Ross, 1996, p. 31; Lawrence, 1991, pp. 13–15; Miles, 1993, p. 28). In the 1990s, different works on visitor studies showed the emergence of the field and the diversity of approaches. Overall, it can be said that there was a boom in the literature devoted to the topic in the USA and the UK (Bitgood, Patterson, & Benefield, 1991; Hein, 1996; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Hudson, 1993; Serrell, 1998).

It becomes more difficult to trace specific publications labelled explicitly as "visitor studies" or devoted solely to the matter after 2000. However, this should not be read as a decrease in interest in the area, but rather, that the studies seem to have been incorporated into more holistic works, where they coexist among other museum-related research or are the centre for broader discussions on particular topics (and no longer

tend to focus solely on pragmatic recommendations for operation or profiling purposes). Thus, to some extent, they have stopped being an isolated, technical or practical field, and have started to greatly enrich the theoretical reflection about the museum generally, as can be seen in the works of Dudley (2010a), Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson (2002), Macdonald (2002), Rees Leahy (2012), Sandell (2007) and Scott (2007), among others.² Qualitative research has also started to become a method used for large-scale research – which was normally limited to quantitative surveys. Two of these studies were generally useful for the present research: the previously mentioned EuNaMus report and *1807 Commemorated*³, a research about commemorations of the abolition of slavery in the UK, in 2007.

In the second place, the design of this research owes a great deal to three specific large-scale visitor studies that were produced in the 1990s, focused on issues of public history and the consumption of the past. Although different in their scope, approach and context, they all shared the aim of analysing how non-specialists – the general public – related to the past. These studies are: Nick Merriman's *Beyond the Glass Case. The Past, the Heritage and the Public in Britain* (1991), Tony Bennett, Chilla Bulbeck and Mark Finnane's *Accessing the Past* (1991) and Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen's *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998).

Merriman's study is a pioneer work for anyone interested in the topic, even though it is UK-based, as it filled a void in the literature regarding the *consumption* – the term he uses – of the past and not the production of representations of it (1991, p. 3). His research approach was fundamental for my own study in that: a) it arose from the desire to foster the opening up (democratisation) process of history museums, but discovered that it was first necessary to examine deeper issues such as peoples' relationship with the past, the ideological issues behind museums and the role of museums; b) it considered museums in their historical and social framework, so the visitor research went hand in hand with an understanding of the role and place of the

² This does not mean that the publication of specific works or reports of visitor studies from a more technical or pragmatic perspective has disappeared. Specific organisations such as the American Alliance of Museums (formerly the American Association of Museums), the Visitor Studies Group, the Visitor Studies Association, the Research Centre for Gallery Studies, and of course many museums (for example the V&A, Natural Science Museum, British Museum or The Smithsonian) still produce this type of research – among other strands of research.

³ The methodology and results of this large research can be seen at: <http://www.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/> There is also a special issue from the journal of *Museum and Society* devoted to this subject, from November 2010, Vol. 8 no. 3. Available at: <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/volumes/volume8>

museum in a particular context (what he calls a ‘historical and contemporary sociology’ of the museum) (1991, p. 3); c) it was interested in studying how ‘people themselves think about the past and museums and how they use them, rather than how analysts *think* they use them’ (his emphasis) (1991, p. 3), which has been a pattern in the existent literature⁴, and d) it is a research that, although focused on museums, looked at the broader picture in other non-museum like activities where people experience the past, to have a more holistic understanding of the topic.

However, my research has significant differences from Merriman’s study. Firstly, his research was a large-scale survey that had a strong component of variable analysis and where statistical representation was important. Secondly, his research is based on sociological theories of consumption, mainly Pierre Bourdieu’s, where issues of class and socioeconomic variables were fundamental to establish categories. Thirdly, his study is (understandably) marked by the cultural specificities of the European context; for example, his over-reliance on the idea of a “heritage boom” and a Western ‘addiction to the past’ (Plumb 1969 cited in Merriman, 1991, p. 1) in the post-war period, and a view of museums as a bourgeois institution that had a long history of exclusion. Fourthly, Merriman’s approach embraces heritage generally, including museums, historical and archaeological sites, and also other cultural consumption activities; this was possible, partly, because the written survey could address many more topics (although in less detail) than a qualitative interview could.

Merriman’s study has a detailed methodological appendix including a copy of the survey used. During the process of designing my pilot questionnaire, Merriman’s survey acted as a guide. Some of the questions that I wanted to test in the Mexican context were those about peoples’ ideas of the past and people from the past (imagining what the past was like). However, and surprisingly because of the apparent relevance of his research to my study, most of the types of questions in Merriman’s survey did not seem to apply or work in Mexico. They referred to processes that were not significant in this context, or that Mexican visitors did not find clear or understandable, such as having to rate things by value or by order.

⁴ This view certainly has methodological complications and can be subject to criticism, as it cannot be naively assumed that research can actually “get” as such peoples’ thoughts. However, in the essentials, it still holds valuable as there is an attempt to gain insight into the visitors’ perception by dialoguing with them and not only by assuming what their experiences will be.

Accessing the past is another study that was fundamental for the conceptualization and methodological design of my research. Like Merriman, the authors carried out a large-scale survey focused on relating socio-economic conditions (using different demographic variables) with attitudes to the past. However, unlike Merriman, their research was much more focused on museums, specifically three social history museums that had opened in Australia at the time of the research and that were considered to represent forward-thinking practice in the historiographical and museological domains. Their research did include other non-museum contexts and cultural activities, but they stressed the social history museum aspect. Bennett, Chilla and Finnane's research was particularly relevant for my own because of their use of the concept of *historical disposition*, which they define as 'different forms of involvement in and orientation to the past' or 'different ways of viewing the past and its relations to the present [...] and engaging in historically related pursuits' (Bennett et al., 1991, pp. 4, 21). They derived it from Bourdieu's related concept of *aesthetic disposition*, which advocates the idea that judgements are socially distributed and regulated. However, Bennett, Chilla and Finnane's view of historical dispositions differed significantly from Bourdieu's approach because they did not see a direct correlation between attitudes to the past and socioeconomic status (e.g., more educated people or richer people are more interested in history). Their view allows opening the debate to a more nuanced understanding of different historical dispositions: different groups interact with the past and they do so in different ways, not necessarily depending on their being better off, or more socially and economically deprived. As a result of their study and using cluster analysis, the authors reached the conclusion that there were at least six groups that showed different attitudes to the past (the authors at some point use the term *historical consciousness*, although they do not make any theoretical reference about it) (Bennett et al., 1991, p. 67).

Accessing the Past was based to an important degree on Merriman's work, which was not only explicitly mentioned by the authors but was also visible in the type of questions they used for their survey, which was included as an appendix. Accordingly, Bennett, Chilla and Finnane's questionnaire was only partially useful for this research as, once again, many of the questions asked were not applicable for the Mexican case. Furthermore, the scope and statistical nature of their research – possible because it was an institutional project developed by the Institute of Cultural Policy Analysis – is very different from the more local and limited, although deeper, qualitative scope of my research.

Finally, Rosenzweig and Thelen's research was also pioneering in the USA in its context and approach. It set out to investigate, in a large-scale national survey, what they considered a greatly 'unstudied question': American citizens' 'popular historical consciousness [this being] the ways that Americans use and think about the past' (Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 263). They carried out this research in the midst of claims, both from the media and from intellectuals and historians, about Americans' supposed ignorance or indifference towards the past and their apparently preferred forward-looking mind-set. However, like Merriman, the authors set out to investigate this topic, about which much had been said but little had actually been backed up with empirical or social research. Their study was different from Merriman's and Bennett's *et al* in that, although it was large-scale and did include some closed quantitative questions, its emphasis was on generating qualitative data.⁵ Their study also included some minority samples among communities of African Americans, Mexican Americans and Sioux Indians.

As a result of their research, Rosenzweig and Thelen reached the conclusion that 'contrary to the conventional wisdom' (Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 264), Americans were widely engaged with the past. They reached this conclusion by inquiring (much like Merriman and the authors of *Accessing the Past*) about 'past-related activities' broadly (for example, looking at or taking photographs, watching programmes about the past, family reunions, writing a journal, etc.) (Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 264). Rosenzweig and Thelen were thus suggesting that engagement with the past should not be measured only by academic practice (historiography), but that it is much more complex and embedded in different ways in peoples' everyday lives. Their research did allow, and was designed to, understand the intimate uses of the past and cross-reference them with socioeconomic variables in their search for patterns. Similar to Bennett *et al*, who suggested the existence of different types of historical dispositions but which were not determined by socio-economic status, Rosenzweig and Thelen found that 'participation in historical activities and a sense of "connectedness" to the past are not for the most part tied to particular social groups or backgrounds' (Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 267). Where they did find more significant differences was in the way minorities link to the idea of a national

⁵ It must also be mentioned that the three studies had different methods of interaction with the interviewees: Merriman's was a postal questionnaire, Bennett, Chilla and Finnane's was face-to-face survey and Rosenzweig and Thelen's was a telephone survey.

history, or what priority they give it in relation to their own family or group (or ethnical) history.

Rosenzweig and Thelen's study was useful for my research in several ways. Their stressing of everyday life links with a variety of "intimate" past-oriented activities opened my perspective and increased my sensibility to the visitors' comments. Also, their incorporation and analysis of several history-making agents, such as schools and museums, was compatible with the historical culture approach of my study.

Because of the conditions of my research, it was not possible to carry out large-scale (statistical) and wide-encompassing studies, such as Merriman's, Bennett, Chilla and Finnane's, or Rosenzweig and Thelen's. The project was carried out in a particular setting (two case study museums) and with a limited number of participants. Also, it had to be carried out within a defined lapse of time (a PhD programme). Still, the qualitative data generated from an in-depth, small-scale study can inform later on the design of larger projects, both of which are non-existent in the Mexican context. There is a huge gap regarding how people think about, understand and relate to the past, hence this thesis seeks to contribute to this under developed area of knowledge by focusing on the museum – although from a perspective that is aware of, and sensitive to, the non-museum, "external" context.

In the third place, the design of my visitor research about history in the museum has, on the whole, been deeply impacted by the concepts of historical culture and historical consciousness, mostly developed in Europe, the USA and Canada. In basic terms, it is an approach that allows understanding history in a more socially encompassing way, beyond the academic domain of professional historians, because it analyses a diversity of contexts, agents and processes involved in past-related activities. In Europe, the works of Jörn Rüsen (1994, 2004a, 2012), Peter Lee (2004) and Fernando Sánchez Marcos (2009) have provided important guidance. In the USA and Canada, the work of Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), and Peter Seixas (2004), as well as the Public History tradition in the USA, have all addressed this in their own ways.

Being a research focused on history in museums but that also looks at how people make sense of the past in Mexican society today, the approach of historical consciousness and historical culture were considered the most appropriate. Unfortunately, Mexican academics have not produced, as yet, a body of theory, frameworks or approaches that embody this perspective, hence the use of local literature is limited. However, when appropriate, I have drawn on key authors who have written

about issues that are more broadly related with history-making or museums and that are essential for understanding the historical culture in Mexico, for example, those focused on nationalism (Lomnitz-Adler, 2001b; Pérez Montfort, 2012; Vázquez, 1979), historiography and the historical discipline (Florescano, 1991; Matute, 2010; Zermeño, 2002), museology (Morales Moreno, 1994a, 2007), history of museums (Del Río, 2010; Fernández, 1988), history textbooks (Alcubierre, 2012; Galván Lafarga, 2011; Vargas Escobar, 2011; Villa Lever, 2012) and commemorations (Florescano, 2012; Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012). Despite relying theoretically on foreign frameworks, great care has been taken in considering as many methodological caveats and adjustments as possible, in order to produce a research that is accountable, rigorous and context-aware. Ultimately, the aim was to understand and explain Mexican cases, so I strived to avoid uncritically copying or applying foreign frameworks without being sensitive to the cultural specificities and conditions.

1.4 DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

From its inception, this research has been considered a qualitative one, as it is devoted to exploring an aspect of the social world – historical understanding in the museum – through three positions that are the core of qualitative research:

- 1) Grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly “interpretivist” in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted [...]
- 2) Based on methods of data generation which are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced, rather than rigidly standardized [...] or abstracted from “real-life” contexts [...]
- 3) Based on methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context [...] There is more emphasis on “holistic” forms of analysis.

(J. Mason, 2002, p. 3)

If the purpose of the research was to understand how visitors – specifically adult visitors – understood the past in the museal institution, a quantitative approach would not have been able to address a phenomena that is dynamic, that cannot be quantified, and that needs nuance and context, as well as a fair amount of verbalisation from visitors. These preconditions also impacted on the scope of the research in terms of the number of institutions involved. The research would be in-depth, detailed, interested in rich qualitative data, which cannot be quickly systematized, and thus, it needed to be focused on a limited number of cases.

As for the case studies, it was necessary to clarify the methodological aspects related to the use of this term. The concept of *case study* has been used in many different – even contradictory – ways, by different disciplinary approaches, and continues to be a problematic term within the literature (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000; Platt, 2007). For example, it has been used to describe research that focuses on one unit or instance (a “case”) but also to studies that deal with “cases” (more than one) in detail and depth; it is used as a method – comparable to other qualitative alternatives such as interviews or participant observation – or as a research paradigm with a particular view of the social reality; it can be used to deal with large entities (a nation can be a “case”) or with minimal cases (an individual); and so on. For the purposes of this research, case study is seen as an ethnography, in that it will attempt an in-depth and context-aware study of a phenomenon (history in the museum) in a small number of instances, using a variety of sources and methods – although interviews with visitors is the main method – in order to create an account as holistic as possible (Sandell, 2007, p. 23).

Originally, three museums were selected for the research, in order to compare visitors’ experiences in three very different approaches to exhibiting the past in the museum: the *Galería de Historia. Museo del Caracol* (GHMC), the *Museo Nacional de la Revolución* (MNR) and the *Memorial del 68* (68’ Memorial). However, during the course of the pilot study, it became clear that the research would be strengthened by focusing on the two cases that addressed a similar time period (GHMC and MNR both broadly cover from the 19th century up to the 1930s, more or less). These two cases were thus selected and became the setting of both the interviews and further ethnographic research in terms of documenting their history, their visual and spatial conditions, getting to know key elements of their staff and familiarising myself with the context. Visitors’ comments could not be understood in isolation from the context where the interview had taken place or from the broader social context beyond the museum, where visitors perform as citizens and the museum as a public institution.

As for the research questions, there was a substantial change in the approach to the issue after the first year of the PhD. The original 2011 project assumed that the relationship between Mexican history museums and their visitors was “dysfunctional”; thus, the rationale of the project was to work on a proposal to “improve” this relationship, in order to make museums “fulfil” their educational and democratic potential. This approach was eventually found to be inappropriate, based on the reflections fostered by readings on historical consciousness, theory of history, museums

and visitor studies. The 2011 proposal was based on a value judgement (a “dysfunctional” relationship) that was not backed up with formal or sufficient research. More importantly, it moved on too quickly to the pragmatic domain – how to “improve” the relationship – without first questioning the assumptions on which it was based: what do we know about Mexican history museums visiting dynamics? What do we know about understandings of the past amongst non-academics? Practically nothing, as I eventually found out. So, before any pragmatic consideration was taken, it was first necessary to improve our knowledge of these issues. In methodological terms, the 2011 proposal was too reliant on the *how* and it did not consider that a first foundational step was necessary: *what* is happening. As the research went on, the idea that it was necessary to devote a greater proportion of the contents to the *what* became stronger (Blaikie, 2009, p. 61). Also, the clarification of this first step allowed a better positioning of the *how* questions later on in the study.

As for my selection of the data generation method, interviews were the preferred method from the early stages, for several reasons. In the first place, Rosenzweig and Thelen, as well as Bennett *et al* and Merriman, all used interviews (structured ones) in order to establish a conversation with visitors and so get the necessary insight into the issues they were researching – ordinary peoples’ (not professional historians’) understandings of the past. Also, these authors were interested in linking different agents and sources involved in history-making, and interviews had allowed them to do so. Their methodological choices thus influenced the design of my own study.

In the second place, I was aware early on that there was no data already available in other sources for my research topic, so I needed to generate my own, and I felt interviews were the most appropriate and comprehensive way to do so. The use of interviews follows an ontological and epistemological position by which peoples’ views, interpretations, understandings and experiences are ‘meaningful properties of the social reality’ that can be captured and analysed through the establishment of an interaction with visitors, in order to ‘gain access to their accounts and articulations’ (J. Mason, 2002, pp. 63, 64). However, this does not mean that visitors’ comments were taken literally – doing so would assume that the interviewees’ words are a “transparent” reflection of their thoughts – nor that my role as researcher is to “transfer” those thoughts to the reader literally. Rather, an interpretivist approach presupposes that the interview *generates* – not collects – data (J. Mason, 2002, p. 52) through the interaction of the visitor and the researcher in specific conditions; also, that visitors’ opinions can be

read in different ways and, furthermore, that visitors themselves may have varying or contradictory opinions about a topic.

The pilot tests confirmed my intuition that interviews were the best method for data generation, as other methods tested during the pilot research stage – such as tracking and observation in rooms, drawing of mind maps, visual prompts and Likert scales – were not successful. The “traditional” interview turned out to be the most effective method for the topic I was interested in: visitors’ historical consciousness could not be understood with data such as tracking routes or multiple choice selection questions; I needed to talk with them (have a ‘conversation with purpose’) (J. Mason, 2002). Moreover, visitors seemed nervous if expected to write or draw something, and it generally broke the fluidity and confidence that was gained throughout the interview. It may be that, due to sociocultural conditioning, Mexicans – on the whole – are more inclined to oral forms of interaction than written ones.

In April 2012, a first pilot interview protocol was developed (see Appendix one). It consisted of about ten questions eliciting socioeconomic information, four questions about the visiting context and ten questions/statements about their idea of history, the past and history in the museum. Several of them were inspired by the studies of Merriman, Bennett *et al* and Rozensweig and Thelen. Twenty-seven interviews were carried out in the institutions originally selected: the GHMC, the MNR and the 68’ Memorial.⁶ Several questions and statements were changed, as they did not seem to work among Mexican interviewees, especially those that were close-ended questions that required selecting one answer from several given options. Some visitors considered them unclear or too abstract, so they too were ambiguous in their answers, or showed anxiety while answering. Accordingly, the questions were adapted to what seemed more appropriate for the case, which on the whole meant doing open, more conversational questions.

The pilot work also highlighted topics or aspects that certain visitors seemed to be talking about but that were not addressed by the sort of questions I was using in that first interview protocol. So, by the end of the pilot stage, there was a sense that the protocol would need to be different but at that point it was not clear to me what those changes should be. It was only after some preliminary analysis of the fieldwork data was

⁶ As mentioned earlier, for the main fieldwork I decided to work only with two of those institutions, the GHMC and the MNR. These two provided the necessary comparison of different strategies of exhibiting the past, whilst remaining more or less chronologically related.

carried out later on in the UK, as well as readings on methodology and other topics were done, that the definition of the protocol for the main fieldwork was defined, in 2013.

By April 2013, the strategy of the main fieldwork was defined. As can be seen in Appendix two, the layout of the interview protocol was changed, in order to facilitate the reading of the questions and the flow of the interview. There was an introductory “warming up”, followed by different sections with questions in each of them, with demographic questions left last. In this more organic design of the interview protocol, the models of Sandell (2007), Macdonald (2002) and the EuNaMus project (Dodd et al., 2012) were fundamental. The most important change was, precisely, that the interview protocol was conceived as a set of different sections or parts, which could be changed or moved depending on the fluency of, or points raised by, the interviewee. This was done according to Jennifer Mason’s advice (2002, pp. 68–72), where she presents this technique whereby the interviewer can have some control over the interview by balancing the need to ask the visitor the fundamental research questions but also remaining flexible for spontaneous, new or unexpected issues raised by the interviewee.

The final protocol was conceived as an unfinished version that would need some final adjustment and definition during the first days of fieldwork. This adjustment took place during the first two weeks, so the definite protocol was finally ready after approximately three versions, with minor changes. This means that there are slight variations in the tone and contents of the first and the last interviews. In total, I carried out 46 interviews with 81 visitors. Twenty-four interviews were carried out in the GHMC and 22 in the MNR. Interviews were with either one (11 in total in both museums) or two interviewees (35 interviews), with a predominance of the later. The reason for this is that people tend to visit museums in groups and they were more willing to be interviewed together. I focused on adult visitors – over 18 years old – but I took care to balance my selection based on an intuitive targeting, in order to include a variety of ages and a balanced gender representation. Appendices three and four present charts and graphs of the main traits of the visitors with whom I spoke, such as age, gender, occupation, educational attainment, reasons for visiting, and company during the visit and interview. It provides a complementary reference for readers wanting to have a general sense of visitors’ profiles, but it must be noted that, due to the particular approach taken for this research, I did not use or apply most of these factors in the analysis.

As for the analysis of the interviews, which will be presented in detail in chapters five and six, it must be said that it was the result of a staged process. The 46 interviews were divided into three samples. The first one (composed of 12 interviews) was treated in a very grounded fashion, scanning all the content of each interview closely and in detail with the help of a specialised qualitative analysis software (Nvivo). As a result, main topics were extracted and then applied to a second sample of another eight interviews. A draft analysis of interviews was written with these 20 interviews but the result was still too descriptive and lacked critical analysis; it also needed more narrowing as to what points to focus on. A larger methodological and theoretical adjustment took place, in order to establish the final strategy with which to analyse the third sample (the 26 interviews left). After the analysis of this last sample, the first and second samples were re-analysed and re-incorporated into this final scheme and approach.

As in most qualitative research, the analysis of the interviews was not a straightforward process. Interpreting peoples' perceptions requires a great deal of both ethical and critical skills, whilst taking difficult decisions. The process of going through three different stages and using samples reflects how complex it is to find and define an interpretive strategy. The process of working with samples was an iterative process of going backwards and forwards from theory to interviews, with the help of – and sometimes because of the problems caused by – qualitative analysis software. Learning how to use Nvivo was part of the learning curve of the PhD. I decided early on to use this software as I considered it would help me have greater control over the data. And to some extent it has; some of the conclusions I reached are due to the level of detail I gained by being able to “code” in detail certain aspects of visitors' experiences. On the other hand, that same level of detail that was induced by the software temptation of over-enthusiastic coding, created problems that I would not have faced by using a more traditional method – for example, highlighting in Word. At some point, I had to step back and return to the basics; of the original – rich and meaningful – interviews with people, I had made mechanical fragments that made no sense. The final months of the interviews analysis were very much about returning to a holistic perspective and being more critical – even limited – in my use of Nvivo.

Besides the interviews, some observations on and careful registration of the contents of both case studies were necessary, in order to clarify the exhibition settings for the reader and to have the contextual elements to link with the visitors' comments later, during the analysis stage. As mentioned, an important part of this research was

understanding the institutions, their history and space. Due to the lack of material about the chosen museums owing to several reasons (for example, the limitation of museum literature in general in Mexico, the non-existence of institutional archives as such, or their unavailability for consultation), it was necessary to take the following actions: 1) make a careful photographic registration of the contents of each room and of the text panels (with the help of a professional photographer hired for the task), 2) interview key museum staff who could provide information about the history of the institutions and 3) try to trace as many internal and external sources on the institutions as possible, notwithstanding whether they were “grey” sources of literature (leaflets, guides, webpages, among others). The interviews with staff had a more documentary (oral history) approach, in order to build the history of the institutions, which is not available in any written source. The purpose and sense of the staff interviews was, thus, different from the visitor interviews and, accordingly, their use in this thesis has also been different.

An interesting transformation of the project took place during the analysis of the interviews and the early writing-up stage, which was that, whilst the documentation of the history of the GHMC and the MNR was originally considered to be secondary or only complementary to the interviews, it turned out to be more important than expected. The research into the history of the institutions and their display strategies provided key elements for the analysis of the interview contents themselves and helped understand visitor experiences of the past in a more holistic way – more aware of the socio-cultural specificities.

This shift in focus was probably due to the fact that the historical culture approach stresses the interaction between different actors, entities and processes in the reflection about the past. Therefore, I needed to stress the analysis of the links between individuals and institutions, between the inside and the outside, between historians’ and visitors’ ideas, and not only between the visitor and the exhibition (the visitor-exhibition encounter). Both the interviews and the history of the case studies became gateways to a complex network of relationships and exchanges. The challenge and contribution of this research has been to focus on the exchange between them through nuancing the apparent barriers that have kept them apart. The museum has been a privileged space to pin down and trace in more detail the different processes and entities involved in history-making, including the contradictions and tensions, as well as the continuities.

CONCLUSION

In the previous pages I presented the overarching perspective and research design of my ‘intellectual puzzle’ (J. Mason, 2002), which is exploring Mexicans’ understanding of the past in the history museum, focusing on two case studies. As explained, qualitative research was considered the best approach for this phenomenon as it looks for depth, nuance and interaction with people, as well as a holistic and context-sensitive view. Visitors’ experiences as generated through semi-structured interviews provided the appropriate insight into this phenomenon, but their interpretation also required an understanding of the museal institution itself, the context in which it is immersed, as well as the different social and intellectual practices involved in history-making more generally – including the exchanges and tensions with other actors and entities.

The research has drawn heavily on foreign authors and frameworks, mainly due to the fact that there is not, as yet, a significant body of research in Mexico about the topics and approaches used for this thesis. However, there has been an attempt to be thorough-thinking in the use of foreign models, as well as being self-reflective on the way my own personal and intellectual conditions – and those in which the research has been carried out – have impacted on the result. This cultural context-awareness, along with the interpretation of the visitors’ experiences in the museum, have been the biggest methodological challenges of the research, but they have also been the source of the originality of the study and the contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL CULTURE AND MAKING SENSE OF THE PAST

INTRODUCTION

Once the general methodological approach has been outlined, it is necessary to address in more detail the conceptual framework that guided the analysis of the research matter: how do people make sense of the past in the history museum. Because this research focused on non-professionals, I chose a particular corpus of authors, such as Rüsen (2004a, 2004b) and Seixas (2004), who have used the concept of *historical consciousness* to define the different ways in which people orientate themselves in time and create their ideas of history in everyday life. I also used the related concept of *historical culture* (Rüsen, 1994; Sánchez Marcos, 2009), which holds that each society relates to the past – its own past – through different processes of history-making, involving several entities and actors. I will present a more focused explanation of these concepts by drawing on discussions about narrative, not only because it provides elements to understand historical consciousness, but also because narratives are an active “vehicle” for conveying ideas within the historical culture.

The combination of the concepts of *historical culture* and *historical consciousness* will help identify ways in which the past is interpreted and understood, not as a unitary process, but one where there is coexistence, tension and contradiction between different approaches and forms of making history. As will be argued, the museum is a privileged ground to trace and analyse those processes of exchange and tension, and examples will be presented. Ultimately, the chapter points at the need to draw connections, break disciplinary and intellectual boundaries, and challenge unquestioned preconceptions that have hindered us from gaining a more dynamic view of the way in which the past, with its ubiquity, is involved in peoples’ everyday lives.

2.1 HISTORICAL CULTURE AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In this section I will present the reference framework for understanding both historical culture and historical consciousness, along with associated terms that are widely used in relation to them, or instead. In 2004, Peter Seixas edited a book called *Theorizing historical consciousness* (2004), where he systematized a corpus of research that had been

unarticulated so far. The book has become one of the key texts on this subject. In the introduction, he advocates for

[...] an inclusive notion of historical consciousness by incorporating all those modes of understanding that are included in “collective memory” [*sic*]. At the same time, this notion should allow for the coexistence in any one culture and, indeed, in any one individual, of fundamentally different *types* [*sic*] of historical consciousness [...] Thus, we will use the term historical consciousness to maintain collective memory’s attention to broad popular understandings of the past, bringing to the forefront, nevertheless, the problematic relationships between the distinctly modern, disciplinary practices of historiography and the memory practices of broader populations across different cultures and across different eras [...]

(Seixas, 2004, pp. 7, 8)

In my reading of Seixas’ definition, historical consciousness can be broadly considered as the different ways in which people make sense of the past. However, when analysed in detail, his definition also points at one of the central difficulties of this research topic: the existence of multiple terminologies whose boundaries and meanings are contentious, not to say obscure. Probably as a result of its complexity, historical consciousness is a phenomenon that has been named using different terms and analysed through different approaches, as a brief genealogy will show.

According to Seixas, for example, some authors used the term as equivalent to *collective memory*, whilst others – especially from what he calls the German tradition – like Hans-Georg Gadamer, considered historical consciousness as a very specific phenomenon or cultural development from the Modern era, related to the awareness of the historicity of things (Seixas, 2004, p. 7). Christian Laville, one of the authors included in Seixas’ book, positions the development of the concept in three different geographical scenarios: in Germany, the concept was addressed in the 1970s by authors such as Rüsen, who were interested in the didactics of history (learning and teaching of history at school); in France, it developed in the late 1980s as a result of historians’ interest in Pierre Nora’s work on the *Realms of memory* (1984), itself based on Maurice Halbwach’s work on collective memory; finally, in the UK, although John Lukacs published his work *Historical Consciousness: Or, the Remembered Past* as early as 1968, interest only developed after the 1980s, especially in the anthropological context (Laville, 2004, pp. 165–169).

In the late 1990s and 2000s, several European and North American authors from the area of history didactics produced works related to historical consciousness,

although other terminologies were used, for example: Sam Wineburg referred to *processes of making historical sense* (2000); David Lowenthal (2000), Verónica Boix-Mansilla (2000), Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby (2000 and 2004) used *understanding history*; Bodo von Borries (2000) and Linda Levstik (2000) employed *historical meaning* and *historical significance*; Lee (2004) and Laville (2004) used *historical thinking*. This decade also saw certain works about the perception of history in the public sphere produce a terminology of its own, for example, Morris-Suzuki's (2005) *historical awareness*; Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen's *understanding of the past*; and Nick Merriman's (1991) and Jerome de Groot's (2009) *consuming history*.

More recently, as can be seen in Seixas' compilation as well as in other texts, historical consciousness has been used almost interchangeably with other terms, such as *collective memory* (Seixas, 2004, p. 7), *historical memory* (Létourneau & Moisan, 2004, p. 110; Rüsen, 1994, p. 4), *historical imagination or imagery* (de Groot, 2009, pp. 8, 249; Kean, 2013, p. xix), *historical identity* (Lorenz, 2004, pp. 31, 32) and even *pubic history* (Jordanova, 2006, pp. 126, 127; Kean, 2013, pp. xiii–xix). Meanwhile, the project *Canadians and their pasts* has kept to the usage of *historical consciousness* (Conrad & et al, 2009; Conrad & et al, 2013).

The boundaries and definitions are as varied as they are imprecise, and would require a specific analytical review that is beyond the scope of this research. Thus, the present thesis will not focus on analysing the differences in how these authors use the terms. For the purposes of this research, most of them (*historical consciousness*, *historical thinking*, *historical understanding*, *consuming history*, etc.) are interchangeable, as they all have to deal with the broader problem I intend to address in this thesis: how people understand (make sense of) the past in their present circumstances and in relation to the historical culture to which they belong. This approach to historical consciousness has been greatly influenced by the work of Jörn Rüsen and Fernando Sánchez Marcos, which I will now address.

According to Rüsen, *historical consciousness* refers to a series of mental processes to 'make sense of the experience of time by interpreting the past in order to understand the present and to expect the future' (2007, p. 175). It is an orientation process that guides practical, daily, human action, by helping people to understand the past; it makes the passage of time intelligible by fomenting a meaningful relationship between past, present and future, and thus, understanding the 'web of temporal change in which our lives are caught up' (Rüsen, 2004a, pp. 66, 67).

Rüsen has also written about historical culture, although he is mostly known for texts about historical consciousness.⁷ For him, *historical culture* is an encompassing term that brings together different ‘structures, areas and strategies’ to ‘retain and make the past present’ (1994, pp. 4, 5); for example, academic research institutions, schools, conservation practices and museums. Hence, although very closely related, historical consciousness and historical culture are not the same thing: the latter refers precisely to the more practical and operative articulations of historical consciousness in the life of a society. Historical culture is the multidimensional and concrete manifestation of the ‘interpretive work of historical consciousness, and its product, the cognitive structure called “history”’ (Rüsen, 2007, p. 179).

Fernando Sánchez Marcos, a Spanish historian who coordinates a website devoted to this matter since 2009⁸, provides a working definition that helps to further explain and clarify Rüsen’s ideas about historical culture:

The concept of Historical Culture and its cognates in other languages (such as *cultura histórica*, *Geschichtskultur*, *Culture historique*) expresses a new way of approaching and understanding the effective and affective relationship that a human group has with the past, with *its own* [*sic*] past. It is an area of study that aims to embrace a broader field than that of *historiography* [*sic*], since it is not only limited to the analysis of academic historical literature. The scope of *historical culture* [*sic*] is to advocate the examination of all the layers and processes of social historical consciousness, paying attention to the agents who create it, the media by means of which it is disseminated, the representations that it popularizes and the creative reception on the part of citizens.

(Sánchez Marcos, 2009, p. 1)

For the purposes of this research, his definition of historical culture as a broad way of understanding the relationship of a society with the – its own – past, is of the highest relevance, as it not only focusses on the internal cognitive processes of historical consciousness (for example, peoples’ perceptions of time in the museum visit or during their history lessons at school) but also on the social and physical practices that surround it (for example, exhibiting and curating history in the museum). Sánchez Marcos’ views also open the scope to look beyond the context of academic historians’ historiography,

⁷ Rüsen’s ideas of historical consciousness and historical culture are part of his broader theory of Metahistory. There are different strands and aspects to his research beyond these two, for example, narrative, moral values and reasoning, aesthetics and history, etc. I will only address those that are relevant for the research, and they will be presented in the appropriate sections as necessary.

⁸ <http://www.culturahistorica.es/> The site is available both in English and Spanish. It has unpublished Spanish and English versions of German speaking authors like Jörn Rüsen, fundamental for the topic at stake, but whose works have mostly not been translated to other languages.

into the larger scope of how different members and constituencies of a society use, represent, interpret (understand) and negotiate the past.

So far, I have presented a clarification of historical culture and historical consciousness, including their definitions and the relationship between these two close – but not equal – terms. However, it is also necessary to clarify other similar and related terms that will feature in the research: the past, history and memory. I am aware of the complex debate and vast academic production surrounding these terms, especially the last two. It is not the aim of this thesis to focus on this debate, thus, I will only provide a framework of reference of how these concepts were used and understood within the nature of the present research.

Throughout this thesis I will use the concept of *the past* to refer to that infinite ocean of events that took place at some point in time. *History* is that part of the past which has been integrated into a temporal framework of understanding: history is a cognitive structure (Rüsen, 2007, p. 179), that gives meaning to time, and which is achieved as a result of historical consciousness. In common usage though, the word *history* is used to refer to both the past in itself and the past integrated as history. Furthermore, *history* is also used for the academic or professional discipline that studies and explains the past. For purposes of clarity, I will use the word *past* when it refers to that distant and infinite set of events that have not been “processed” as history, in order to emphasise how the notion of history precisely involves that interweaving of past-present-future (Rüsen, 2004b, p. 2). For further clarity, I will refer to the profession of history as the *historical discipline* and to its product as *academic history*. Therefore, *historiography* will specifically refer to academic texts written by professional historians. Because this research is interested in challenging artificial boundaries, it considers that historians do not only produce historiography but that they are also involved in other forms of history-making; thus, academic history can take different forms, such as documentaries, exhibitions, books for the general public and even educational policies.

Finally, it is necessary to look at memory and argue why this research is not fundamentally about memory, although it is indeed addressed tangentially. As Cubitt has argued, the relationship between *history* and *memory* is one of the most complex, because each of these terms has its own array of meanings and because the relationship between them is permanently shifting and diverse (2007, pp. 4, 5). Basically, memory is the quality to retain anything from the past and use it as a reference for the present. An essential condition of memory is its role in everyday life, not as past but as a present

experience. In contrast, history (as a cognitive structure) demands a notion of distance and separation from the present (Rüsen, 2007, pp. 169–172).

However, precisely because I consider memory as inevitably tied to the present individual experience – thus disagreeing with authors like Goethals and Solomon (1988), who have made of memory an all-encompassing and omnipresent term (Cubitt, 2007, p. 1) –, history is what allows us to analyse events and processes that are distant in time, beyond the scope of our memory. Following Cubitt’s discussion in regards to a text by historian Sarah Foot (1999), this means that the deposit that memory leaves ‘[...] is a form of knowledge of which memory was once vehicle but whose articulation now depends on a different form of mental action’ (Cubitt, 2007, p. 11). I argue that this other “mental action” is, precisely, historical consciousness. In other words, individuals’ memories, if shared by any means (oral history, diaries, recordings, etc.), are eventually integrated into the larger pool of the past. The only way we can have intellectual access to them is through our historical consciousness – not through our memory. For example, it is different to have lived the Mexican Revolution and remember it, than not have lived it and think about it through your memories of what you learnt at school, or by talking with older relatives about it. In the second case, the ideas we hold about that event have been integrated through diverse structures, products and agents, and turned into history.

However, the complexity of the matter lies in that at any given moment in time, there is a coexistence of memory and history. For example, survivors’ memories of the 1968 student movement are part of present-day historical culture in Mexico, along with histories of the 1968 student movement. We must thus recognise that historical culture is dynamic and, as such, it is not always possible to make clear-cut divisions between history and memory.

2.2 THE PAST AND HISTORY-MAKING

As mentioned in the previous section, a fundamental aspect of the notion of historical culture is that history is not only made by professionals, but is something that happens in everyday life and which is produced by the exchanges between different entities and through different processes; any society has varieties of history-making which coexist simultaneously. This section will look into the relationship between academic history and other ways of history-making, by considering both the tensions and connections that lie in between, using examples to illustrate the points made.

Based on the aforementioned framework of historical culture and historical consciousness, it can be argued that thinking about, giving meaning to, and using the past is not the exclusive domain of historians. Consequently, I think there is room to accept Raphael Samuel's view of history: by claiming that history is a form of social knowledge (1994), he was also saying that it is wide, open and inclusive. The past is everywhere and surrounds all our senses, so history-making is possible in kaleidoscopic ways, even more so when there is an abundance of different meanings about the past distributed in many channels, all of which might be in operation at the same time and in the same place (de Groot, 2009, p. 13). There is a constant 'cross-fertilization' of discourses (what de Groot calls *historioglossia*), as well as an abundance of such discourses (*historiocopia*), thus creating a 'web of historical meanings and experiences' (2009, p. 13). In this way, de Groot sets a perspective compatible with that of historical culture, by pointing at the complexity, fluidity and mutability of the operation of the past in everyday life, as well as the interconnectedness of the actors and elements involved in its interpretation.

A context of abundance and cross-fertilization of diverse ways of history-making and discourses is not without its problems. If there is not a single entity that "possesses" the right of interpretation or a sanctioned view about the past, then, theoretically, anyone is entitled to interpret it; the authority is shared. But where does this line or argument leave the historical discipline, self-claimed and socially considered to be the professional exercise of researching and building explanations about the past? The issue of the right and authority to interpret the past is considered to be one of the most important, but contested, problems of the historical discipline (Kean, 2013, pp. xii–xiv; P. Martin, 2013, pp. 2, 3). Indeed, who owns the past and who is entitled to interpret it?

In literature, the debate around public history has encapsulated this discussion about ownership over the interpretation of the past. The problem with these discussions is that, on the whole, there is a lack of clarity on the way the concepts of *public history* and *popular history* have been used. In her introduction to a recent *Public History Reader*, Kean recognised the existence of many ways or traditions to understand what the term is, even more so because its genealogy is obscure (2013, pp. xvi, xvii). Similarly, Jordanova presents a series of things she considers public history encompasses, by calling it an 'umbrella term': history designed 'for a mass audience' (dissemination of academic history), the past itself in its different forms (diverse genres and sources of history such as buildings, magazines and memorials that constantly surround us) and even a 'diffused

awareness of that past that varies from person to person, group to group, country to country' (2006, pp. 126–130), the last of which seems to refer to the notion of historical consciousness.

Another problem with some of the debates and publications in the realm of public history is that there has been a division of history into what are perceived to be two different spheres of action: the “popular” and the academic. Debate has tended to end in a polarization or opposition between academic history (limited mainly to historiography) and “popular” or “public” forms of history making. David Cannadine has sketched, with a dose of humour, this division at its most radical, writing from the particular context of media history:

[...] in our dichotomy-dominated world, obsessed with such simplistic divides as West-East, black-white, men-women, rich-poor, Christian-Muslim, and so on, it is both tempting and easy to exaggerate the antagonisms between professional historians on the one side, and media people on the other. Here is one such version: academics are reclusive scholars of exemplary integrity, painstakingly uncovering and accumulating knowledge, disinterestedly searching for the truth, and constantly aware of the complexities of the past; while media people, be they newspaper editors, radio and television producers, or Hollywood moguls, have scant regard for evidence or accuracy, want simplified sensational stories, and are only interested in circulation, audience and profits [...] But like all stereotypes, they also have some basis in fact [...] (Cannadine, 2004, pp. 2, 3)

Debate has also ended up with some parties rejecting the historical discipline's capacity to produce solid and trustworthy knowledge about the past, thus placing it alongside other forms of “fiction”. This was characteristic of the narrative debate of the 1980s following White's 1973 *Metahistory* (Roberts, 2001). As a result, some historians wrote works in order to counter-attack this discrediting of the historical discipline; one of these works is, for example, Richard Evan's *In Defence of History* (2000). Other historians, like Rüsen, have considered that historical studies need to ‘revise their tradition of self-reflection [...] in order to explicate, legitimate and also criticize their cognitive status’, and the only way to do so is by looking into the constitution and function of the discipline in ‘practical human life’ and in relation ‘to the cultural needs of human activities’ (2004b, pp. 131, 132).

I agree with Rüsen's view on the need to root the historical discipline in a context of everyday life and practice, and in permanent coexistence with other history-making actors and entities. This does not mean, however, a denial of the specificity of the historical discipline. I do not share homogenising views – often found amongst authors that advocate for public history – which flatten any distinction between

processes as diverse as family stories, school lessons, public commemorations, museum exhibitions or historiography, but neither do I support the claim that historiography is the only way to make history. Indeed, history (both as a product and as a cognitive structure) is not a ‘private preserve’ of practitioners (Fowler, 1992, p. 153). Although historians produce a professional approach to the past, they are not the only drivers of the historical enterprise, because a broad range of history-making communities is also in action, and in this specific sense, history is – as Samuel claimed – the work ‘of a thousand different hands’ (1994, p. 8). My perspective is that we need to look at the interactions between these two spheres – the “popular” and the academic – instead of keeping them separate or of trying to eliminate their differences. They are both elements of the historical culture and the richness of the matter lies, precisely, in understanding the complex relationships, exchanges and negotiations that occur within them through practices of history-making.

As I will attempt to show in this section, this perspective of historical culture recognises the existence of different ways of making history, whilst arguing that the boundaries are flexible, permeable and in constant exchange – about which we, unfortunately, know little, hence the importance of the present research.⁹ The use of this perspective is a way of developing a more ‘coherent position on the relationship between academic history, the media, institutions such as museums, and popular culture’ (Jordanova, 2006, p. 149) and of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of ‘the full stretch and complexity of the historical within the everyday’ (Corner 2006 cited in de Groot, 2009, p. 6).

A first proposal to help overcome the harmful (and artificial) opposition between academic and other forms of history-making is to remember that the historical discipline is not based on a sort of timeless and context-less, abstract plinth. It is a mundane activity, grounded in particular present conditions; what Rüsen calls the present conditions of the past or *tradition*: ‘the past is already present [...] in the circumstances and conditions under which historical thinking is performed and obviously influenced by it’ (Rüsen, 2012, p. 45). The historical discipline is affected, to the same extent as any other entity and context of history-making, such as schools, museums or education curricula, by the conditions in which it operates. The historical discipline and its

⁹ The notion of *historical culture*, precisely because of its use of the term *culture*, points to the flexible, movable and reproducible qualities of practices and representations of the past.

product, academic history, reacts to, or is a consequence of, practical needs of orientation that on the whole guide a society's historical thinking (Rüsen, 2004b, p. 132). Thus, for example, it can be deduced that, following the Independence war of 1810-20s, academic history in Mexico, just as any other form of history-making existent at the time – for example, puppet shows, speeches or paintings – were greatly (but not solely) constrained by ideas of the origins of the nation.

A second proposal is to look at historians in a more organic way. On the one hand, just as the historical discipline, historians are affected by society and the conditions they live in; they are not outside of them (Black, 2005, pp. 2, 3; Kean, 2013, p. xv), so they are both 'products and producers of the collective identities of the cultures of which they are part' (Lorenz, 2004, p. 28). On the other hand, historians are not only professionals that always live and act in a clearly defined way, according to disciplinary practices and codes, but also individuals that have shifting social roles or multiple identities (R. Mason, 2005, p. 207). Historians (both male and female) are also parents, teachers, museum curators, politicians, public servants, artists, film-makers, fiction writers and activists, to mention just a few examples. In all of these roles, different requirements and attitudes are expected of them, precisely because different social codes are set for each of them.

Moctezuma reminds us of the importance of locating the place a historian occupies in the group or place where knowledge is produced, in order to understand the impact of this position in the disciplinary context (2005, p. 58); and, I would add, on the broader historical culture. The objective or material conditions individuals occupy in a particular place and time is an important factor that determines the quality and impact of what they communicate, and this is why it is essential to understand 'from which place they are speaking' (Bourdieu cited in Moctezuma, 2005, p. 58). For example, it is one thing to be the main historian curator of "X" museum, and another to be a historian working as part of the learning team in that same museum.

This can be briefly clarified by presenting examples from the Mexican context. Lucas Alamán became the first Minister of the Interior and Foreign Affairs of the newly created Federal Republic, in 1823.¹⁰ He was also a historian (although technically, the

¹⁰ The end of the Independence war in 1821 was a negotiation of different parties that agreed to create a "Mexican Empire" governed by a constitutional monarchy, at the head of which was one of the leaders of the fighting parties, Agustín de Iturbide – originally fighting in favour of the Spanish cause but then

historical profession as such did not yet formally exist). As a statesman, he implemented some of the first official regulations regarding the use of statistics to administer the territory, the fostering of education for the development of a “enlightened citizenship” and also a series of recommendations in order to administer the “national memory”, that is, to protect and bring together all the documents and object collections, both from Colonial and pre-Hispanic times, that had been gathered till then (Zermeno, 2009, pp. 86, 87). Furthermore, as a historian, between 1849 and 1852 Alamán wrote one of the first and most comprehensive works on the history of Mexico. Another case is that of the historian Silvio Zavala, who was director of the National Museum of History from 1946 to 1954, and therefore a public servant. During the same period, as a historian, he penned a large historiographical work according to the Rankean method, by which original documents meant the validation of the historical fact or truth (Moctezuma, 2005, p. 51). Thus, both Alamán and Zavala are exemplary cases of the multiple roles historians perform.

A third proposal is to think differently about media-history (history presented in the media). In several texts devoted to this matter, there seems to be the idea that media-history is more appealing and pervasive than historiography (Black, 2008, p. 12; de Groot, 2009; Jordanova, 2006, p. 135; Morris-Suzuki, 2005). Although media is, indeed, one of the most important elements in a historical culture, there are two problems with the abovementioned argument: one, it implies that historiography does not filter into, or is not present in, media-history; and two, it reduces academic history to historiography, thus leaving out certain academic history products, such as documentaries or popular history books, that are not only appealing but also relevant in the mediascape. By the same token, media-history has at times been pigeonholed, by assuming that there is uniformity in the type of history existent within a medium; for example, “TV-history” is often used to refer to all history broadcast on TV and “museum-history” to any form of exhibition about history. Whilst we must recognise the need for some categories to name things, we must be careful of not homogenising the varieties that lie within each medium; for example, there is a huge difference between a historical documentary and a historical soap-opera, although both can be broadly

sympathising with the independent cause. However, this Empire was very short lived as in 1823 the first federal republic was proclaimed and the monarchy brought to an end.

considered “TV-history”, or between a “museum-history” based on oral testimonies and another on material culture or period-rooms.

Finally, it can be acknowledged that non-academic forms are embedded in many more different genres than professional history (Jordanova, 2006, p. 135), but we must give credit to the fact that there are varieties of academic history (although probably not as many); as mentioned before, not all academic history is historiography. Also, it is likely that apparently non-academic forms may have been influenced at some point by academic history, as a natural result of the dynamic exchanges that take place in a historical culture and as part of the processes of making sense of the past; de Groot’s abovementioned concept of *historioglossia* is of relevance (2009, p. 13). If we are to look at the exchange that takes place among different strategies of history-making, in order to capture the complex ways in which the past circulates in our every day lives, we need to seek an integral perspective that emphasizes their differences and similarities, just as some authors claim (de Groot, 2009; Jordanova, 2006; Morris-Suzuki, 2005). Similarly, I believe we need to stop setting academic history and “popular” or “public” forms of history-making in opposition.

I will briefly analyse three media to exemplify how to draw connections in their representations of the past, and so, attempt to produce more holistic understandings. The first example I will address is TV, or more precisely, history broadcast on television. TV has a broad range of programmes with historical content; amongst the documentary type alone, there is a variety of strategies to convey history, e.g., presenter-led history (where the audience is given a single voice, that of the narrator), those that intercut eye witness testimony (“talking heads”) with ‘dramatic commentary and powerful music’, and those that offer reconstructions to make a point or illustrate a theme (Downing, 2004, pp. 10, 13). However, in all of these, as the same author claimed, there is a

[...] variety of ways in which television historians, like myself, can relate to or provide a link with the Academy [*sic*], with professional historians, primarily in the university but also including that broader constituency of archivists, curators and those who earn their living from the research and study of history [...] We are reliant upon the work that has been and is being done by scholars and researchers around the world.

(Downing, 2004, pp. 16, 17)

Cannadine also recognised that professional historians based at universities and media practitioners were not ‘two separate, monolithic and mutually hostile

constituencies, but rather [...] two diverse, engaged and interconnected worlds', out of which much public benefit could be derived (2004, p. 3).

A second example is school textbooks. This medium needs to be understood in relation to the broader context of history didactics and curricula studies (educational policies), but also in detail regarding more specific contents and links with other media. This way, research has shown there is a link between historiography and history textbooks; actually, this constitutes a classical analysis trend in the textbook domain (Repoussi & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2010, p. 155). There is also a recognition that textbooks carry and help disseminate myths of the nation which are perceived to be necessary for the construction of citizenship and that circulate widely in the public sphere or other media, such as images (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 115). Finally, there is research on how the iconographic programme of textbooks is part of a broader visual context, where there is a 'recycling' and circulation of particular images that tend to be associated with particular events or characters (Galván Lafarga, 2011). For example, during my fieldwork research I came across the following image of Benito Juárez – one of the most beloved figures of national history, as we will see in chapters four and six – on the cover of the official history textbook for the 5th year of primary school (see figure 1, p.48).¹¹

The image is a digital reproduction from a mural painted in 1972 by Antonio González Orozco, called *Juárez, symbol of the Republic against the French intervention* [my translation], which covers a wall in Chapultepec Castle, the building that hosts the National Museum of History (MNH). It depicts President Juárez in the centre, brown-skinned in accordance with his indigenous ethnic origin, carrying the national flag (green, white and red) and leading the army of the Republic against the French forces, who invaded the country in 1862 and stayed until 1867. In the background, in the upper left hand corner, can be seen Chapultepec Castle, one of the fields of battle (although Juárez himself was not at the battle of Chapultepec). This is not the only case in which mural paintings, several of which are in either the MNH or in the National Museum of Anthropology, are used to illustrate textbooks. Thus, by using the particular and rich example of González Orozco's painting, it is possible to trace how textbooks, museums and history curriculum are connected by using the same images.

¹¹ I want to extend here my sincere thanks to Mr Miguel A Barrera, at Conaliteg, who granted access to the historical archive of this institution in order to see and photograph the textbooks, and who also provided some insight on this matter.

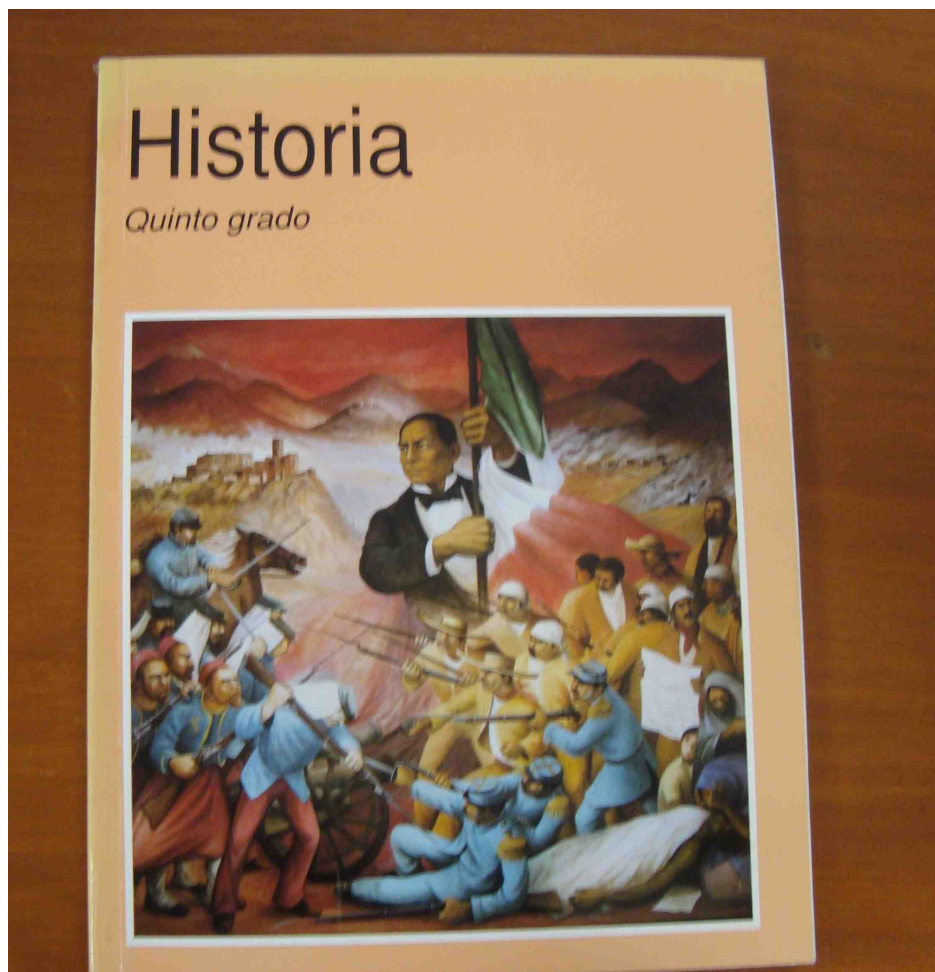


Figure 1 History textbook cover with mural painting of Benito Juárez. Source: Cintia Velázquez

A third example is that of history exhibitions in museums, a medium that in itself gathers many other media, creating a complex network of relationships with other elements of the historical culture, for example, visual culture (through the use of photography or images), material culture (through the exhibit of symbolic objects or elements of the physical context of a society) and, of course, through discourses that use particular historiographical ideas, as will be seen in more detail in chapter four. It is thus possible to agree with Andrea Witcomb's approach to the analysis of museums, which links them with 'seemingly unrelated sites' (such as cultural sites, texts and practices), and thus allows studying them '[...] in ways that link [them] to the world, rather than separating [them] from it' (2003, p. 10).

Through the concept of 'modern practices of looking', Witcomb connects the museum with other contexts and media, such as department stores, international fairs, tourism, journals or magazines, TV and films; all entities that experienced a boom from the 19th century onwards (2003, pp. 19–23). Ideas and visualizations of progress, history, evolution and empire can be found across these contexts and media, working in

[...] articulation [so that] the museum is connected into, and operate through, other channels of communication such as television, the internet and film [...] The museum is not a closed repository, a mausoleum, but an institution that is closely connected with other sites of cultural representation. Moreover, it has always been so – in the nineteenth century as much as in the twentieth and twenty-first.

(Witcomb, 2003, p. 110)

Accordingly, it is reasonable to think that ideas of the past and historical interpretations will circulate across media (or, as Witcomb would say, sites of cultural representation), both those from academic historians and those that are not. Let us consider, for example, how a museum exhibits digital prints of a mural painting that is located in another museum (see figures 2 and 3). Figure 2 shows the interior of the National Revolution Museum (MNR) and on the wall a digital reproduction of part of a mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros, one of the three most famous muralists of the Mexican school.¹² Figure 3 (p.50) shows a section of the actual mural, which is called *From Porfirismo to Revolution* [my translation], painted from 1957 to 1966, in one of the MNH rooms at Chapultepec Castle.

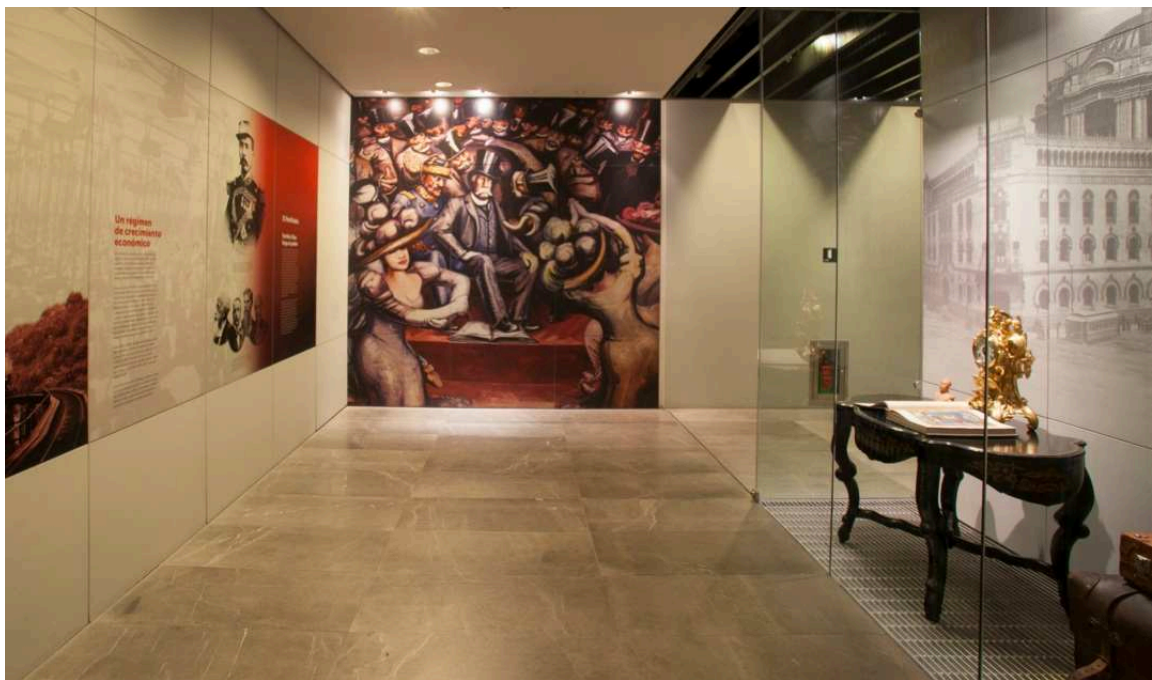


Figure 2 Reproduction of mural by Siqueiros at the MNR. Source: Jorge Moreno

¹² For unknown reasons, the digital reproduction of the mural is inverted. Most probably this was a printing mistake.



Figure 3 Mural by Siqueiros at the National Museum of History. Source: Cintia Velázquez

Thus, the murals at the MNH have become common references beyond the walls of the museum; their visual narratives have also become images to illustrate textbooks and other museum exhibitions. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this interconnectedness of media, where certain images are repeated over and over again, creates a certain public expectation or visual familiarity with particular depictions and narratives of the past.

2.3 MAKING SENSE OF THE PAST AND NARRATIVES

So far, I have presented a discussion of the way in which different actors and/or entities that tend to be opposed or kept separate (academic history and “popular” history), constantly interact and impact on each other through varied processes of history-making. Earlier in this chapter we became familiar with an inclusive notion of history, which takes into consideration how “ordinary” people (non-professionals) make sense of the past. In this section, I will argue that one of the ways in which we can gain insight into this very important but under-researched matter – how people who are not historians make sense of the past – is through narratives, not only because they circulate naturally as part of everyday life, but precisely because, in doing so, they cross different entities and contexts.

There is a large amount of research about how historians make sense of the past; in fact, this is the core of historiographical production. However, there is relatively little research about how people in everyday life, beyond the academic environment, make sense of the past. A considerable part of this research has been carried out in the school context, from the area of history didactics, mainly looking at how pupils acquire, or not, different skills related to the historical discipline, how they understand national history and how they identify themselves as historical actors generally (Barton, 2001; Lee, 2004; P. N. Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000). Another significant portion of research has to do with national identity and how people interpret the past in relation to issues of State or nation (nationalism) (Dodd et al., 2012; Edensor, 2002; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Watson, 2006; Yoshino, 1999). There has also been work in the area of tourism, heritage and history “consumption”, as well as in the area of audience research broadly (Gaynor Bagnall, 1996; Bennett et al., 1991; Merriman, 1991; Prentice & Andersen, 2007; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). Some of the latter have been fundamental for the present research, as I mentioned in the first chapter. Finally, some research has had to do with memory and cognitive research, in regards to the way in which we learn, fix, and create understandings of the past (Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva, 2002; Wertsch, 2004).

So how do “ordinary” people make sense of the past? The way in which we cognitively make sense of the past is a widely discussed matter, though, and many different theories have been suggested. One of the aspects with which theories have engaged is narrative. In the realm of philosophy of history, ever since the 1960s – but more intensively after the “cultural turn” of the 1970s – there has been an intense debate about the role of narrative in knowing, understanding, explaining and reconstructing the past (Gunn, 2006, p. 49; Roberts, 2001, p. 1).

On a basic level, a narrative or a story is a type of explanation that describes what happened, but also goes beyond, by telling how and why it happened (Roberts, 2001, p. 3). On a broader level, narrative is the way in which we shape the past as a succession of events (Porter Abbott, 2008, p. 5). It is a ‘human phenomenon [...] found in all activities that involve the representation of events in time’ (Porter Abbott, 2008, p. xii). Besides shaping time, Porter Abbott points at another fundamental feature of narrative: it is the key ingredient by which we perceive the world. Thinking narratively, that is, in terms of how what we are seeing came to be (what happened before and what will happen later), is embedded in our everyday life, so much so that it is almost a

subconscious trait (Porter Abbott, 2008, pp. 6, 7). However, precisely because narrative is so essential and pervasive in our lives, there is a wide array of theoretical positions on it.

James Wertsch, for example, claims that our understanding of the past is mediated by narratives, some more concrete and factual (for example, those that contain information about events, characters and settings) – called *specific narratives* – and those that are more structural, which lie behind those specific narratives – *schematic narrative templates*. The word *schematic* alludes to the notion of *schemata*, developed by cognitive research in the 1970s, which refers to ‘shared cultural scripts’ (Cobley, 2014, pp. 220, 221). By analysing written accounts by Russian citizens from different generations marked by the Soviet or the post-Soviet condition, he reached the conclusion that, in spite of changes in the contents in the specific narratives, some schematic narrative templates essentially remained the same, therefore making viable a cultural understanding across generations that were apparently so different¹³ (Wertsch, 2004, p. 60).

Rüsen has also used narrative in order to explain how historical consciousness operates. In his model, making sense of the past as a way of orientating our life and actions is a narrative procedure: ‘the operations by which the human mind realizes the historical synthesis of the dimensions of time [past-present-future] simultaneous with those of value and experience lie in narration: telling of a story’ (Rüsen, 2004a, p. 69). We develop our narrative competencies throughout life, which can be judged by the extent to which we learn to: a) look at the past to grasp its specifics as something different from the present (*competence of experience*); b) establish a bridge between that past, our present and a projected future (*competence of interpretation*); and c) use that temporal arch for orientating our life (*competence of orientation*) (2004a, pp. 69, 70). Depending on the extent to which we master these three narrative competencies, we will have a particular *type* of historical consciousness: a) one where we stick to an inherited tradition of doing and seeing things as a timeless set of rules (*Traditional*), b) one where we are shaped by ‘deriving general rules from specific cases and applying them to other cases’ (*Exemplary*), c) one where we develop an ideological critique and reject or deny what has been given (*Critical*), and d) one where we are conscious of the temporal change and how meaning

¹³ Wertsch is making reference here in the context of collective memory although he also mentions the notion of historical consciousness. He does not make any differentiation of these two terms, though, so I assume he uses them indistinctively.

lies on accepting ceaseless changing (*Genetic*). It is important to mention the fact that, although some progression is implied in these categories, there is coexistence of elements of each of these four in our everyday life procedures of meaning-making (Rüsen, 2004a, pp. 70–78).

As Rüsen himself has argued, his model is theoretical and it requires further empirical research, in order to see whether and how it would work in daily life. Some of this research is being carried out, but mainly in school environments (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Lee, 2004); studies in other contexts, such as museums, remains scarce – Jones' (2011) being one of the few available. This might be related to the fact that probing the theoretical model requires detailed and sequential information that is not easily generated in certain contexts; my research being an example of this. The semi-structured interviews with visitors lasted between 15 minutes and one hour, and it is impossible to get a comprehensive grasp of visitors' historical consciousness with the data generated. Hence, I have not sought to test Rüsen's theoretical model. But the interviews still provided certain hints that were valuable to understand how narratives are an important part of how we make sense of the past.

One of the hints provided by my visitor research is that people make sense of the past in different ways, which can be identified by the type of narratives they tell, as well as by the different approaches they take to the past. As Jones claims, the main value of Rüsen's theory for practice-based research might be that, despite its limitations for being empirically tested, it suggests that there are *different types* of historical consciousness (2011, pp. 283, 284). So it is not a matter of whether people "have" historical consciousness or not, which has often been the argument, but that we all have several ways of making sense of the past, and we shift between them.

Another hint that my visitor research provided was that the socio-cultural component is key to how people make sense of the past through narratives. Whilst each person is unique, and makes sense of the past in a somewhat unique way, there are similarities with those of other people immersed in the same historical culture. Thus, the approach of this research has been that individuals' experiences are framed by a cultural context of social patterns of thinking and acting; Tim Edensor calls this, inspired on the

ideas of Raymond Williams, a ‘structure of thinking and feeling’ (2002, pp. 20, 21).¹⁴ In making this claim, I am affiliating myself with authors who support the need for some sort of commonality; “something” shared by all members of a group which has been historically predetermined as a condition of existence in and of meaning-making as part of that group, whether loosely termed as structures, schemes, frameworks or systems (R. Mason, 2005, pp. 206, 210; Wertsch, 2004, pp. 50, 51). Individuals do interpret the past but they do not do so with a pure, free-willed individual action; it is a culturally constructed process ‘[...] through socially-grounded particular discourses’ (L. Smith, 2006, p. 15).

Among those socially-grounded narratives that are part of the historical culture, myths, or *masterplots* in Porter Abbott’s terms, play an important role in peoples’ everyday life because they link with their identity and their culture, and as such they are ‘a kind of cultural glue that holds societies together’ (2008, p. 47). They are ‘the mythological structure of a society from which we derive comfort and which it may be uncomfortable to dispute’ (Kermode 1979 cited in Porter Abbott, 2008, pp. 47, 48). Like Porter Abbott, Bottici and Challand consider the myth as an element of human nature that gives meaning to the world, facilitates adapting to it and overcoming indifference by emotionally attaching to it; myths provide “ground” or substantiate things, so they go beyond a mere explanation (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 91). However, unlike narratives in general, myths are narratives with specific qualities:

To produce a narrative, one needs only a more or less coherent series of events; more is needed to make a myth. In a nutshell, political myths are narratives that set a drama on the stage [...] All myths are narratives, in that all of them presuppose a story, but not all narratives are able to acquire the status of a myth. There are, indeed, many narratives, both political and otherwise, that leave us completely indifferent. While the concept of a political narrative entails that of a series of events organized in a more or less coherent plot, the concept of myth entails that of a surplus, of an emotional attachment that motivates political action

(Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 4)

Although narratives are able to explain or provide meaning, only myths can be meaningful or significant for a particular social group. Hence, the distinction between these two terms is seen by the authors as crucial when analysing collective identity

¹⁴ As Edensor himself claims, the idea of structure might be a bit problematic in that it assumes fixation, but, just as him, we consider that it is possible to have a more fluid view of structures – they have defined and feeble areas, they change, they are made of different parts, etc.

(Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 5). Myths lend ‘significance to our existence by connecting our banal everyday life with a larger, more poetic, and glorious past that predates and will outlive us’; for example, myths of origins are powerful because they make people feel that they belong or were born in a ‘culturally rich mother (land)’ (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 105). Besides how myths make us feel and how we contemplate life through them, they can also inspire us to act within the world and to politically interact with it, depending on the circumstances (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 109). Myths are powerful, not only because they impact on our ways of thinking, but also in what we do; they are internalized (Samuel & Thompson, 1990, p. 14).

All nations have their masterplots or myths, which although similar to those of other nations, acquire particular characteristics in each context. So for example, the story of the quest (that of an individual born into poverty or difficult circumstances who rises through hard work and reaches success or virtue) is part of the USA cultural construction of the self-made man (Porter Abbott, 2008, p. 47). In Mexico, this quest is also present, but in a different way, with the story of President Juárez, the indigenous, poor, orphan boy who became president in the mid 19th century, and has since been one of the most important figures of national history. I will address in more detail in section 4.3 how this mythical interpretation of Juárez is present in the historical culture, in museums and also amongst many visitors’ perceptions of Juárez himself (section 6.3).

Another example of a myth that is part of the historical culture in Mexico is that presented by Morales Moreno: the belief in an essential “Mexicanness” that is traced back to the “original” pre-Hispanic indigenous groups of central Mexico, supposed to have “survived” the colonial period, and that reaches modern Mexico almost untouched as a main influx of identity. As we will see in sections 3.2 and 5.4, it is a myth of origins and a powerful element of national narratives and iconographies in present-day Mexico (Morales Moreno, 2007, p. 56) because it ‘convey[s] meanings that are central to the identity’ of the country (Castaños, 2013, p. 77). This myth is reinforced by the pervasiveness of a clearly visible and monumental pre-Hispanic archaeological past, which helps giving national identity an ‘ethnic rootedness’ (A. D. Smith, 2001).

It is important to note that, although certain myths might be more visible than others, ‘no culture can be summed up in one masterplot’ (Porter Abbott, 2008, p. 48). I agree that this should be stressed: there is not one single narrative that by itself can represent a country or that can “speak” for the past, even if it is made by a powerful entity such as the State. Thus, there is not one “official history” but, rather, many

different narratives, clashing at some points and coexisting at others: ‘narratives are in combat in most compartments of life, public and private’ (Porter Abbott, 2008, p. 90).

A myth needs to be understood not as an object but as a process that works to produce significance on a sequence of events (stories or narratives). Thus, myths are more than stories: through a process of need and “emotional underpinning”, narratives are elaborated as myths. ‘As a consequence, myths are not usually *learned* once and for all, but rather are apprehended through a more or less conscious cumulative *exposure* to them’ (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 90). The power of myths lies precisely in that their significance goes beyond conscious learning and into ‘unconscious elaboration’: any object, icon or gesture can prompt the myth (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 91). Samuel and Thompson could be said to agree with this dynamic view of myth; they disagree with the idea of an invented tradition¹⁵ because myths are constantly being transformed, recycled, and are shifting from the public to the private spheres. Myths, just like tradition, are handed on by continual interactions, which allows them to transcend; they are never ‘created’ as such (with only a few exceptions, such as big ceremonials) by a particular instance or at a particular moment in time (Samuel & Thompson, 1990, pp. 14, 15). Myths are constantly adapted, according to different circumstances (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 7).

Besides being an iterative and dynamic process, myth-making crosses the boundaries of the public and the private. People make sense of their individual life by drawing on resources of collective myths and tradition that exist in the public realm. Thus, as will be presented in chapter five, peoples’ personal stories are often seen through the lens of these major myths or narratives. People select, interpret and bequeath these myths to their descendants, either consciously or unconsciously; myths thus become ‘currency’ and an important element of exchange in personal relationships (Samuel & Thompson, 1990, p. 15).

But studying myth-making is particularly difficult, as it often takes place unconsciously and is not limited to the written word (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 5). It is also difficult because, as mentioned, the process takes place in a fluid, dynamic way, where several social relations, forces and interpretations are interlinked, and where the public and the private are in constant play. In this sense, myth and narrative-making

¹⁵ They are discussing here the ideas that Hobsbawn and Ranger present in their *The invention of tradition*, from 1983. I will discuss in more detail this issue in chapter three.

processes cannot be separated from myths or narratives themselves: they are both ‘instituting’ and ‘instituted’ for a given social group¹⁶ (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 8). Bottici and Challand argue that the methodology for studying myths must, therefore, include a diversity of empirical material, both textual and visual, an attention to discourse, a diachronic perspective and a consideration of all the different ways in which myths are conveyed or institutionalized (2013, pp. 7, 8). Furthermore, it needs to account for the ‘entire process of production, reception, and reproduction’ (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 90). In chapters four and six I will present how this occurred with specific narratives and myths in the Mexican context.

Myths circulate in a variety of media, both written and visual, as well as oral. They often circulate as icons – ‘images that convey an entire myth by means of a synecdoche’ (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 101) – therefore research on visual sources, for example images in textbooks, can be illuminating. According to these authors, textbooks are ‘crucial media for the transmission of political myths. They are the means through which the basic knowledge and self-representation of a society are transmitted from one generation to the next’ (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 102). Textbooks contain ‘the bottom line of what a society knows’ (Jonker 2009 cited on *ibid*) and this is often in the manner of icons (visual myths). Icons are a powerful element, often fixed in a subconscious level that makes them the ‘background knowledge’ with which we interpret the world but, precisely because of it, they can hardly be dismantled later (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 102).

Historians seem to be critical of, or feel uncomfortable with, myth. As Samuel and Thompson claimed back in 1990: myth can be something broad and inclusive, and yet, ‘most commonly historians are apt to see myth, if they notice it at all, as an impediment to their true work’ (1990, p. 3). However, they stress how myth is an essential component of human thought, even to date, and is a powerful imaginative resource that acts as a historical force. For Samuel, ‘blindness to myth undeniably robs us of much power to understand and interpret the past’ (Samuel & Thompson, 1990,

¹⁶ It is also worth mentioning here that the notion of institution used by Bottici and Challand is rich in that it encompasses *formal* institutions (organizations), *codified* institutions (laws, constitution) and the *informal norms of behaviour* (habits, customs, ideologies) (Bottici & Challand, 2013, p. 8). In another words, we could say that a particular historical culture is made up or institutionalized by the interplay of these types of entities.

pp. 4, 5).¹⁷ For example, research about popular movements cannot do without analysing how ‘national sentiment’, or the myth of national sentiment, operates (ibid). A more sensitive approach to myth can help historians raise new questions and their awareness about the psychic dimension of history and peoples’ lives; establish a more ‘active [sic] relationship between past and present, subjective and objective, poetic and political’ (Samuel & Thompson, 1990, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the framework of the main concepts that have informed my research and which will be present throughout the thesis. Based on Rüsen’s and Seixas’ ideas I have argued that making sense of the past (*historical consciousness*) is not an activity exclusive to historians but essential to all humans, in that it has to do with how we orientate our lives in the present in regards to a ‘remembered past’ and an ‘expected future’ (2004b, p. 2). I have also used the idea of *historical culture* to argue that history-making takes place in myriad ways, because various entities acting through different processes constantly interact in daily life. Therefore, it is necessary to draw connections in spheres that have normally been kept separate, such as the “popular” and the academic. The museum is an entity that embodies particularly well the interconnection between different forms and entities of history-making. Narratives – and myths therein – understood as a way of structuring time, allow us to delve further on how people make sense of time, how ideas of the past circulate through different contexts and how they are closely connected to socio-cultural contexts, as they convey understandings of the past which are specific to certain groups. Based on this framework, we will now move on to look at the particular configuration of the historical culture in Mexico, so as to later understand the context of the case studies and their visitors’ historical consciousness.

¹⁷ It must be noted, though, that this view was written in the early 90s, and the conference had taken place in 1987. It was, though, a time still marked by the influx of social scientific and structuralist history. The opening up of the cultural and narrative turn was just starting. More recently, history has increasingly made of myth, memory and other non-factual themes, part of its scope of scholarly research although there is yet much work to be done indeed.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CULTURE IN MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented some of the main concepts that will guide this thesis. I introduced the notion of *historical culture*, understood as the different ways in which a society relates to the past, including all actors, entities and processes involved in history-making, whether professional or not (Sánchez Marcos, 2009). As such, it can be considered to be broader than the notion of *historical consciousness*, which refers more specifically to how people make sense of the past. It also looked at the way in which narratives, and myths therein, convey historical consciousness (that is, they embody ideas of the past) and thus constitute an important element of the broader historical culture.

This chapter will look in more detail at the historical culture in Mexico and certain key aspects of its dynamics of history-making. The chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive review of Mexican history, or of its historical culture; it merely provides the necessary context to understand the case studies (chapter four) and the interviews analysis (chapters five and six). A key issue in Mexico is the relationship between the State and history. I will analyse why this relationship is so significant and how it has usually been addressed in academic literature, but also how it could be approached differently, in order to gain a more nuanced and critical understanding of history-making in Mexico. In particular, I will provide a critique of the idea of “official history” and suggest alternative ways of thinking about dominant narratives, by drawing on ideas produced by authors such as Rüsen (2012), Anthony Smith (1999a) and Tim Edensor (2002). As will be seen, the relationship between the State and history-making is more complex and unstable than normally depicted: it is permeated with internal conflict and contradictions. By turning “official history” into something that is also circumstantial, variable and less definite, I hope to open some space to think about those dynamics of history-making which have not been recognised under a model that privileges the State over all other historical actors and entities.

3.1 THE STATE, THE NATION AND THE POLITICS OF HISTORY

Rüsen states that historical culture not only has a *cognitive dimension* but also a *political* one. This dimension is ‘concerned with the legitimation of a certain political order, primarily

relations of power’ and with the ways in which people make sense of the past through master narratives about their political identity – about ‘the I and the We’ – (Rüsen, 2007, p. 179). Thus, the political dimension is part of any society, although it is reasonable to assume that each society will have a different configuration, based on its particular cultural and historical conditions. When considering the cultural particularities of a context, it makes sense to think, as Cubitt did, that ‘different conceptual emphases may sometimes be a legitimate reflection of the different issues that arise in the study of different periods or different types of society’ (2007, p. 11). Due to Mexico’s particular cultural and historical conditions, the relationship between the State and history has been a core aspect of its historical culture. These conditions could be broadly summarised in the following aspects:

- Before the Spaniards arrived to the American continent, in the late 15th century, the territory that Mexico now covers was inhabited by a large number of indigenous nations. The Aztec (or *Mexica*) empire was the most powerful at the time and dominated other nations of the central highlands. Their capital was the city of *Tenochtitlan* where, following the Conquest in 1521, the Spaniards founded Mexico City, the capital of their new colony: New Spain.
- The fusion between a Spanish colony and a wide diversity of indigenous nations resulted in a complex social and ethnic mosaic where a dominant *mestizo* (mixed “race”) society eventually consolidated itself, but where indigenous populations continued to exist – although altered by the colonial regime. The unsolved “indigenous question” – how to integrate them into a *mestizo* society – remains a central issue in Mexico.
- A very violent and unstable 19th century marked both by internal tensions resulting from its complex social and political mosaic, and by external conflict due to European and American Imperialism; in particular, the tensions with the USA have remained another central condition of the country ever since. Tension also rose due to the clash between modernizing processes and the rural, traditional peasant and indigenous communities.
- A long dictatorship from around 1877 to 1910, called the *Porfiriato*, where General Porfirio Díaz established a context of relative peace through violent repression of political or social dissidence, tight control over the legislative apparatus, an alliance with certain intellectuals, military leaders, wealthy landowners and businessmen, along with an economic policy that favored foreign investment and development of urban areas at the expense of large swathes of the population (the poor, workers, indigenous and rural communities).
- A violent civil war, the Revolution of 1910, which had wide popular participation from the most marginal groups, and where internal tensions between different groups and social projects exploded. The winning group implemented a large programme of political legitimacy and consolidation, including drafting the 1917 Constitution, which still regulates national life.

- A national *status quo* marked throughout most of the 20th century by a single-party dictatorship for more than 50 years¹⁸, a strong presidentialism (prevalence of the authority and figure of the President over all other political actors) and a dominant State with corrupt practices. This party was the PRI, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* [Institutional Revolutionary Party].
- The defeat of the PRI in the national elections of 2000 and its return in 2013 (after two government periods out of power, when the right-wing opposition ruled) has created a climate of uncertainty, anxiety and social tension that has steadily increased since 2006.

By looking at these conditions, it is possible to identify certain traits of the historical culture in Mexico that differ significantly from those of the European context.¹⁹ In the first place, there is the fact that the sheer instability in the 19th century – including the fall of the *Porfiriato* and the start of Revolution – was followed by a “stable” 20th century (at least since the 1930s) where a single political party remained in power until 2000, and thus consolidated a strong centralised State and established continuity. In contrast, in Europe, the 2nd World War dramatically altered the geopolitics and society of the time. In particular, the Holocaust and the destruction of the cities altered peoples’ relationship to the past. It triggered a “memorialisation boom” – frequently mentioned in European and American literature – aimed at reflecting about what had happened, and protecting what started to be considered “cultural heritage”.²⁰ In Mexico, this boom did not occur simply because the country had experienced a very different path throughout the 20th century: firstly, it had been the 1910 Revolution – and not the 2nd World War or the Holocaust – that which radically changed peoples’ relationship to the past, and secondly, the stability of a centralised single-party dictatorship created continuity – instead of rupture.

This condition of continuity and State intervention in the historical culture in Mexico is embodied in particular political (institutional and practical) manifestations, for example, in the existence of a huge public and centralized governmental institution for managing the past, called the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).²¹

¹⁸ Although more years can be claimed if previous configurations of PRI are considered, for example, the National Revolutionary Party (1929-1938) and the Mexican Revolution Party (1938-1946). PRI and its previous formations were integrated by former leaders – *caudillos* – of the winning group of the Revolution.

¹⁹ A more detailed chronology and glossary of important dates and names of the Mexican context are presented in Appendices five and six.

²⁰ For example, in the works of James Plumb (1969) and Andreas Huyssen (1995).

²¹ INAH for its name in Spanish: *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*. It is symbolic that it depends of the Ministry of Education and occupies an important place within it (thus the past and education of citizens seem to go hand in hand). It was created in 1939 and since has been responsible for researching,

In addition, the 16th of September – Independence Day – and the 20th of November – Revolution day – are characterized by public commemorations with wide State intervention, including military parades. As for public education, it is regulated by the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of the history curricula at school and textbooks.

Due to these conditions, research about how the past is understood and how history is made in Mexico is necessarily – but not exclusively, as I will argue later – related to the intervention of the State, to political struggles in the processes of conforming and implementing concepts of national identity, and to the political use of history by the powerful. It thus makes sense that a significant proportion of research about history and identity in Mexico has been related to politics, the State and nationalism (Aguirre Rojas, 2003; Crespo, 2009; Florescano, 2010; López, 2010; Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012; Vázquez, 1979). Consequently, there is a pervasiveness of ideas such as “official history” or “hegemonic history”; and, as we will see in chapters five and six, this was also present amongst several of the interviewees.

What is popularly encompassed in this notion of “official history” is a fixed narrative that goes more or less like this: *Mexico (or its ethos) exists since pre-Hispanic times; it suffered domination and exploitation throughout the Conquest and Colonial times, and finally emancipated itself through its War of Independence; however, it underwent a difficult 19th century with foreign invasions, followed by Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship. Still, in the end, it succeeded in becoming a modern and democratic nation, thanks to its Revolution and the popular government that resulted from it.* Critics of “official history” often use this specific narrative to condemn the intervention of the State in historical affairs. As we will see throughout this section, although State intervention has been an undeniable aspect of the historical culture in Mexico, it is necessary to move beyond this perspective that conceives of “official history” as a monolithic, seamless and unchangeable narrative that excludes other actors and entities from the processes of history-making.

Interpretations that over-stress the role of the State in historical affairs are not exclusive to Mexico. Historians have generally been concerned with the intervention of the State in the regulation of historical knowledge (Black, 2005, 2008; Hobsbawm, 1997; L. Smith, 2006; Taylor, 2004). This concern was expressed, for example, in

preserving and disseminating the past. It manages a huge network of archaeological sites, national museums, higher education schools and research and conservation centres. There is an English version of the main website on <http://www.inah.gob.mx/index.php/english>

Hobsbawm's idea that history is a powerful but dangerous tool because it could become 'the opium' of the people (1997, p. 275), thus, whoever had control over it would have control over society. Rüsen himself agreed that any State or political form of dominion needs history to legitimize itself within a society (1994, p. 18). Indeed, although the State is not the only institution involved in the dissemination, reproduction and interpretation of the past, it is generally the one with the highest political impact, since it regulates daily social life in different realms, such as education, laws, national symbols and media. The Mexican case clearly demonstrates that the State does hold significant power over historical culture, and we must not forget this if we are to understand the ways in which people make sense of the past in Mexico.

However, this widely held view, both in the academic and in the public spheres – that the State regulates all forms of history – has also resulted in a lack of perspective on how history is made outside the State or, even worse, in a missed opportunity to question some widespread assumptions about the State, "official history", nationalism and, on the whole, about historical consciousness. As Mary K Vaughan and Stephen Lewis (2006, p. 3) argue, there has been a tendency to emphasize the imposition of the State and the elites over popular forms of identity. However, a more detailed look at the Mexican case shows that the State's (or elite's) and popular forces interact reciprocally when it comes to using, creating and transforming symbols and building a national identity (Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 3).

At this point, Rüsen's ideas about the State are illuminating. As mentioned above, he does recognise the role it has on a historical culture, but he does not see it as an entity that operates outside the conditions of the present; rather, as the State itself has been shaped by past conditions (which he calls *tradition*). Thus, he rejects the idea that the State "invents" tradition, claiming instead that tradition is not invented but already embedded and a prerequisite for the existence of the State. The following excerpt presents the line of compelling arguments he makes for this matter:

Today's academic convention that tradition is a construction of the past by historical thinking in the present denies any tradition in the usual meaning of the word. Tradition, which is understood as a construction, has lost its power over the minds of the people, since it has lost the decisive character of its role in culture, namely its quality of establishing a pregiven world order. Has tradition therefore lost its impact on the work of today's historical consciousness? Is it only the stupidity of unenlightened people that causes them to believe in tradition? [...] But can we consider the past only as sense-free and meaningless matter for historical sense-generation? Or can we attribute to it an impact on the mental procedures of historical consciousness and their social realization in historical

culture? Nobody can deny that the work of those who decide upon the features of historical culture is conditioned by the cultural circumstances within which it takes place. Nobody can deny that these conditions are the result of developments of the past leading into the present. Nobody can deny that the past is already present and effective in constituting important elements of historical culture before the work of historians explicitly refers to it.

(Rüsen, 2012, pp. 49, 50)

As I will argue, the State is indeed a central actor of the historical culture – at least for the Mexican case – but it is bound by, and in a dialectical relationship with, tradition: it and the State are interlinked and constantly impacting on each other. Thus, the relevant aspect for this research is the means by which the State shapes, and is shaped by, historical culture. The theoretical tool that allowed me to develop this further was Anthony Smith’s ideas of ethno-symbolic nationalism, which I will now address.²²

In his writings about nationalism, Smith suggests a typology or classification of the vast existing material about nations and nationalism, which consists of four standpoints²³: the *primordialist*, the *perennialist*, the *modernist* and the *ethno-symbolic* (1999a, pp. 3, 5). Modernist ways of thought have many theoretical positions; still, their main arguments can be outlined more or less as follows: 1) nations did not exist before nationalism; it was nationalism and the State which created nations; 2) nations and nationalism are a “new” product of the Modern age, which means that they developed around the 18th and 19th centuries, not before; and 3) nations and nationalism are ‘artefacts of the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie’ (A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 100).²⁴

As for ethno-symbolism, this position differs from modernist views, that see nationalism as a purely political movement, where ‘politics is about the control of the state [and consequently], nationalism is an argument for seizing and retaining that control’ (A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 79). In modernist views, nationalism is based on the idea

²² It is worth quickly mentioning beforehand that Smith himself rejects the idea of an “invention of tradition”. At most, he says, invention can be understood as ‘novel recombination of existing elements’, not as “new” fabrication (Banks cited in Smith 1999b, p. 72).

²³ Smith’s typology is not a reflection of what has indeed been written about nationalism; other authors might disagree. However, I have drawn on Smith’s typology as it does provide an articulated and compelling general view of a topic that is otherwise unmanageable. Smith himself, in more recent works, has recognised that the field has changed significantly in the 2000s, as a result of shifting and fragmented landscapes where there is cross-fertilization (2008). I have taken on board these ideas as will be seen shortly in my interlinking of both modernist and ethno-symbolic elements.

²⁴ He also mentions that 4) ethnic nationalism needs to be distinguished from civic-political nationalism; and 5) nationalism and nations ‘are becoming obsolete in an era of globalization’. The debate about all these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis. I will only address those aspects that directly relate to the specifics of this research.

of political arrangements between people (citizens) and institutions, and on notions of cultural homogeneity and sovereignty (A. D. Smith, 1999a, pp. 6, 7). On the contrary, for ethno-symbolists, ‘nationalism cannot be confined within the political’, nor should politics and culture be opposed (A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 81). Ethno-symbolism focuses on the weight that history and culture have on the development of nations and nationalism; it considers them as ‘integral parts of the fabric of popular visions, and of the social structures and processes in which the designated populations are embedded, and through which their elites must forge their strategies’ (A. D. Smith, 1999a, p. 9):

[...] what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular living past has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias [...] and reconstituted in each generation.

(A. D. Smith, 1999a, p. 9)

What this view is suggesting is that ‘the power and durability of nations and nationalism [comes from] narratives and images [that] strike a chord with the people to whom they are designed to appeal’, and who then contribute to the process of nation-making. Only when rulers and leaders are able to ‘“re-present” to the mass of the population an acceptable and inspiring image or narrative of the nation can elites exert any influence’ (A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 89). In modernist views, the “masses” are seen as ‘passive victims of elite social designs [...] But are the masses simply a *tabula rasa*, waiting for the nationalist messages of their rulers to be inscribed on their minds and hearts?’ (A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 88).

On the contrary, nationalism is a process

[...] of reconstruction of earlier ethnic ties and sentiments....[E]thnic pasts help to shape present concerns by providing the cultural frameworks and parameters within and through which the needs and understandings of the present are formed and articulated [...] There has never been a *tabula rasa*.

(A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 90)²⁵

So, in contrast to the modernist views, Smith suggests that the rise of modern nations and nationalism is not due to an “invention” in the present, but to something deeply rooted in traditions, popular myths, symbols, memories, and collective cultural

²⁵ And at this point, I think that Smith’s ideas are totally compatible with Rüsen’s ideas of historical consciousness in that *tradition* is already there, embedded in the way in which history is made and thought in the present. It is the past conditions of the present.

identities in pre-modern epochs – for example, the *ethnie* – which they seek to evoke.²⁶ In Rüsen’s terms, this would be what he calls *tradition* (see p. 63 earlier). For example, ideas about the Aztec or *Mexica* Empire have been an important element in shaping Mexican nationalism since the 19th century and up until the present day. Thus, nationalism is not a progressive move that successfully ‘sweep[s] away the vestiges of the past and its patchwork of ethnic and religious cultures’ (A. D. Smith, 2010, pp. 92, 93). This means that the study of nationalism needs to pay significant ‘attention to ethnic memories, myths, symbols and traditions that provide such vital clues to the understanding – and persistence – of cultural identities and communities’ (ibid), and how societies draw on those cultural repertoires (myths, symbols and memories) to cope with the new challenges, by redeveloping or adapting them (Hutchinson quoted in A. D. Smith, 2010, p. 81).

Hence, it is necessary to look at nationalism as an everyday phenomenon that involves the wider population’s (popular) beliefs, sentiments and practices. Smith recognises the work of authors focused on the phenomenon of *everyday nationalism*, such as Billig (1995) and Edensor (2002), who look at the ways in which “‘ordinary people’ produce and reproduce nationhood’, through practices such as talking about the nation, visiting places, consuming products or services that relate to the nation, and participating in rituals and ceremonies (A. D. Smith, 2010, pp. 83–84). However, Smith also criticises some features of the research agenda of *everyday nationalism*.²⁷ The present research agrees with this criticism, so efforts have been made to 1) ensure that personal and everyday stories link to broader frameworks and 2) emphasize the exchange between culture and politics, elites and “ordinary people”, and dialectic processes of exchange in shaping ideas of the past and of the nation.

²⁶ *Ethnie* is a central element in Smith’s theory. He defines it as ‘a named human population [...] associated with a particular territory, and which shares myths of ancestry and historical memories, as well as elements of common culture’ (2010, pp. 92, 93).

²⁷ Among these, he mentions the following: 1) the focus on “ordinary people” needs to consider the exchange and contact they have with political elites; nationalism is a dynamic process between the two, and not only a product of one of these sides, 2) research needs to have a historical perspective, in that everyday nationalism tends to be presentist by ignoring the role of the past and tradition on peoples’ “present” experiences and 3) “everyday nationhood” needs to be put in contact with “historic nationhood” in that micro studies of everyday practices and sentiments, whilst useful, do need to be put in context with wider frameworks of long-term spans and other agencies and actors (A. D. Smith, 2010, pp. 84, 85).

3.2 THE CONTEXT: HISTORICAL CULTURE AND HISTORY-MAKING IN MEXICO

In the previous section I argued that the political realm is part of historical culture and of the way in which people make sense of the past, but that it has specific configurations, depending on each country's context. In the case of Mexico, for example, the relationship between the State and history has been very pervasive. However, unlike certain approaches that tend to claim that history is an invention of the State that is then "imposed" on people, I have used authors like Rüsen and Smith to advocate for a less "mechanical" view of this relationship. One where tradition and symbolic elements precede the State itself, and where ideas of history and the nation are negotiated, changed and appropriated in everyday life in a more fluid, but also chaotic, way; and finally, one where the State is in constant exchange and tension with other agents of history-making.

Having reviewed this background, I will now turn to present some key aspects of 20th century historical culture in Mexico, which I consider essential for understanding the ways in which the past has been studied, used and disseminated in Mexico, and consequently, to better contextualise the case studies and the visitor research later on. As I discussed in chapters one and two, the museum is not an institution that is isolated from the outside world, but is intimately connected with other history-making processes and entities. This is why it is so important to explain and analyse the historical culture in which the case studies where I carried out the visitor research – the GHMC and the MNR – are immersed.

This research focused the visitor study on the periods of the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution, so it is important to start this brief review of key aspects of historical culture in Mexico with those two periods. From around 1877 to 1910, Porfirio Díaz – who in the mid 19th century had been a successful general who fought foreign interventions and was a supporter of the liberal republicans – established a dictatorship based on his political alliances, backing from wealthy foreign and national investors, and fierce repression of political and social dissent. The motto of the period was "Order and Progress", as inspired by the philosophical doctrine of Positivism.²⁸ It was a time of great inequality between the elite classes that inhabited certain areas of Mexico City and

²⁸ This refers to Auguste Comte's positivism, which was brought in the mid 19th century from France by Mexican intellectuals who studied there. Positivism consolidated throughout that century and was fundamental for the creation of an idea of history whereby the *Porfiriato* was the ultimate state of a process of evolution: material progress was a result of the fact that the imposition of order had been followed by the intervention of science (Matute, 2010, p. 217).

provincial towns, and the vast majority of illiterate workers and peasants. The *Porfiriato* temporarily contained the social tensions and problems that had not been resolved since the wars in the 19th century, but they ultimately reappeared, violently, in the Revolution of 1910, partly due to their exacerbation during the Díaz regime.

The complexity of the *Porfiriato* would turn it into one of the most debated topics of the 20th and 21st centuries, not only amongst academics but also the wider population – museums and museum visitors included, as we will see in chapters four and six. One particular book was central to projecting a negative view of the *Porfiriato* throughout most of the 20th century: *México Bárbaro* [*Barbarous Mexico*], a short and very sharp political essay by USA author John Kenneth Turner, who belonged to the *Muckrakers*, a group of critical journalism who sought to investigate and denounce social issues like poverty and workers' exploitation. Visiting Mexico in 1908 and 1909, he documented the slavery of indigenous populations in southern Mexico, the gruelling conditions of workers and the general abuses of the Porfirian regime, in a short, powerful and accessible prose. The book was published in the USA for the first time in 1911 (E. Meyer, 2005) and ever since became one of the basic references on the subject. As we will see in chapters four and six, this book was present in both museums and visitors' interpretation of this period of Mexican history.

Because the *Porfiriato* was also a time of relative peace and stability, a cultural and educational project was developed for the capital city. It included, among others, the creation of universities and learning centres, the consolidation of the National Museum and, significantly, an increase in the knowledge about, and study of, Mexican history. Some important historiographical works were produced during the *Porfiriato*, for example, *México, su evolución social* [*Mexico, its Social Evolution*] (1900-1902), a collective work of several volumes that provided a general and thematic history of Mexico, from its geography and ethnic groups (at the time called "races"), up until the *Porfiriato*, using the positivist framework (Matute, 2010, p. 217,218). This work seems to have followed the structure of the highly successful *México a través de los siglos* [*Mexico Throughout the Centuries*] (1884) (Florescano, 2012, pp. 31, 32), which compiled, in several profusely illustrated volumes, Mexican history from pre-Hispanic times up to President Benito Juárez's reforms in the mid 19th century, uniting hitherto contrasted characters and periods, and incorporating them into a single unifying national narrative (Florescano, 2012, p. 31).

The study, interpretation and recovery of the past during the *Porfiriato* was also greatly triggered by the preparations for, and commemorations of, the 100th anniversary of the War of Independence, in September 1910. Paradoxically, the commemorations took place shortly before the Revolution started, in November of that same year. The wide-encompassing programme involved different activities that had a strong public impact, such as the unveiling of the Monument to Independence and a series of sculptures of historical characters (from pre-Hispanic times and up to the 19th century – turned into “national heroes”) along Mexico’s main street, *Reforma* avenue; the opening of new rooms in, and bringing of symbolic pieces to, the National Museum; a procession and parade with allegorical floats, costumes and an array of visual elements; a re-enactment of “the Cry of Dolores” at the National Palace²⁹; and the printing of mementos and stamp collections that celebrated the country’s historical events, which circulated widely among the public (Beezley, 2008; Florescano, 2012; Garciadiego, 2012; Zárate Toscano, 2012).

The Revolution officially started on the 20th of November 1910, and it quickly became a violent civil war with many opposing factions, bringing about the destruction of everyday life. There were different demands, according to the different groups, some of a political vein (political reform in order to ban re-election), others of an agrarian character (the redistribution of land among peasant communities), the most famous of which was Emiliano Zapata, and others more class-based (the emancipation of workers and peasants). The Revolution brought with it chaos, hunger, instability, violence, disease and death: over a million people – one-tenth of the population – died (Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 4). Although there is no agreement as to when the Revolution actually ended³⁰, it is often considered that the proclamation of the 1917 Constitution was one of its most significant achievements, as this legal document embodied a fair proportion of

²⁹ The independence of Mexico is celebrated the midnight of September 15th. This day, but in 1810, father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla – who was part of a group of conspirators seeking the independence of New Spain – called for the popular uprising that gave place to the independence war. He called to arms by ringing the bell of the church of the town of Dolores, in the state of Guanajuato, where he was priest. This was done late the 15th as the conspiracy for independence had been discovered and the group of conspirators had decided to accelerate (bring forward) the upheaval. This event consolidated towards the mid 19th century as the “foundational” event of independent Mexico. The simulation of the “Cry of Dolores” every 15th of September to celebrate independence became national tradition and is still carried out every year.

³⁰ For example, some say that in 1917 with the proclamation of the 1917 Constitution, others with the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s (José Valenzuela, 2012). Actually, this constitutes one of the most debated topics, still to date, because of the symbolic, political and social implications that seem to go with the different views.

the popular demands of the Revolution, such as the redistribution of land to communities (land reform), workers' rights, public education, and national control over resources (Córdova in Florescano, 1991, pp. 128, 129; Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 8). As we will see in chapters four and six, the 1917 Constitution is still a significant element of history museums and visitors' interpretation of the past.

The Revolution also brought about the collapse of the positivist thinking framework and interpretations of history, and thus initiated a period of historical revisionism. New ways of thinking about the origins of the country and about what had happened started to appear. In this period, as Zermeño notes, historical revisionism was quite interested in the issue of origins (2002, p. 62). This revisionism is generally followed by the creation of institutions, in order to physically, practically and operatively shape, disseminate and, ultimately, control the resulting interpretation (Zermeño cited in Azuela de la Cueva, 2012, p. 293).

It is in this period as well that the professionalisation of the historical discipline was consolidated as a 'new language about the past and its rules of production'; a process which had started since the second half of the 19th century (Zermeño, 2002, p. 147).³¹ From 1910 onwards, there is steady progress in the institutionalisation of history, partly due to the new relationship that was established between intellectuals and a State looking to administer its cultural and geographical domains. Thus, several institutions related to the historical discipline were created in those years, for example, the Mexican Academy of History (1919) and the National Academy of History and Geography (1926) (Zermeño, 2002, p. 166). It is important to note that until the late 1910s, the National Museum had been an important point for the professionalisation of history through tenures (chairs) in archaeology, ethnology, physical anthropology, prehistory and general history of Mexico, as well as conferences about the 'historical science' (Zermeño, 2002, pp. 166, 169); and also through the publication of its journal, *Anales* [*Annals*].

Besides this historiographical development and the professionalisation and early institutionalisation of history, the Revolution triggered intellectual activity in other topics and realms; one of the most important was the debate around national identity (Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 8). Because the Revolution had been a social movement

³¹ In Mexico, as in other parts of the world, the process of professionalisation of history is related to the method developed by Leopold von Ranke and by the publication of several works about the "method" of history, for example, Langlois and Seignobos' manual of 1898.

largely carried out by the most marginal and unprivileged social groups, especially from rural areas, there was a rethinking of the role of “the people” or the “masses” [*el pueblo*] as historical actors. *El pueblo* is an unclear and complex notion that can refer to different things, such as *mestizos*, indigenous people, peasants (*campesinos*), workers, the “poor” or any combination thereof (Pérez Montfort, 2012, p. 191).

In the post-revolution, the role of *el pueblo* became a new and strong element of national identity; it became the source of a new cultural nationalism based on the popular realm: celebrations, music and dance, handcrafts, clothing, food, rituals and oral traditions were assimilated as essential to an idea of “Mexican culture” or *lo mexicano* [“Mexicanness”, or that which is Mexican] (Pérez Montfort, 2012, p. 192). In particular, *Adelitas* – the women who participated in the Revolution in different ways, whether in combat, as nurses, partners, cooks, spies, mothers, or performing several of these roles simultaneously – consolidated as a very significant element of popular culture and of nationalism (Arrizón, 1998, p. 90).³² In chapters four, five and six, we will see the ways in which these ideas of *el pueblo* and *Adelitas* have impacted on visitors’ understandings of the past.

Beyond this political use, however, popular culture became an inspiration and a creative source in art and literature (Pérez Montfort, 2012, p. 194). One of the best known was the Mexican muralism movement. The *muralismo* [muralism] programme was conceived by José Vasconcelos, then Minister of Education, who saw it as part of his broader programme of nation building through education, art and popular culture (Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 14). Vasconcelos considered that art and popular culture would help “civilize” the Mexican people by encouraging a sort of “spiritual” revolution; for example, *muralismo* depicted historical topics and characters that were considered to be moral examples for the people (Azuela de la Cueva, 2012, p. 282). As will be seen in chapters four and five, *muralismo* became, and is to date, an important element in museums’ and visitors’ interpretation of the past.

From the 1920s to the 1940s there were several media that linked ideas of national identity with the articulation of a national history, including schools, civic

³² *Adelitas* is a plural and diminutive word for the female name Adela. “La Adelita” was one of the most popular songs of the Revolution. It is the story of a young woman who took part in the Revolution. The name has since been used to refer generally to women who participated in the Revolution. *Adelitas* often participated in the armed conflict, amongst other things, and so were often dressed up as gunners. They are highly iconic in Mexico not only in photographs but also in films, where they became the archetype of warrior women and women in general who fight for their rights.

festivities, monuments, street names, architecture, art and radio, among many others (Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 9). Just as cultural products had been strongly inspired by popular culture to articulate an idea of “Mexicanness”, so too, had the different projects of shaping up a national history sourced from the popular realm, as well as from previous traditions of explaining history. For example, they were inspired by narratives of 19th century liberalism contained in the aforementioned *México a través de los siglos* [Mexico Throughout the Centuries] (Pérez Montfort, 2012, pp. 196, 197). These narratives circulated publicly not only in history books but also in other media, such as children’s games and almanacs, films and images, even festivals. It was a history with a strong didactical style and purpose, and aimed at raising feelings of belonging and patriotism among people (Pérez Montfort, 2012). Projects for building a national history were also inspired by exemplary narratives, marked by their strong moral, *quasi*-religious language, and exaltation of heroes and virtues; history books for children were a clear example (Pérez Montfort, 2012, pp. 196, 197).

However, whilst towards the 1940s there was an ‘incipient hegemony’ of an ‘official version’ of national history, there were oppositions to, and variations on, these ‘official messages’ (Vaughan & Lewis, 2006, p. 9), due to the diversity of channels of dissemination, of actors involved in its creation and to the country’s geographical diversity. It is precisely this relative volatility of the intended “official history” which explains the State’s aim to strengthen both the contents of a dominant historical narrative and the media for its dissemination after the 1940s. This strengthening of an “official history” was necessary for the legitimation of the State itself. To do so, it was fundamental to talk about the Revolution, as the government positioned itself as its “heir”. Since about 1926, there had been attempts to gather a collection and build an exhibition of the Revolution (Fernández, 1988, p. 182; Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995, p. 30). However, this project remained unfinished, for lack of space, although it is reasonable to assume that political sensibilities might also have been a key issue at stake. The project that did succeed was the creation of a Monument to the Revolution. The State was in a condition to monumentalise the Revolution as a memory which was still very present, but it was not capable of incorporating it as history; that is, as an explanation, for which distance is required. This might partly explain why the Revolution was profusely represented in the mural paintings of the 1920s, but not in historical exhibitions, as if only art could convey the intended meaning of the Revolution (Fernández, 1988, pp. 183, 184).

The creation of the National Museum of History (MNH) can be placed in this context of reinforcement of the articulation and dissemination of official narratives. In 1939, a year before leaving office and as part of the preparations for the 30th anniversary of the Revolution, President Lázaro Cárdenas signed a decree for the creation of both the MNH and a centralized organism that could look after this museum and all other elements of Mexican history, whether material or immaterial: the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* [National Institute of Anthropology and History] (INAH). It must be mentioned, though, that even with a national museum, “official history” as a more or less defined narrative was not articulated until the 1960s. For example, different authors have shown that the sections on the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution at the MNH were still under construction in the 40s, and that they remained shut up to the early 1970s (de Mello Vasconcellos, 2007; Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995, p. 34).

Besides the MNH, dominant narratives of history were disseminated in different media and channels, many of which were created purposely for the cause; this is the case, for example, of the textbooks for public elementary school, which were ‘unique, free and compulsory’ (Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012, p. 12). Textbooks began to be published in 1959, as a government programme to increase the population’s level of literacy, but they can also be understood as an attempt to control and establish a State-version of history – a history that was perceived to have a “civilizing” and moral role (Vázquez, 1979) – not only through text but also, very importantly, through the establishment of particular iconographies (Galván Lafarga, 2011, pp. 404–405). The Minister of Education at the time, Jaime Torres Bodet, had been the main sponsor of this programme, partly inspired by ideas advocated by his mentor, José Vasconcelos. Textbooks have played an important role in Mexico’s historical culture ever since, as we will see in chapters five and six.

It is revealing that, in parallel to this reinforcement and consolidation of dominant narratives in educational programmes, museums, and the public sphere in general, there was also an intensive growth in the academic institutionalisation of the historical discipline. New institutions for higher education and research were created between 1940 and 1970. Intellectuals and historians such as Daniel Cosío Villegas, Silvio Zavala and Edmundo O’Gorman helped create these institutions, for example,

the *Colegio de México*³³ [*The College of Mexico*] (1940), the *Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia* [*National School of Anthropology and History*] (1942), the *Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas* at UNAM [*Institute of Historical Research at the National University*] (1945) (Zermeño, 2002, p. 148), and the *Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos sobre la Revolución Mexicana* [*National Institute of Historical Studies on the Mexican Revolution*] (1953).

As for the fate of the old National Museum, it had ceased to be the epicentre of teaching and research, because from 1912 onwards, classes and academic research had been moved to other institutions (Zermeño, 2002). So, although it was originally part of the initial institutionalisation of history, its nature and role seem to have changed radically in this period. For example, Silvio Zavala, one of the most important historians of the time and director of the National Museum of History (1946-1954), considered that the ‘critique developed by the “*antiquarian history*” [*sic*] was no longer enough [my emphasis] to respond to the crisis triggered during the revolutionary period’ (Zavala paraphrased in Zermeño, 2002, p. 225). This showed a steady but continual process: other forms of history-making (for example, that of the antiquarians in the museum) lost academic relevance and were separated from what was considered “proper” historical research.

In this context of the professionalisation of the historical discipline, certain voices of dissent started questioning and analysing the Revolution, as part of an attempt to articulate an explanation of 20th century Mexican history. This questioning had partly started as a result of the political direction the Revolution seemed to have taken after President Cárdenas’ period in office (1934-1940). Cárdenas had established a wide programme of social and agrarian reforms, for example oil nationalisation and redistribution of land to indigenous communities, based on the ideals of the 1917 Constitution. But his successors embarked on a course that did not continue with this pattern. Some intellectuals started addressing the topic through a historical analysis of how things “had gone wrong” with the Revolution.

During the 1940s, historians did not only debate about the meaning and course of the Revolution, but also about the relationship between the historical discipline and the State. Their historiographical discussions were also the result of the context: an active State implementing different actions in order to build a national history and

³³ Previously the House of Spain in Mexico, which was the meeting point of all Spanish Civil War exiled intellectuals, for example, the philosopher José Gaos. The exiles contributed significantly to the academic life of the period, and especially to the *Colegio de México*.

consolidate itself through it, as seen at the beginning of this section. Consequently, a series of discussions were organized in congresses and seminars about the teaching and “transmission” of history through different channels, such as schools, universities, museums and even films; two of the most important were the *First Congress* in May 1944 and a *First Follow-up Seminar* in March 1945 (Moctezuma, 2005, pp. 71–73).

But the discussions were not only about teaching and transmission; rather, these discussions pointed at deeper and more complex questions about the meaning and function of the historical discipline in society. Villoro, a historian of the time, claimed that the discipline’s problem was not its lack of methods but a lack of clarity in its purpose and function; there was an apparent ambiguity between the exhaustive research about the past by the past itself and the desire to make it a ‘practical teaching’ (*magistra vitae*) for life (Zermeño, 2002, p. 209).

Such were the confrontations between historians of opposing views that mentions of a “crisis” in the historical discipline became pervasive. This crisis was, *grosso modo*, the clash between a historiographical school aligned with the idea of objectivity and impartiality (the “empiricist” or “positivist” tradition, represented by Silvio Zavala), and a more recent one (represented by O’Gorman and Villoro, among others) which was critical of the idea of objectivity and advocated for the subjective character of historiography, and recognised the political and contextual conditions in which historiography was written (Moctezuma, 2005). O’Gorman, in particular, criticized the ‘instrumental character’ that had been given to history (Zermeño, 2002, p. 208).

The 1960s was the decade of consolidation for official interpretations of history, not only in terms of the definition of a more or less fixed content, but also of the media through which it was conveyed, for example, textbooks and museums. However, not even in this context was the State or “official history” exempt of criticism and debate. In fact, various political and social movements had manifested their discontent with the regime, for example, the workers’ and teachers’ strikes of 1958-1959, the doctors’ and nurses’ strike of 1964-65, or the student movements of 1968 and 1971. This discontent opposed what was a rather peculiar regime: unlike other Latin-American cases, Mexico was neither a *de facto* military dictatorship nor a democracy as such, but an ‘authoritarian democracy’ (L. Meyer, 2013). The PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] had been “democratically” re-elected since 1946, without any political change whatsoever.

The rise in discontent was such that the following decades were marked by political opposition, social mobilisation and a historical revisionism that questioned the role and place of intellectuals in civic life. For example, the 1981 Conference of Mexican and United States Historians addressed the issue of intellectuals and the State in Mexico (Camp, Hale, & Vázquez, 1991). The book *History, what for?* (*Historia, ¿para qué?*, 1980), which addressed both the cognitive and the political dimensions of the historical discipline, also dates from this period. Historians such as Florescano and González y González criticised the discipline's inability to explain and transform society, its rather distant relationship with the broader public, as well as its denial of the political stance from which it was written (Zermeño, 2002, p. 211).

Political pressure opened up some spaces for renovation, both in cultural and political terms. In the museological realm, institutional dynamism can be seen following the impulse of the anthropological critique from the 1970s and the development of new museum trends (Morales Moreno, 2007). There was also a rehabilitation and reorganization of the INAH's network of state museums towards the end of the 1970s and during part of the 1980s (Del Río, 2010, pp. 71, 72). In this context, the GHMC was definitely incorporated into the INAH, instead of being managed by the CAPFCE.³⁴ Finally, a considerable number of museums opened or were renovated in the 1980s, such as the National Museum of Art (1981), the National Museum of Interventions (1981), the National Museum of Popular Cultures (MNCP) (1982), along with the renovation of the MNH (1982) and the *Templo Mayor* Museum (MTM) (1987). There was a reaffirmation of certain dominant narratives in these museums, but also innovation in some approaches; for example, a historical materialist interpretation in the MTM (Rosas, 1992, p. 13), and a critical, contemporary approach to culture in the MNCP (Morales Moreno, 2007, p. 57).

As for the political realm, reforms took place, allowing the appearance of opposition parties (Hernández Chávez, 2006, p. 309). In the 1988 presidential elections, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of General Lázaro Cárdenas, participated as an opposition candidate.³⁵ He advocated for a programme of reforms and for the

³⁴ CAPFCE goes for *Comité Administrador del Programa de Construcción de Escuelas* [Managing Committee of the Federal Programme for building schools]. Further analysis needs to be carried out about the implications of this radical institutional change; however, practically no material about the process is available except for a few vague references made by the interviewed staff.

³⁵ He had been part of PRI until 1987 when, along with other dissident members, split and formed a coalition that gathered members of left-wing parties and organisations. After the elections, part of this

“rehabilitation” of political life; of return to the roots of the “true” socialist Revolution, using his family “pedigree” as political legitimation for his project. It is widely known that Cárdenas won the elections but that an electoral fraud had been orchestrated, as a result of which the PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was installed in power. Salinas consolidated on-going changes in economic and social policy, which consisted of replacing a very protectionist and nationalistic policy – characterised by public institutions and State intervention – for a neo-liberal policy with foreign trade and investment, as well as privatisation of public institutions. These changes caused a series of clashes in the way national history was thought about and interpreted, as we will see in the next section with a specific case (the 1992 textbook controversy).

The 1990s, especially 1993 and 1994, were highly polemical years which probably marked the beginning of the end of the PRI-led government as it had been for most of the 20th century. This was a period of sheer instability, not only in economic terms³⁶ but also in political ones. There was an armed uprising of indigenous communities in the southern state of Chiapas, the EZLN³⁷ movement, that in both name and nature revived the discussion about the unsolved question of indigenous and peasant populations in Mexico.

In 2000, for the first time since 1946, the PRI lost the presidential election and experienced several defeats in local elections and for seats in Congress. It had already lost its majority in Congress in 1997, along with the government of Mexico City, won by the PRD, then a left-wing opposition party. The defeat of the PRI in the 2000 elections was popularly interpreted as a “triumph for democracy” and as the “coming of age” of Mexican society, which had manifested its need for “change” and renewal (Del Río, 2010, p. 129). The idea of “change” became fundamental in the discourses of the time. The party that won was the right-wing opposition, the PAN (*Partido de Acción Nacional*) [*Party of National Action*], which was also re-elected in 2006, marred this time by intense objections from the PRD and large swathes of the population regarding the legality of the process; the difference between the PAN and PRD candidates was less than 1%.

coalition became the left-wing opposition party *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* [Democratic Revolution Party] (PRD).

³⁶ The economic crisis of December 1993 was probably the worst in Mexican history and the *peso* underwent a dramatic depreciation. Before the crisis, one USA dollar was worth three Mexican *pesos*; after the crisis, each dollar was worth 12 *pesos*.

³⁷ *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* [Zapatist Army of National Liberation]. The name takes on board the agrarian and peasant struggle of the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata.

In this new political context, it is easy to understand the increase in debate regarding the interpretation of national history. There seems to be a need to create a new dominant historical narrative, although the intellectual and political landscape today is much more complex. The last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have seen an increase in non-academic literature, or popular literature, calling for a “demystification” and “unmasking” of “official history”, and to ‘stop deceiving people’ (Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012, p. 13). The best example is writer Martín Moreno, who has penned more than 15 books about Mexican history since 1986, some of them historical novels, some more documental works, and is indeed a best-selling phenomenon.³⁸ Some of his titles already point to a more tantalising, controversial, irreverent approach to “official history”, and promise a “real” vision of history: *The Great Betrayals of Mexico* [*Las grandes traiciones de México*], *Secret Mexico* [*México secreto*], *100 Myths of Mexican History* [*100 Mitos de la historia de México*] and the best-seller *Arrebatos Carnales*³⁹ (1, 2 and 3). Another such book is the one by José Antonio Crespo, *Contra la historia oficial* [*Against Official History*] (2009). As we will see in section 6.2, this literature and the call for “alternative histories” in general were present amongst several of the visitors interviewed.

This literature has been greatly influenced by a whole new approach to history, brought by historian and entrepreneur Enrique Krauze, who was one of the first intellectual ‘self-supporting entrepreneurs’ (Camp, 1991, p. 554). He currently co-owns, with media corporation *Televisa*, a successful company called *Clio*, which is focused on disseminating history.⁴⁰ His books have become best-sellers and the basis for a vision whereby history is conceived as a permanent struggle for power and democracy. Nevertheless, Krauze has also been criticised for his proximity to power, especially with ex-president Salinas de Gortari, from which *Clio* has benefited. This can help explain

³⁸ He claims to have sold more than 2 000 000 books, so it seems that there is indeed a market for his work (Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012, p. 13). His books can be bought in many places, most of which are public and commercial; for example, convenience shops similar to WHS in the UK. It must be mentioned that Martín Moreno is not a historian and has been highly questioned among academic sectors for his lack of rigour and his misinterpretations of history. Surprisingly, many people (non-academic) think that *he does* present the “real” history.

³⁹ This title is particularly difficult to translate. *Arrebato* is an outburst or an intense attack/desire, whilst *carnal* is an adjective for human flesh [*carne*]. So *Arrebato Carnal* could either be something like an outburst of passion, or simply carnal desire.

⁴⁰ *Clio* edits books and many audio-visual materials that have wide circulation. They are sold in kiosks and have a significant penetration in the market, just as Martín Moreno’s books. As for Krauze’s works in English, there is a compilation of several of his books into one comprehensive volume called *Mexico: Biography of Power*, which was published in 1997.

why Krauze's interpretations of history do not challenge the core narratives of the PRI's 'authoritative narration' of Mexican history, despite presenting himself as a "critical" historian (Lomnitz-Adler, 2001a, p. 218).

As part of this shifting intellectual landscape, the National Museum of History also underwent a massive process of renewal that lasted almost three years (from 2000 to 2003), during which the museum remained closed. The new museum not only changed its exhibition approach but, above all, modified its discourse. New actors and topics were addressed, along with different types of objects and narratives (de Mello Vasconcellos, 2007).

There is another phenomenon that allows us to analyse the processes of negotiation between, and change of, different competing historical narratives: the 2010 commemorations of the bicentenary of the Independence and the centenary of the Revolution. For the commemorations at the federal level, the PAN-led government implemented a wide-encompassing programme of activities, just as Porfirio Díaz had done for the centenary of the Independence in 1910. The official reports of the events (Gobierno Federal, 2010a, 2010b) present a long list of different types of activities, including not only the most popular or festive ones (parades, multi-media shows, the distribution of a flag to every home in the country, the creation of a giant sculpture in the city centre, etc.) but also academic ones (publishing specialised books, organising conferences, broadcasting analytical programmes). There were other events that were more "hybrid", in that they seemed to attempt to bring the academic and the popular together. One such was the exhibition *México 200 años. La patria en construcción* [*Mexico 200 years. The "patria" in construction*], which included both a curatorial revision of national history and more "spectacle-like" elements, such as displaying the physical remains of national "heroes" (in open caskets), or exhibiting some of the country's foundational documents that had never been publically exhibited before.⁴¹ Other "hybrid" products were a series of TV programmes and radio broadcasts where academics were interviewed in an informal manner; and the distribution of 27 million free copies (one for "every family" or "every Mexican home") of a history of México, written in an attractive and accessible prose by a professional historian, González y González

⁴¹ The exhibition featured, for the first time in history, highly important documents like the original 1917 Constitution and *Sentimientos de la nación* [Feelings of the nation], which were also exhibited in a spectacle-like way, with complex and super-protected glass cases. This strongly emphasized the feeling of being in front of a precious relic.

(Gobierno Federal, 2010a, p. 485). As usual, statistics were presented as evidence of the richness, diversity and success of the programme. However, it is not possible to evaluate the impact of any of these programmes at this stage; it seems too soon.⁴²

Several academics criticised the programme during the commemorations and have continued to do so afterwards; some have spoken of a series of ‘senseless acts’ and the lack of a ‘solid version of Mexican history’ (Zárate Toscano, 2012, p. 77); of a celebration that was rather ‘frivolous, spectacular, ephemeral’, that emphasised folklore but that had ‘lacked a clear historical script’ (Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012, p. 16). Other academics tried to provide an explanation of why this had been so, and reached the conclusion that it was due to the “plurality” of the Mexican political context; now – unlike the commemorations of the Centenary of the Independence carried out by Díaz, or of the 50th or other anniversaries of the Revolution by PRI governments in the 20th century – there was no imposition of an ideological, stately version (Garcíadiego, 2012, pp. 353–354).

Whether the PAN imprinted or not a particular type of “official history” is not yet clear, at the time of completing this research (2015), although some changes from previous official histories do seem to have occurred. Neither is it clear what the return of the PRI in 2012 – once again after legally dubious elections – implies; whether it is about returning to the “official” practices of representation of history that characterized PRI governments from the 1930s and 1940s to about the late 1980s, or whether some of the cracks that opened from the late 80s onwards are deeper than we all think and cannot be undone, even by the PRI. It is not yet clear whether the social and political changes of the last decades have been strong enough to force the government to adapt, develop and implement a “new official history”, in spite of whatever desire they may have to control things “the old way”. Ultimately, if history is to be utilized by the State and serve civilizing functions, it needs to work, it needs to be meaningful or resonate with people, and thus it will need to adapt to the new times, just as Smith suggested (2010, p. 89). The visitor research was particularly illuminating on this matter, as will be seen in chapter six.

⁴² In the interviews, visitors only tangentially mentioned the celebrations and in a few of those cases it was to complain against the public expenditure of the programme; in other cases, it was as a vague reference to González y González’s book, but not as a source that they had read and used but as a “thing” that they had received and that they kept at home (more like an object or memorabilia of the moment than a source of knowledge or information about the past).

If there is uncertainty about what a “new” dominant historical narrative will look like, there is also uncertainty about, and within, the historical discipline itself. Zermeño considers that the discipline is still – ever since the debates of the mid-20th century – in crisis, because it has not managed to solve fundamental issues about its sense, place and orientation. More specifically, historiography has not managed to understand the sense of temporality and the type of discourse about the past it creates, nor the function it fulfils in modern societies, especially facing the ‘challenges and possibilities originated in the development and expansion of mass communication media’ (Zermeño, 2002, p. 216). More broadly, the issue is about the social relevance of history, about having an audience for it and, ultimately, about the relationship between this particular type of knowledge about the past and ‘the production of possible futures’ (Zermeño, 2002, pp. 225, 228).

In less than two years, on the 5th of February 2017, Mexico will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Constitution. There is expectation and uncertainty surrounding what will occur. A few months before the commemorations of 2010, there were widespread rumours about the possible outbreak of a new revolution, but no armed revolution or upheaval took place. As living conditions in Mexico have continued to worsen since 2010, there is room to think whether the commemoration of the centenary of the 1917 Constitution, which appears to be so meaningful to Mexican historical culture, will inspire the next revolution, or whether the times of armed uprisings in Mexico are over, and we will have to wait for slower, more nuanced and less spectacular processes of social change.

3.3 RETHINKING OFFICIAL HISTORY, THE STATE AND HISTORY-MAKING IN MEXICO

Based on the above-presented ethno-symbolic views of nationalism, as well as on the short review of some key aspects of history-making in Mexico, we can now approach from a different angle our understanding of its historical culture and, more specifically, of the relationship between history and the State.

There is vast evidence that the Mexican State has indeed, throughout time, produced narratives of a national history; many have become pervasive and dominant as they are distributed through certain media – such as textbooks and museums – and filter into popular domains. To this extent, it is impossible to deny the “official” in history. However, as I will argue, there is a need to reconsider how we approach it. Some authors, such as Crespo (2009) and Aguirre Rojas (2003), refer to “official history”

as a fixed narrative that has been created by an omnipotent State, and which is Manichean, prescriptive and patriotic. However, as Rodríguez Kuri and Pani claim, the truth is that there are no rigorous delimitations of what this “official history” encompasses:

[...] professional or academic history – which consolidated in the mid 20th century – likes to distinguish itself, despite being carried out in public contexts and with public financing, from official history. The later is turned into a scarecrow, which we easily reject but that is rarely analysed. And sometimes we cheat. Due to the fact that there is no (and probably will never be) a rigorous definition of what we call official history, we professional historians always emerge triumphant from our battles against that windmill.⁴³ In the academy and in the written and digital media we have built an *ad hoc* enemy[...] Without doubts, we exaggerate. As a matter of fact, official history does not argue, it is us (their enemies) who attribute to it arguments that we then contest.

(Pani & Rodríguez Kuri, 2012, pp. 13, 14)

In my view, the reason why the notion of a single “official history” is problematic or ungraspable – just as the imaginary giants that Don Quixote saw in the windmills – is because it oversimplifies how history-making and the past operate in daily life. Conceiving “official history” as a monolithic and seamless thing hinders our noticing the ways in which official narratives compete, change, are forgotten and recovered. My view is that “official history” is not a monolithic thing “invented” by an omnipotent State but, rather, competing dominant narratives (official *histories*) produced by different pressure groups, grounded in tradition, which are subject to interpretation and application, and which coexist with many other narratives and popular understandings of the past and processes of history-making.

In this section I will show, by highlighting the various interpretations of the *Porfiriato* and Revolution, that official histories are constantly contested in Mexico, hence there is no real uniformity, despite appearances. This could be due to the fact that the State does not have a uniform position with regards to history, as there are different competing groups within it. Furthermore, contextual circumstances force the State to make transformations in its narratives, in order to bridge the gaps between the history presented in textbooks and reality. Finally, the popular realm – through different organisations and entities, such as teachers’ unions, parents’ associations, media and even the Church – constantly exert political pressure that at times dominates the State

⁴³ The authors are here doing a subtle reference to the “imaginary battles” of Don Quixote of La Mancha (who conflated windmills with ferocious giants), in the work of Miguel de Cervantes.

itself. All this can be exemplified with how ideas of, and attitudes towards, the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution have changed.

Amongst those who complain about “official history”, there is often the argument that the *Porfiriato* has been unfairly demonised, without taking into account that it also brought the country “good” things. Furthermore, it is bluntly assumed that the demonisation of the *Porfiriato* has always been there, from the onset of the Revolution in 1910 up to the present. The reality is very different once we look in more detail at what has happened to interpretations of the *Porfiriato*. In the first place, the demonisation of the *Porfiriato* was not straightforward but, rather, something that was constructed over several decades, after the late 1930s and 1940s (Pérez Montfort, 2012, p. 196). In the second place, by the late 1970s there was already a shift in the official interpretations of this period, which would become more visible and explicit towards the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. From the 1990s onwards, there has been fertile ground for what Knight calls a ‘romantic revisionism’ and ‘broader rehabilitation of Díaz and the Porfiriato’ (2006, p. 347), which might have started more or less a decade before, with the ‘delegitimation of the PRI and the myth of the Revolution’ and the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s (2006, p. 349).⁴⁴

History textbooks embody this change in the interpretations of the *Porfiriato*. Until the creation of the first official and free textbooks, in the early 1960s, there were many different – even conflicting – versions of national history, as the books for children were written by independent writers with diverse affiliations (Loyo & Torres Septién, 1991; Pérez Montfort, 2012). When the Commission for free Textbooks (CONALITEG) was created and it published its first textbooks, there began indeed a process of centralisation and uniformity of historical contents by the State. However, the landscape became more complex as of the 1970s, partly due to the political instability and to increased opposition to the government. The State sought to regain legitimacy

⁴⁴ This trend of “rehabilitation” of *Porfiriato* seems to be stronger than ever. In the context of the 100th anniversary of his death, several happenings have taken place. For example, British scholar Paul Garner has recently published in July 2015 a book called *Porfirio Díaz, entre el mito y el héroe* [*Porfirio Díaz, between the myth and the hero*] where he attempts to shed new light on this character that he considers has been “misjudged by history”. In the political realm, there is a public bid by some local politicians of the southern state of Oaxaca, cradle of Díaz, to return to Mexico from Paris his mortal remains (he died in exile). This event arouse some debate on the press in late July 2015. Also, *Nexos*, a magazine of social and political critique of wide circulation where intellectuals tend to write contributions, published in July a special issue devoted to Porfirio Díaz. Finally, as the last edits of this thesis were being made, the first public monument to Díaz to be installed in Mexico since 1910 was unveiled in the southern state of Veracruz – not without protest, though.

via an apparently democratic opening and a reform of education which included, amongst other things, the involvement of professional historians in the 1970s and 1990s textbooks (Villa Lever, 2012, pp. 267, 269).⁴⁵ This not only meant that historians were closely involved in the creation and dissemination of official narratives, but also that official narratives about the *Porfiriato* underwent changes.

The change in the State's own conflicting and shifting ideas about the *Porfiriato* was clearly manifested in the 1992 textbooks controversy, when new history textbooks produced under President Salinas' administration (1988-1994) featured a different interpretation from that of its predecessors.⁴⁶ Significantly, professional historians had been involved in the creation of these textbooks and the general idea had been to 'erase heroes from black and white lists [as] they would be presented as men of flesh and bone, with flaws and qualities, analysed in its full complexity' (Villa Lever, 2012, p. 274). For example, in the 1992 textbooks, popular historical figures such as the *Pipila* and the *Niños Héroes* were not included (Vázquez Mantecón, 2012, p. 374).⁴⁷ There were also three prominent differences, as Denis Gilbert has pointed out: 'the aversion to anything suggestive of stratification, exploitation, or class conflict'; 'the limitless enthusiasm for foreign investment and integration with the U.S. economy'; and a 'concern with modernization', which is closely associated with foreign capital, technology and markets (1997, p. 294). These changes seem to have been conducive to a sort of crisis in the dominant narratives of history that were told until then:

[...] the Salinas-Zedillo texts and the two preceding generations of official texts demonstrate significant interpretative differences, suggestive of a shift in ideological perspective on the part of the Mexican regime. True, ideological consistency has never been the hallmark of PRI. And, if there has been a coherent shift, it began before Salinas became president. But it does appear that the gap between official history and fundamental national policies had, by 1992, become so wide that Salinas, Zedillo, and the intellectuals associated with them

⁴⁵ The 1960s' books had been written by *normalistas* – teachers formed in state centres of higher education (*Normales*) specialised in the training of the teachers. *Normalistas* have generally been more closely affiliated to prescriptive and official narratives of history.

⁴⁶ Salinas assigned this project to his Minister of Education, Ernesto Zedillo. He succeeded Salinas in the presidency in the 1994 elections and was the last president from PRI in the 20th century.

⁴⁷ The *Pipila* – about whom I will write in section 4.3 – is a nickname with no translation. He was a poor miner that helped defeating the Spanish during the independence war by tying to his back a big block of stone in order to avoid bullets and thus set fire to the door of the last stronghold of Spanish resistance. Most historians have denied his existence. As for the *Niños Héroes* [The Hero Children or Boy Heroes], they were young cadets who died fighting against the USA troops during the invasion of 1847 at the Chapultepec Castle. One of them is particularly known, the story goes, for wrapping himself in the national flag and jumping from the Castle in order to prevent it from falling in the enemy's hands. Unlike the *Pipila*, historians have not denied their existence but there are discrepancies about how they actually died.

felt pressured to close the breach [...] [Previous presidents'] celebration of Zapata's revolt and [Lázaro] Cárdenas' presidency were mostly lip service from a regime little concerned with their ideals. But the interpretative shift evident in the new texts [those of 1992] is sufficient to suggest the influence of a powerful new orthodoxy. Even lip service to the old ideals had become intolerable.

(Gilbert, 1997, pp. 294, 295)

These textbooks provoked intense criticism, not only from intellectual and opposition groups in general, but also within sectors of the State and the PRI itself, such as teachers' unions, parliamentarians, former presidents, and even military officers. On the contrary, it received support from groups that had normally criticised the State-version of history, such as businessmen, the Church and right-leaning groups such as the PAN (Gilbert, 1997, pp. 295–296). Some of the criticisms were concerned with an over recognition of the Díaz regime and his open-market economic policy, which was helping to legitimise President Salinas' neo-liberal policies; or that the figure of Emiliano Zapata had been minimised and other popular historical figures had been excluded (Vázquez, 1997, p. 940).

As a result of the severe public opposition they faced, the 1992 textbooks could not be distributed and new books had to be produced within the next two years (Vázquez, 1997, pp. 940, 941; Villa Lever, 2012, p. 274). This showed the power that other entities and popular forces could exert over the State, and even over professional historians, when it came to attempting to modify a version of national history that had popular appeal. It also showed that historians, in attempting to produce more "objective" or balanced interpretations, could also be supporting particular political views linked to the State and, furthermore, that the State itself used the moral authority of historians as a source of legitimation. Finally, it showed that deep and engrained narratives do not change quickly, despite State policies; instead, there is a sedimentation or layering of different versions of history all coexisting simultaneously, at times more peacefully than others.

The processes of discussions about the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution that I have analysed so far regarding textbooks can also be seen in the context of the history museum. We will look at this in more detail in the next chapter. For the time being, though, it is worth mentioning that throughout the 1920s and up until 1960, all attempts at producing an official museal narrative of the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution had been unsuccessful. Lack of collections, space and resources are mentioned by several authors as the reasons (Fernández, 1988; Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995; Vázquez del

Mercado, 2011). The 1930s plan to create a museum under the then recently opened Monument to the Revolution had not come to fruition, despite the fact that its architect had created the space for it, which proves that space was not the issue. As for the National Museum of History, although it had some collections, it was not able to articulate in its permanent exhibition the rooms dedicated to the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution until the 1970s (de Mello Vasconcellos, 2007). The GHMC, one of the case studies of this research, was actually the first integrated narrative of the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution, and this did not happen until 1960. As of the 1970s and up until today, new layers of interpretations have been added to the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution, in such a way that there are different coexisting versions of these periods.

All this suggests that throughout the 20th century, the State has faced difficulties in articulating a sanctioned, detailed and fixed interpretation (“an official history”) of what these events have meant. Rather, through time, the State produced a series of different narratives, where contradictions and ambiguity are present. Indeed, history as it is taught in schools, and very often as it is seen in museums – or, more importantly, as it is perceived by many visitors in spite of what the museum presents – contains these contradictions and ambiguities.

But the greatest problem of monolithic visions of “official history” is that they do not give people themselves, or other agents beyond the State, any role in the creation of their ideas of history. The power of popular history is dismissed by the idea of an imposed and omnipresent narrative which is directly, totally and efficiently manipulated by the State and “implanted” in citizens’ brains. In my opinion, this is a very mechanistic view that does not account for the contradictory, chaotic, fluid and unstable dynamics of popular history, of the way historical culture operates, and how people make sense of the past. Chapters four, five and six will address in detail the diverse and often contradictory ways in which both museums and their visitors create historical interpretations.

A more detailed analysis of official narratives and their processes of elaboration shows that they are closely connected with popular forms of history-making. It also shows that professional historians are often involved in creating these official narratives, thus not all historians are opposed to the intervention of the State in historical affairs. Finally, it also shows that people create their interpretations in ways that often contradict, challenge or change the intended interpretation, as their historical consciousness is indeed shaped by the State, but more so by everyday life – the realm of

the popular – where they encounter, and participate in, other processes of history-making. Similarly, the State is not the sole “manager” of national identity. National identity is above the State; citizens establish their political identity as belonging to a nation or culture over and above their affiliation to a State. There are deeply ingrained preconceptions that need a more nuanced reading, as they cannot be explained simply as the result of a “State-imposed official history”.

In this process, it is also essential that we reconsider the role of historians. As public servants or statesmen, historians can be considered part of the State. This has often been the case in the historical culture of Mexico, where the connection between politicians and intellectuals is cultivated early on (Camp, 1991). Historians have both ‘figured prominently amongst [nationalism] creators and devotees’ and ‘been nationalism’s sharpest critics and opponents’ (A. D. Smith, 1999b, p. 58), and thus their professional integrity has often been compromised. Historians are placed in a complex position: on the one hand, like any other citizen, they are affected by tradition and the historical culture in which they are immersed, thus they are part of certain state-sanctioned dynamics; on the other, they have received professional training in order to take distance from and to scrutinise that tradition. It is reasonable to think historians’ lives are a sort of crossroads, with constant shifts and tensions between those contrasting conditions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has navigated some of the main aspects of the historical culture and history-making in Mexico. Among them, it stressed the relationship between the State and history, as it is indeed a pervasive characteristic of the Mexican context. Precisely because of this configuration, discussions about “official history” and the politics of history remain essential for anyone wishing to understand how people make sense of the past in Mexico. However, I have also argued that it is necessary to understand the relationship between the State and history differently. “Official history” is not a uniform and fixed single discourse but a series of competing dominant narratives that have been produced throughout time; there is a layering or sedimentation of these narratives, as time passes and conditions change. This has happened in such a way that it is possible to perceive even nowadays the coexistence – at times peaceful and at others confrontational – of these narratives. Furthermore, the dominant narratives produced by the State are not “produced” out of thin air, but based on traditions and on the

broader popular history, both of which have social legitimacy. The State does not operate from a “clean slate”, but has itself – and all of its procedures – been predetermined by the ‘past conditions of the present’ (Rüsen, 2012, p. 45). Finally, the State, with its impact on creating dominant narratives, is central, but there are other entities and actors for history-making that also take part in the broader historical culture.

This has meant, among other things, re-thinking the role of the historian – and of academic history. Ultimately, by reconsidering the relationship between the State and history, we are opening the way to perceiving the impact that other entities have on the way we understand the past, but that have somehow remained unseen because of the emphasis on State intervention. We are now better placed to explore the tradition and historical culture in which the GHMC and the MNR are based, in chapter four, and visitors’ responses to them later on, in chapters five and six.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORY IN THE MUSEUM: THE CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter addressed what I considered to be some of the most significant aspects of the historical culture in Mexico, as well as some of the dynamics and means by which these aspects have been conveyed and disseminated. This framework will now allow us to analyse in more detail how historical culture converges in the context of the history museum, and more specifically, in the two case studies of the present research (the GHMC and the MNR).

As was briefly presented in chapter one, the relationship between history and museums is a complex one. Not only do the concepts of *history* and *museum* embody an array of meanings, so does their combination. So, for example, there are ongoing discussions about what history museums are; how *histories of museums* can be made; and what *history in the museum* is and how it is made. This chapter will focus on the latter; it will analyse how the past is exhibited in the GHMC and the MNR, although it will partially draw on elements from the other discussions, when necessary.

In focusing on history in the museum, I am agreeing with other authors that have suggested that museum exhibitions have their own distinct and special way of presenting and generating knowledge about the past (Schlereth, 1990b, p. 303; Watson, 2010, p. 205). Thus, their analysis should not be carried out as that of a historical monograph – in other words, in a historiographical manner – but should include other considerations such as visual, spatial, material and, notably, visitors' experiences.

This chapter will address history in the museum as it is produced by the institution. It argues that a central aspect to help understand, later in the thesis, how visitors responded to the GHMC and the MNR, is looking at these museums' particular histories, their configuration – their contents about the past and through which strategies they exhibit them – and the changes they have undergone, as they all provide insight into how museums and museum visiting operate within the broader historical culture. It also provides insight into the tensions and contradictions that exist in the museums' contents because of these processes of change, or because of how they use different resources for exhibiting the past that could be deemed to be oppositional.

Chapters five and six will then focus on history in the museum as it is “produced” by visitors’ experiences.

4.1 HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

In the first place, history in the museum must be seen in the context in which it was created (the *history of* the institution): what were the main topics, ideas and approaches at the time it was first developed, and in any changes subsequently undertaken; who made it, why and how, among other issues. *History of the museum* can refer to research about the particular history of a museal institution, or to studies that embrace the development of museums collectively as part of a branch of cultural history. In this sense, history of the museum could be understood as historiography of the museum (Schlereth, 1990b, p. 306).

In the context of history museums, for example, *history of the museum* is about understanding the ‘mind-maps and dominant ideologies in which they were created’ and, therefore, the study of the history of the museum reveals ‘the *traditions* [my emphasis] of history-telling that are prioritised in contemporary life’ (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 5). It also permits seeing changes in the museum in a more organic way, where “ruptures” are not as divisive as they are often depicted; in accordance with Witcomb, ‘contemporary museum trends have historical precedents rather than being a radical break with the past’ (2003, p. 165).

Different authors have criticised the lack of serious research about the history of museums in general (Schlereth, 1990b; Starn, 2005; Wilkinson, 2014). Fortunately, new research is starting to address this gap (Macleod, 2013; Walker, 2013). However, research in the specific field of history museums, that is, the history of the history museum, remains scarce. Even more so in the Mexican case, where, to date, there is only a handful of books on the history of museums in general (Del Río, 2010; Fernández, 1988, 2000). Most of these are general accounts which often lack nuance, detail, documentation and, significantly, links to the materiality of the museum itself. A few other works address in more detail, and with more documentation, specific aspects of the history of museums in Mexico, but they are limited (Morales Moreno, 1994b; Rico Mansard, 2004; Vázquez Olvera, 1997).

As mentioned earlier, the present research is neither a history of history museums in Mexico nor a history of the two chosen case studies (the GHMC and the MNR). However, I will partly address the case studies’ history because it helps to

elucidate broader aspects of the historical culture in Mexico – which is the overall approach that has been used for the research – and also to interpret the visitors’ comments. By looking at the history of the GHMC and the MNR, and more generally of other history museums in Mexico City, it has been possible to ‘reflect [on] the interests, predilections, and even prejudices of a given generation’ as they are present in the exhibiting of history (Schlereth, 1990b, p. 306). Thus, the history of the GHMC and the MNR shows us how the exhibition of the 19th and 20th centuries has been made at different times and by different institutions, the similarities and contrasts that they have, and more specifically, the role of historians and the historical discipline in them; that is, of different practices or traditions of history curatorship (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 11).

The GHMC was the first purpose-built museum in modern Mexico and so it was the forefront laboratory of the processes that would thrive later on in what has been considered the “Golden Age” of museums in the country.⁴⁸ This museum plan of the 1960s was part of the larger boom of educational and cultural projects, resulting from a period of political stability and economic development in post-revolutionary Mexico (Del Río, 2010, pp. 37–48). In this period, the network of museums in general and the creation of national museums grew to unprecedented levels: the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* [National Museum of Anthropology] (MNA) (1964), the *Museo Nacional del Virreinato* [National Museum of the Viceroyalty] (Munavi) (1964), the *Museo de Arte Moderno* [Museum of Modern Art] (MAM) (1964), the *Museo de Historia Natural* [Museum of Natural History] (1964) and the *Museo Nacional de las Culturas* [National Museum of Cultures] (MNC) (1965).

The museum boom of the 1960s was part of the nationalist policy that the State implemented from the 1940s onwards. As seen in chapter three, this policy included several actions in order to consolidate an idea of a national history and of the government as its “custodian”. The museum boom was created as part of the regime’s celebratory dynamics, by which many public works were – and still are – carried out on commemorative dates; in the particular case of the GHMC, it was the 150th anniversary of the Independence and the 50th of the Revolution. It was Torres Bodet, then Minister

⁴⁸ The original name of the GHMC was *Galería de Historia. La lucha del pueblo mexicano por su libertad* [Gallery of History. The struggle of Mexican people for their freedom]. It was later changed, in the 1990s, for the one it currently holds – *Gallery of History. Spiral Museum*. The change was part of a renovation process that considered the original name too long and impractical, unlike that of *Spiral Museum* with which this space was popularly referred to because of its architectural layout. In changing its public name there were important epistemological aspects that probably were not taken into consideration. I will address this in more detail in section 4. 2.

of Education, who set the project in motion; he conceived the GHMC as a ‘homage to heroes’ and a place to ‘host the account of history’ (Ramírez Vázquez, 1960, p. 1). This explains why not only the historical contents but also some of the building’s architectural features were designed to convey nationalist messages, which will be dealt with in more detail in section 4.3.

Torres Bodet also referred to the GHMC as ‘an open text book’; that is, as a place where a ‘simple history lesson’ would be displayed across different rooms, along with images and maps, around three ‘central points of interest’: Independence, Reform and Revolution (1960, p. 1). It is worth mentioning that Torres Bodet had been the creator, two years earlier (in 1959), of the National Commission for Free Textbooks (CONALITEG), which allows us to think of the close connection that existed from the GHMC’s early inception between school history and textbooks, and the museum. This is also reinforced by the fact that the GHMC was built by the CAPFCE, the Committee for the building of public schools.

The MNH was opened in 1944 in Chapultepec Castle, which is situated at the top of a hill in the largest public park in Mexico City, the Chapultepec Woods. Because the GHMC was conceived as an introduction to the MNH, the space for it had to be improvised from the terrain nearest to the Castle, so the building goes down the hillside in a steep spiral. The spiral was the architectural solution to achieve the best possible use of the available space: ‘the building has a circular shape that unfolds in a helical pattern and that makes the most of the unevenness between the entrance ramp and the lower part of the hill’ (Comité Organizador de los Juegos de la XIX Olimpiada, 1968, p. 7). The trail is, then, linear and in a spiral (helicoid); the history of Mexico is chronologically displayed without interruption in consecutive rooms, placed along a descending ramp (Ramírez Vázquez, 1960, p. 1) (see figures 4 and 5, pp. 93 and 94).

The GHMC is particularly important because, for the first time in Mexico, a museum was created as part of a collective project in which architecture, historical curatorship and exhibition design were carried out simultaneously, thus ‘didactic, constructive and installation problems’ were a single unit with equal hierarchical importance of the elements (Hernández Serrano, 1961, p. 1). This was the result of the particular way in which the GHMC was conceived: an introduction to the history of the country and to the MNH for schoolchildren. It thus needed to be highly “didactic” and “appealing”. Torres Bodet had been inspired by the power of didactic exhibitions resulting from a temporary exhibition on human rights at the then *Musée Galiera*, in

Paris, which he helped organise in 1948 during his term as director of UNESCO.⁴⁹ Torres Bodet and the other members of the main team argued that the strength of the new Gallery would be its “didactic” approach to history, not based on “original” objects. They considered that the GHMC would be able to provide a clear and comprehensive narrative by producing its own exhibition resources (Arriaga, 1961; Larrauri, 2010; Torres Bodet, 1960), not having to rely solely on originals. This will be further explored in section 4.2 in the analysis of how the GHMC uses material culture to exhibit the past.



Figure 4 Entrance view of the GHMC. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

As for the staff responsible for the GHMC project, two main aspects of its history seem relevant for the present research. The first one is that, precisely due to its conceptualisation as a unit where contents, exhibition design and architecture were planned and carried out simultaneously, the figure of the expert historian-curator did not dominate over other roles, for example, the architect or, very importantly, the main exhibition and stage designer. In this case, then, the creation of the history museum was

⁴⁹ This reference was mentioned by Ramírez Vázquez’ son, who was one of the attendees to a conference called *Aquí nació un Caracol* [A snail was born here] on 30th May 2015. This conference was the presentation of a temporary exhibition that features new historical materials about the creation of the GHMC. I then traced the reference and found some information about that exhibition. There is a contemporary project for disseminating the contents and exhibition plan of the original 1948 show. It is available at: <http://www.exhibithumanrights.org>

a ‘collaborative venture’, more similar to other forms of artistic production – such as film or theatre – than to the writing up of a historical monograph (Schlereth, 2004, p. 344 [1978]).⁵⁰ This leads us to the second point, which is how the historian-curator negotiated and adjusted his position to the larger institutional premises and ethos of the project; in this case, a highly nationalistic space that needed to “shape” history according to the broader political project.



Figure 5 Internal view of the GHMC showing the descending ramp. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

The curator of the GHMC was Arturo Arnaiz y Freg, a historian and lecturer at the National University (UNAM), who had a much more active life as a communicator and public historian than as a writer of historical monographs (González y González, n.d.). He was one of the few historians not based in academia or research institutes to occupy a public position, along with his colleague Silvio Zavala, another historian and public servant, who was the director of the MNH (from 1946 to 1954). Rather paradoxically, these two historians are part of what has been called the ‘generation of

⁵⁰ The composition of the team who created the GHMC reflects the pervasiveness of the aesthetic project above any other element: a coordinator of exhibition design, a set designer, an illustrator, a chief of the clay-figures sculpting team, a chief of mock-ups and miniatures team (which included 40 artisans), a chief of the painting and drawing team, a chief of the graphic workshop, a sound producer and an artist (José Chávez Morado, who sculpted the entrance metal gates and the marble eagle of the Constitution Chamber), among others (Arnaiz y Freg, 1960; Hernández Serrano, 1961; Ramírez Vázquez, 1960; Torres Bodet, 1960).

neoscientists' (González y González, n.d.); that is, historians focused on ideas of objectivity and impartiality based on the documentary and archival approach of the positivist school, as seen in chapter three. Arnaiz y Freg can thus be considered to embody the position of those historians for whom the discipline was not in contradiction with building up official narratives with nationalistic overtones and compatible with the State project. Moreover, he seems to have been aware that historians drew on popular traditions of history-making. His speech at the opening of the GHMC provides a sense of this:⁵¹

In this museum we have sourced not only from the fruits of historical research itself, but also from elements of *tradition* [my emphasis]. The message that is intended to transmit has been elaborated by the Mexican people with their heroic effort [...] Based on precise documentation, we aimed to reconstruct the past with the highest degree of reality. This effort [...] aspires to bring facts back to life, with the warmth of liveliness and objectivity [...] The teaching of History [*sic*] allows understanding of the development of our institutions, strengthens patriotism and is essential in the education of the citizen [...]

(Arnaiz y Freg, 1960, p. 4)

Arnaiz y Freg's quote shows that history museums provide a good case to analyse the opposition to, and debates about, the historical discipline and its involvement in the construction of a national history. Furthermore, it demonstrates the complex position in which historians are placed, as mentioned in chapter two, by having to simultaneously perform roles that have tended to be oppositional: that of being a "sound" and "objective" professional, whilst also being a public servant who works for the State. As the cases of Zavala or Arnaiz y Freg show, professional historians were involved in the process of construction and dissemination of official narratives either actively or passively – by not challenging them.

The MNR was opened 26 years after the GHMC – in 1986 – in a very different political and social context. As addressed in chapter three, the government was still run by the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] in an authoritarian and centralised manner, but the steady increase in social and political discontent from the late 50s onwards had altered the scenario. The MNR was created by decree in 1985 and opened in 1986, again in a celebratory spirit – this time for the 75th anniversary of the

⁵¹ I want to thank here Mrs Martha Robles, chief of Education Services of the GHSM, for providing me with a copy of this along with other similar and most valuable documents, which were not available anywhere else at the time of the fieldwork (2013). Recently, in 2015, this and other inaugural speeches have been uploaded to the webpage of the GHMC as part of its renewal. Documents are in Spanish and can be consulted at <http://www.caracol.inah.gob.mx/index.php/iquienes-somos/historia>

Revolution – and as an act of political reaffirmation of the State in this climate of growing polarisation and dissidence.

The symbolic power of the MNR derives more from the building under which it is located – the Monument to the Revolution – than from the museum itself. The Monument is a 1930s adaptation of the remains of Porfirio Díaz’s unfinished legislative palace. It is a colossal grey stone building culminating in a shiny copper cupola, in the basement of which the museum opened in 1986⁵² (see figure 6, p. 97). Since its inauguration in 1938, the Monument became the most important material symbol of the Revolution, one that physically and metaphorically “solidified” this popular uprising in a grandiose manner. More symbolic layers were added to this space when, from the 1940s onwards, it became a mausoleum (*Monumento a la Revolución Mexicana*, n.d.; Reza Casahonda & Norman Mora, 2007).⁵³ The physical remains of several revolutionary leaders were buried together – even if opposed in life – in the pillars of the Monument, thus becoming part of a unified representation of this civil struggle that, as seen in chapter three, was marked by internal struggles between factions.

As happens with many presidential decrees in Mexico, the MNR project was carried out in a rush, in order to be ready for its inauguration on the date of the anniversary of the Revolution (20th of November). As a result, only a temporary exhibition called *1910 in the Memory of Mexico* [*1910 en la memoria de México*] could be inaugurated.⁵⁴ A few months later, on the 1st of May 1987, the permanent exhibition was opened – which I will refer to as the “second” MNR. Vázquez del Mercado

⁵² An important note is that the space in the basement for the museum had been created since the 1930s, as its original architect – Carlos Obregón – had conceived that the Monument should have also, among other things, its museum to the Revolution (Vázquez del Mercado, 2011, p. 19), as we saw in chapter three. For financial reasons, but more likely for political ones, the project of the museum did not come to fruition then. Shortly after the 1985 earthquake, the space of the basement was re-discovered during a revision of the structure of the Monument. A few weeks later, president Miguel de la Madrid decreed the creation of the MNR.

⁵³ I would like to thank Mr Miguel Enríquez for providing me a copy of Reza and Norman’s video about the MNR, as well as dozens of photographs and some documents about the history of the MNR. His interview was also an important source for gaining a general insight into the history of this institution.

⁵⁴ The only source that provides some reference to this is Vázquez del Mercado (2011, p. 20) but it is very brief. In 2014 I was finally able to see the historical archive of the MNR. Since 2013, the then director Edgar Rojano informed me that he had located this archive in the library of the José María Luis Mora Institute of Historical Research (popularly known as *Instituto Mora*) and that he was negotiating its relocation. He achieved this in early 2014. By then, a new director had been appointed. In the last stage of my fieldwork, in July 2014, I was granted access to this archive by the new director, Miguel Ángel Berúmen, assisted by the collections manager, Catalina Gagern. Mrs Gagern’s help was very important in order to navigate the content of this archive and other sources from the library of the MNR, for which I am most grateful.

mentions that this “second” MNR showed dioramas⁵⁵, photographs, maps, and some objects. As for the objects, they had been gathered in less than a year and would become the core of the museum’s current collection (2011, p. 20). It is not explained, though, how they were gathered, or where the objects came from; this lack of knowledge remains a significant absence in the history of the museum. From the documents available in the archive, it would appear that several of the objects were borrowed from private owners. The rather hasty – even improvised, I would say – creation of the MNR would have a strong impact on the kind of exhibition that it presented, not only in its “first” and “second” stages, but also later on, in the 2009-2010 major refurbishment, as we will see in the following sections.



Figure 6 Square of and Monument to the Revolution, with entrance to the MNR Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas.

Unlike the GHMC, the main historian-curator played a predominant role in the “first” and “second” MNR projects. The government assigned historian Dr Eugenia Meyer both the curatorship and the project management. Thus, she did not only coordinate and establish the curatorial script and historical research for the MNR, she was also involved in the managerial – and thus, political – aspects of this state museum.

⁵⁵ But these dioramas were not miniature like those of the GHMC. Rather, they were human-size “re-creations”. By this term I refer to installations that attempt to simulate how a particular scene could have looked liked – for example a kitchen, the inside of a factory or a home, etc. – by placing things in space, in proportions and in context similar to those of reality. “Re-creations” provide the illusion of presenting the past but they are an artificial construction.

Dr Meyer, a specialist in the Mexican Revolution, was a lead figure in the academic landscape of the time; she was director of the José María Luis Mora Institute of Historical Research⁵⁶ at the time (Vázquez del Mercado, 2011, p. 19). She had also been involved in other museum projects, leading a team of experts in oral history that participated in the creation of the National Museum of Interventions (MNI) in 1981, and a Historical Museum of the Revolution in the northern state of Chihuahua (1982) (Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995, p. 50). By taking part in all these State projects of history museums, Meyer is, like Silvio Zavala and Arturo Arnaiz y Freg, another example of the connection between academic historians, official histories and the State.

One final aspect of the history of the MNR is of particular importance for this research. As mentioned, the MNR was created by presidential decree, which meant that it was a “national” museum. In spite of this, it has never been managed by the INAH [National Institute of Anthropology and History] – the decentralised government body that manages all national museums throughout the country. From its inception, the MNR has always depended of the Mexico City local government.⁵⁷ This particular condition has impacted not only on the historical contents of the museum in its later years, but also on its political life, as we will now see.

To begin with, legal changes in 1997 allowed the inhabitants of Mexico City to elect their head of government – until then directly appointed by the federal government. What was then the left-wing opposition party – the PRD – won the elections and has remained in power ever since (although the party itself has undergone changes and internal fractures). Thus, in 1997, what had hitherto been the stronghold of the PRI’s centralised federal state politics became the “heart” of the opposition. This changed the conditions within local government institutions, among them museums. The MNR has since had a dynamics of operation and a historical discourse that is different from those of the INAH’s museums. To start with, it has had more flexibility to update and change its exhibition: in a life-span of 29 years, it has undergone three renovations (whether partial or major) – 1987, 2000 and 2010 – whilst, for example, the GHMC only underwent two in 55 years – the 1970s, and 1999-2001. As for the historical discourse, the renovation of 2010 included the participation of two historians

⁵⁶ Also created by presidential decree in 1981.

⁵⁷ This appears odd to me, even more so because I was not able to find an explanation for this anywhere in the literature, documents, or in the interviews with staff. It is reasonable to think that greater political issues might be at stake.

affiliated – roughly speaking – with the left-wing opposition, and have incorporated an interpretation of the Revolution that differs from that found in the INAH’s museums, as we will see in the next section.⁵⁸ However, it must be said that, unlike the predominant role played by Dr Meyer in the 1986 project, in the 2010 project the historians played a secondary role as outsourced “historical advisers” and were part of a broader exhibition team.

In the second place, the MNR’s institutional affiliation to local government has impacted on its political life. As noted in chapter three, 2010 was the year of the bicentenary of the Independence and the centenary of the Revolution, and the federal right-wing government – the PAN, or National Action Party – orchestrated a wide encompassing programme of activities, many of which took place in the symbolic centre of the nation: Mexico City’s main square (the *Zócalo*). Therefore, the nearby *Plaza de la Revolución* [Revolution Square] became the venue where the left-wing opposition local government – the PRD – carried out its own commemorative programme. In this context, the refurbishment of the Square, the Monument and the MNR itself seem to have been aimed at countering the federal government’s programme. It was a symbolic battle – physically laid out in the division of urban scenarios – where what was largely at stake was, once more, who the “heir” of the Revolution was, and who better embodied the Mexican struggle for freedom and democracy.

The histories of both the GHMC and the MNR are certainly much larger than what has been presented here. During the research process, I came to know more details on several aspects of the processes of change that these two institutions underwent since their creation, including current transformations: for example, during 2015 I traced significant information about how these institutions are carrying out activities related to their own history and reflecting on their own practice.⁵⁹ However, for the purposes of this thesis, I consider that the elements provided so far on their

⁵⁸ These historians are Pedro Salmerón and Francisco Pérez Arce. I obtained the names from a document provided to me by Jorge Agostoni during the interview we held in 2013. Agostoni is director of *Museográfica*, the company who won the bid for the refurbishment project of the MNR in 2009-2010.

⁵⁹ As previously mentioned, on May 30th 2015 the GHMC carried out a conference and opening up of a temporary exhibition *A snail was born here* which brings to light new materials from the historical archive of the museum that had been so far lost until recently, historians Pável Luna and Bertha Hernández found them. Some information (in Spanish) from this project is available at:

<http://www.caracol.inah.gob.mx/index.php/exposicion-temporal/2015/aqui-nacio-un-caracol>

As for the MNR, on December 4 and 5 2014 it hosted the First National Congress of Museums of the Mexican Revolution, which brought together different museum practitioners and academics in general to discuss this new area of research (Secretaría de Cultura de la Ciudad de México, 2014).

histories will be sufficient to understand the context of the visitors' experiences within them.

4.2 THE EXHIBITION STRATEGY AND THE APPROACH FOR USING MATERIAL CULTURE

I will now move on to discuss a second aspect of the issue of how history is exhibited in museums. Unlike historical books or an article, the history exhibition 'is in many ways a more complex mode of communication' because of the infinite possibilities of its form; that is, of the variety of resources and exhibition design and strategies through which historical content is intended to be conveyed (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xviii). Form is not only a matter of appearance; it involves important preconceptions about knowledge, learning, the past, what constitutes evidence, and even about the purpose of the museum itself. This is why, in my research, the analysis of form is as important as that of content – recognising that this separation is only partially possible, or even desirable.

As several authors have stated, there are different genres of exhibiting history in the museum, for example, the period room, historic houses, outdoor villages, gallery exhibitions (Gable, 2008; Kavanagh, 1990; Pearce, 1992; Schlereth, 1990b). So, whilst, roughly considered, all history museums are about 'versions of the past [...] produced through words, pictures, and artifacts' (Gable, 2008, p. 110), there are significant differences between them. These are due to different understandings of what the past is and how we can come to understand it (history), of what counts as evidence or what the best way of conveying meaning is; in other words, what Schlereth calls the 'epistemologies behind historical-museum exhibitions' (1990b, p. 310). It is important to note that these different styles or traditions of history-making tend to coexist, as a result of which countries tend to simultaneously host diverse types of history museums (Kavanagh, 1990). And even within museums themselves, there is often a coexistence of different traditions, as a result of their processes of change through time.

One of the first points that distinguishes different types or strategies for exhibiting the past in the museum is its use of and approach to objects or, broadly speaking, material culture. As Kavanagh has stated, collections constitute 'the raw material of the historian's craft within the museum setting' (2000, p. 98). Similarly, Susan Pearce claimed that one of the hardest but most important issues in museum research and practice was 'the relationship of our museum material to the ways in which we view the past and produce our narratives of what happened in the past' (1992, p.

192). Different authors agree that ‘the production of history in the museum has taken its own, rather different, forms’ (Pearce, 1992, p. 196), partly because academia-based historians have not shown the same interest in the role that objects could play in the historical narrative (Knell, 2007, p. 8), as a result of which, historians working in the museum seem to have developed into another “sort” of history professional: the curator (Schlereth, 1990a, p. 387).

Curators developed other skills that text-only based historians did not, partly because, in the history museum, they had to develop strategies in order to “read” material evidence (Kavanagh, 1996, p. 5). These strategies were often borrowed from other professions which were used to dealing with the physical past, such as geologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, antiquarians, regional studies scholars and even art historians (Kavanagh, 1990, pp. 53, 54). Unlike historiographers, history curators have a certain attachment – although in varying degrees – to an empirical tradition according to which things contain the possibility of accurate knowledge because they are “real” pieces of the world (Knell, 2007, pp. 10–14; Schlereth, 2004, p. 335 [1978]) ; they are not perceived as ‘brute outcomes of thoughts’ but, on the contrary, essential elements for the “re-creation” of life in the past (Pearce, 1992, p. 195). Moreover, they are also valued because of their power to convey a sense of immediacy with the past (Deetz, 2004, p. 375 [1980]) and its capacity to give rise to new questions about it (Leone & Little, 2004, p. 362 [1993]).

One of the most important debates that took place in the specific realm of history museums was that of the 1980s and the 1990s, where the main issue at stake was, precisely, the role of material culture in history. Various authors have suggested that one of the most significant changes in the dynamics of history museums was the steady incorporation of social history from the 1970s onwards (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 49; Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xviii; Witcomb, 1997, p. 388). This process has been considered a positive change in that, not only did social history allow museums to address new topics and approaches that history based solely on objects did not seem to foster, but also, it favoured the inclusion of more accessible and engaging narratives. However, the changes were also seen in a negative light by those who claimed that they had led to a displacement of that which was the “essence” of a museum: its approach to knowledge with objects – in the case of the history museum, its approach to history by material culture from the past (Moore, 1997, pp. 47–51).

At its climax, as some authors have suggested, these discussions became a polarisation between ‘object-based’ and ‘ideas-based’ curatorship, whereby the former was seen as old-fashioned and elitist, and the later as more democratic and inclusive (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 151; Witcomb, 2003, p. 86). This polarisation was captured in some of the texts of the New Museology, one of which was Stephen Weil’s article *The Proper Business of the Museum: Ideas or Things?* (1990). Nevertheless, authors have now started to claim that the polarisation in those terms was, to a certain extent, more constructed than real. As Moore claimed as early as 1997, there was a need to move beyond that debate of binaries in which discussions had been stuck (1997, p. 38). Witcomb also suggested not reducing the issue to an “either/or” dilemma but, instead, recognising that ‘there are various ways of understanding and using objects’ (1997, p. 397).

In the past two decades there has been an increase in the reflection about material culture in the museum, and on how it can be interpreted in order to create meaningful experiences in visitors without being displaced by narrative; some of these authors are Moore (1997, p. ch 4), Pearce (1992, p. ch 7–10) and, more recently, Dudley (2010b). Thomas Schlereth, a pioneer in the debate about history museums and material culture, claimed as early as the 1980s that it was essential for museums to develop an intellectual framework to work with objects (1990a). In my opinion, he was the first to suggest that object interpretation could follow different explanatory paradigms and that museums showed this differentiated use of material culture.

In the context of this research, both the GHMC and the MNR seem to operate more or less based on two of the paradigms put forward by Schlereth: the *national character*, as their approach to material culture is to use objects ‘to explain the collective ethos of an entire nation’, and the *social history* one, in order to depict change, conflict and causal explanation (Schlereth, 1990a, pp. 392, 404).⁶⁰ On the broad scale of things, then, the two museums studied do not use physical resources to explain, for example, how things – such as ancient machines – worked or how life was lived in the past, but how a particular social condition came into being; how the past became the current Mexican nation.

⁶⁰ Besides national character and social history, Schlereth mentions that in history museum the other two forms that have been used are the *functionalist* and the cultural *reconstructionist* (1990a, p. 392).

Although both the GHMC and the MNR use *national character* and *social history* approaches to material culture, their layout and general strategy for exhibiting history in the museum is, however, very different. Each has its own rationale regarding the relationship between historical ideas and the material world. In the following pages I will present these rationales based on my observation and analysis of the case studies, complemented with the relevant literature, when needed. However, it must be said that in the Mexican context, there is practically no research about the relationship between material culture and the production of history in the museum. To my knowledge, only Morales Moreno has addressed aspects of this matter (2009, 2010); a few other works address the issue, but only tangentially (Garrigan, 2012; Moreno Guzmán, 2001).

As mentioned in the previous section, the GHMC was designed as an introduction to the MNH for schoolchildren; it was conceived as a “didactic” and “appealing” option to familiarise children with the country’s history. The GHMC was about presenting history in a ‘graphic way’ (Arriaga, 1961, p. 3). For those involved in the project, this meant using resources other than “original” objects, as these were not considered adequate to explain the history of the country and its development. Let us consider, for example, the words of the curator at the opening ceremony – my emphasis in italics:

[...] The museum, as storage place for relics, gives way to another concept. *The presentation of objects that have no relationship between them has been purposefully avoided.* The gallery that opens today to the public has a deliberate purpose and will strive to accomplish it. In here, *there are no antiquities, mould, rust or moths.* Neither are there precious jewels nor strange objects; all the pieces are replicas, copies [and] reproductions of moderate cost. This exhibition will daily provide thousands of children and adults *with information that could not be transmitted in the same timespan only through the spoken or written word [...]* It is no longer possible to teach history only through books and orally. And in this effort of educating thousands of men for democratic life, *we can no longer fail to use the valuable instruments provided by modern technology.*

(Arnaiz y Freg, 1960, p. 1)

This meant that, whilst there was a need to “convey information”, it was perceived that “original” objects were not the best means of doing so, as they often had gaps in what they could represent – for example, there were no collections to talk about certain important characters. There was an open decision to ‘not fall into the temptation of the physical presence of objects’ (Torres Bodet in Ramírez Vázquez, 1960) so accordingly, the GHMC was called a *gallery*, as the concept of museum was associated with originals, such as the MNH. The GHMC meant the creation of a new strategy for

exhibiting the past and presenting the history of the country in the museum differently from what had been done so far, as one of the members of the exhibition design team mentioned – my emphasis in italics:

Back then, the traditional conception was that a museum operated always, necessarily, with collections of objects of irreplaceable heritage [...] In the Gallery we were somehow *manipulating the history* by reproducing the testimonies of the events instead of ordering relics. It was a turn, let's say, in the conception of museums. A theoretical *turn*! Perhaps today nobody will be surprised by the fact that a museum was being created by the *invention* of its collections [...]
(Larrauri, 2010)

However, the new institution needed to be not only “appealing”, but also “realistic”; it had to inform and meanwhile create an emotional impact. In this context, cycloramas – that is, dioramas with a background contextual painting on a concave surface – were considered the appropriate medium to achieve this complex requirement; that is, to be ‘an objective drama’ (Hernández Serrano, 1961, p. 1) of historical events. Dioramas are based on an idea of realism by which the detailed and “accurate” depiction of a particular event is deemed to create an illusion of transportation to another time (Moser, 1999, pp. 110, 111). In the GHMC, the idea was, precisely, that each diorama acted as a ‘window to peek [or gaze] into history’ (Comité Organizador de los Juegos de la XIX Olimpiada, 1968, p. 7).

The dioramas were narrated by a voice recording, which the creators thought would facilitate their interpretation. The GHMC was, thus, the first audio-visual museum in Mexico (Hernández Serrano, 1961, p. 5). Despite the importance that the audio had on the original project, it is barely referred to in the sources. This might be partly due to the fact that the sound system soon presented technical difficulties and stopped working, up to the point where the lack of recorded sound became the norm in the GHMC.⁶¹ But not only the audio acted as interpretive support for the dioramas; there was also a series of complementary visual resources, along with short narrative texts that “described” what was happening in the scene. Among the visual resources were maps, portraits, replicas of objects such as flags, documents and paintings that

⁶¹ According to the interviews with the GHMC staff, the sound stopped working at some point probably in the 1980s or even earlier, since the 1960s, and eventually the tapes were lost. In the 1999-2001 renovation sound was reintroduced again, but with new recordings. However, this new system also stopped working eventually. The current director of the Gallery has fixed the audio and tried to reintroduce it but based on my last visit, in 2014, there were still problems and it was not always turned on.

were in other museums, photographs and images – e.g., diagrams and statistics. As for the texts, they were short explanatory notes that acted as a sort of synthesis or journalistic heading of the contents of the dioramas (Hernández Serrano, 1961, p. 4).

Based on the few available sources about the museum, it is possible to know that it underwent partial changes in the following decades, such as becoming part of the INAH in the 1970s, and incorporating more elements into its exhibition rooms, according to requirements. Among these, for example, offices for staff were added inside the exhibition rooms as there was no other space available. Also, it seems that at some point the museum changed its original name to the one it currently holds. In 1999 the Gallery closed for a two-year renovation that was planned and carried out by the INAH's central management through its Museums Coordination Department – not by the GHMC's staff.

The 1999-2001 renovation focused on the exhibition design aspect, but on the whole it did not change the main layout or the historical contents – although a partial update of the text panels was carried out. In the words of the then-director, Alfredo Hernández, the Museums Coordination's renewal project aimed to “return” to the original style of the 1960s museum. According to Hernández, at some point during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, several “poor” and improvised additions, as well as “unfortunate” adaptations, were made to the museum, and it was felt that this undermined the quality of the dioramas.⁶² As part of this renewal, all the complementary didactic resources that had been made in the 1960s in order to contextualize the dioramas were eliminated. The exhibition space was thus kept to the minimal elements in terms of the visual and graphic realms; as for text, more labels were written, but the short descriptions of the dioramas were also eliminated. In short, the renewal process privileged the dioramas themselves and turned them into “original” objects of their own, exhibited in a more neutral environment but also stripped of those elements that were originally designed to enhance their interpretation. As we will see in chapter five, this is impacting on the communicability of history presented in the GHMC, based on visitors' responses to the museum.

⁶² Interview with Alfredo Hernández, 2013. I want to thank here the help provided by Hernández, whose knowledge about the GHMC was important for documenting aspects of the museum which are not available anywhere else. He also helped me to establish contact with Iker Larrauri, one of the original members of the exhibition design team and most well-known Mexican museum professionals.

A pair of photographs of the same room and diorama before (in the 1980s) and after the renovation of 1999-2001 gives an idea of the change (see figures 7 and 8):



Figure 7 Room of the GHMC before the renovation of 1999-2001. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

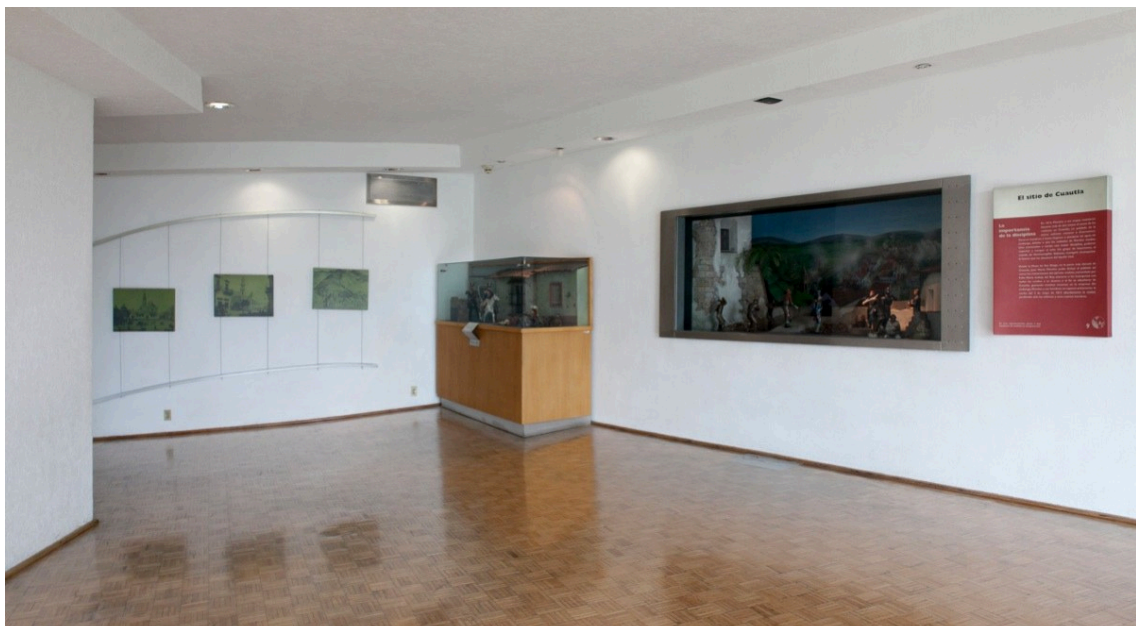


Figure 8 Room of the GHMC after the renovation of 1999-2001. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

This apparently superficial change – stripping off “excess” – was, in fact, a more radical transformation of the original proposal of the GHMC than it seemed at first glance. As mentioned in section 4.1, the 1960 proposal had been designed as an integrated unit, where dioramas were the backbone of the exhibition but their interpretation also depended on the series of narrative and audio-visual resources that

contextualised them. All the elements, dioramas included, were not originals on purpose, in order to avoid the sacredness – but also related limitations – of originals. It was a space called *gallery* and not *museum* because there was a belief that it was not necessary to have original pieces in order to disseminate history. By stripping off all the other resources and prioritising the dioramas as original works of art of their own, the 1999-2001 refurbishment totally altered the original concept.⁶³ It was now a museum with its own “original” collection: the dioramas.

It is impossible to gauge what the difference in visitors’ experiences was after the changes, since there is no visitor research prior to the renewal. Some of the members of staff interviewed believed that the renewal had, on the whole, been negative for the museum; they thought that it not only left out important historical contents, but also, that the new GHMC had lost its “soul” and character. I am not able to provide an evaluation for this, as I do not have the necessary elements. But based on my visitor research, I did notice that visitors do not generally connect with the dioramas in terms of the historical contents they are supposed to convey; rather, they connect with them in terms of their physicality, that is, how they were made and what they look like. Only a few visitors actually commented on specific dioramas in terms of their historical content. Most visitors answered my questions based on their memories or personal references, but mostly without making reference to any of the dioramas. It is possible to suggest that this is partly because the dioramas, as they are currently exhibited, do not have the same capacity to foster or convey reflections about the past. I will address this in more detail in chapter five. Meanwhile, we must accept that we will never know whether, before the renovation, the dioramas in their original setting worked as intended in the first place.

As for the MNR, it was briefly mentioned that the first 1986 museum only featured a temporary exhibition, which was substituted in 1987 by a permanent one (the “second” MNR) and then underwent a partial renovation in 2000, followed by a total refurbishment in 2009-2010. As the visitor study was carried out in 2013, it seems appropriate to focus the analysis of the strategies for exhibiting history and approaching the past only on the renovated museum. The problem, however, is that the characteristics of the 2009-2010 refurbishment were partly constrained by the

⁶³ New text and graphic complementary panels were included, but they seem to remain marginal or unnoticed, as suggested by the interviews. This might be due partly because there is an excess of text in the panels and because their design somehow minimises their presence – probably to avoid distraction from the dioramas.

characteristics of the collection and the previous exhibitions; it was not simply the result of a “new” conceptualisation of how the museum should be. Therefore, I considered it important to analyse the similarities and differences between the pre-2009 and post-2009 MNR, although this has, indeed, been a challenge, among other things because of the lack of documentation.

As mentioned in the previous section, both the “first” and the “second” MNR were mostly created without a collection of its own; especially the 1986 temporary exhibition. The 1987 permanent exhibition included some original objects, mainly a collection of weapons donated by the Ministry of Defence (Vázquez del Mercado, 2011, p. 21), but on the whole it featured other types of resources such as videos, photographs, maps, “re-creations” and replicas. In particular, there were “re-creations” of several scenes made up of objects – whether replicas or originals – placed in their context of function and use. So, for example, there was a “re-creation” of life on an *hacienda* – large holdings owned by rich landowners, in which poor peasants worked in oppressive conditions; a prison cell where political opponents were locked up; the interiors of a rich and a poor family’s houses, in order to represent socio-economic differences between life-styles during the *Porfiriato*; and even the offices of a bank, to represent the economic activity of the period (Vázquez del Mercado, 2011, p. 21).

In his thesis about the “second” MNR, Gutiérrez Ramos mentioned that ‘just like the GHMC, the [MNR] lacks an “original” collection, as a result of which its interest is not in showing objects [...] but in the explanation of a historical process’ (1995, p. 100). I partly disagree with this author as, unlike the MNR, the GHMC chose its exhibition style – not depending on collections of originals – as a result of a vision and strategy. The case of the MNR points instead to a museum project created in haste – because of an improvised presidential decree in a pressing political context – with no base collection and not connected to the INAH’s network of collections and museum expertise. It was an exhibition set up with limited resources, those that were available in those conditions.

Both the GHMC and the MNR strived to convey a narrative about the Revolution, about which there were limited collections. As de Mello Vasconcellos (2007) explained, even the National Museum of History (MNH) struggled with the lack of collections for the Revolution and 20th century history in general. The difference is that, whilst the MNR attempted to “mix-and-match” parts of a limited collection of originals with other resources, the GHMC gave up objects altogether, for the sake of the

narrative. The “second” MNR balanced the lack of objects through a more visible exhibition design, prominent use of graphic elements and, in general, a reliance on re-created scenes. The GHMC created its collection from scratch. This is a significant example of the way in which museums have dealt differently with the use of objects.

For the MNR refurbishment of 2009-2010, *Museográfica*, the private company that won the open bidding process, took a different approach for exhibiting the past.⁶⁴ A few elements from the “second” MNR were conserved, for example, the use of collages of photos, where a historical character was often reproduced life-sized in order to stand out. There are also certain iconic objects that were kept in the exhibition, such as the seats for congressmen, the replica of the 1917 Constitution, a replica of a 19th century dress, machinery, clothing – especially uniforms – and weapons. Nevertheless, the refurbishment did bring about a major change to the MNR: it minimised the presence of exhibition design by opting for a more neutral environment. According to what Jorge Agostoni, head of *Museográfica*, told me in our interview, the new proposal focused on stressing the links between the museum space – the basement where it is located – and the Monument, thus the need to minimise the intervention of exhibition design. The idea behind this was to ‘integrate the architectural adaptation and the exhibition structures into a single piece’ (*Museográfica*, n.d.). The new proposal is based on glass, metal and a reduced range of colours – mainly light grey, red and black. Colour and wood mostly disappeared from the scene.

However, the changes of the new proposal were not only in terms of the general style and layout. More importantly, the reduction of exhibition design also affected the approach to exhibiting history, by eliminating all “re-creations”. The new project sought to present as many original objects as possible, which had not featured in the “second” MNR because of lack of space – the emphasis then had been on producing comprehensive “re-creations”. Therefore, many replicas and all of the “re-creations” were left out, in order to make room for originals, despite the fact that these were rather scarce in the collection because of the way in which the MNR was constituted, as noted in the previous section. As Agostoni explained, *Museográfica* considered the lack of original objects to be a problem that, on the whole, limited their curatorial strategy.

⁶⁴ The refurbishment had to be carried out in haste again: results of the bid were given in May 2010 and the museum had to be ready by November that same year.

This partly explains why the new MNR looks a bit “empty” or deprived of objects, which is something that certain visitors mentioned, as we will see in chapter five.

In the refurbished MNR, objects were stripped of any contextualising support that created a scene or ambience and, instead, were presented mostly on their own, standing on their plinths or on the floor. In this regard, the resulting museum is very different – even contrasting – from the “second” MNR, as the following photographs show: the same object (a replica of the presidential chair) is displayed in a very different way (see figures 9, below, and 10, p. 111). It can be seen from these photographs that in the “second” MNR, objects were often placed as part of “re-creations”, thus the relationship between objects, and between objects and topics, were explicit. In the specific case of the chair, it was placed within a scenario of power: flanked by the flag and a portrait of President Álvaro Obregón – one of the leaders most famous for clinging to power – in a regal ambience provided by wood panelling and red velvet. In contrast, in the new MNR the chair is placed directly on the metal floor, with no surrounding recreation or symbols of power at all, and placed alongside other elements with no direct connection.



Figure 9 Exhibition of the replica of the presidential chair in the “second” MNR. Source: Miguel Enríquez



Figure 10 Exhibition of the replica of the presidential chair in the new MNR Source: Miguel Enríquez

Based on Schlereth's aforementioned categories of material culture uses (1990a, p. 392), it seems that in the new MNR objects passed from being used under a *functionalist* scheme – how a plough worked, what a bank office looked like, how peasants lived, what the presidential chair looked like in the National Palace – to a *social history* one: objects illustrate the history of the Revolution. Furthermore, figure 11 shows how the new proposal radically separates objects and graphic elements (Museográfica, n.d.), as if history told by words and images, needed to be separated from that told by objects.



Figure 11 Exhibition design of the MNR: images and text are separated from objects. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

As was the case in the GHMC, some of the staff that I interviewed or conversed with at the MNR did not like the results of the refurbishment. One of them mentioned that the “warmth” and “close relationship” or “encounter” between visitors and the museum was lost with the new exhibition design (Enríquez cited in Vázquez del Mercado, 2011, pp. 22, 23). Whether we agree with this or not, what the photographs suggest is that a radical change took place in the way objects are exhibited, and therefore in the conception of exhibiting history in the museum. As is the case for the GHMC, I do not have the elements to compare visitors’ experiences before and after the renewal. However, from the visitor research I carried out for this thesis, it does not seem that the current layout of objects hinders visitors from establishing an emotional contact with them, although a few did manifest feeling some sort of distance.

In conclusion, it is possible to see from the analysis of the GHMC and the MNR that there have been different strategies for displaying the past in the museum, and this variability exists as early as 1960. There was an attempt to be more “didactic” through the use of resources other than original objects. However, now there is also a tendency to recover the value of objects placed with less ‘exhibition design interference’ (Morales Moreno, 2009, p. 43), whilst also giving enough space to the textual narratives. When looking at their developments, it is possible to see that there have been constant shifts between different ways of understanding what objects can do. There is no progressive line of development – at least for what can be interpreted from the Mexican case – whereby supposedly “ancient”, object-based museums became more “modern” and “accessible” through the incorporation of textual narratives. The relationship between objects and ideas in the history museum is less clear-cut than the New Museology made us believe.

4.3 THE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION AND THE NARRATIVES

So far, we have seen how history in the museum can be analysed by looking into the history of the institution and by exploring its exhibition strategy and approach to the past through the use of material culture. This last section will address the way in which the content and the narratives of museums, in this case the GHMC and the MNR, convey particular ideologies and conceptions about history. Moreover, by pulling together elements from their history and their use of material culture, I will argue that these institutions do not present a uniform, totally coherent historical narrative, but rather, one where there are also contradictions and internal variability. As Gable has

argued, history in museums involves negotiation between different communities, each of which has its own internal variability, for example professional historians, politicians and the general public. Thus, whilst history museums have a commitment to present a history which is trustworthy – or sanctioned by “experts” – they also have a public commitment to being democratic and to their audiences– to foster their participation. As a result, history in museums is ‘inherently messy’ (Gable, 2008, p. 110).

Museums are an important gateway to understanding the core of ideologies regarding identity, mentality, style, character or nationhood, to mention a few (Preziosi, 2011, pp. 57, 58, 64) and a scenario for debates of social and cultural theory such as knowledge, power and permanence (Macdonald, 1996, pp. 2, 3). It is often possible to identify myths, values, emotions, narratives, theories and so on in museum discourses; thus, museums not only contain collections or objects but also certain intangible phenomena. However, these are not exclusive to the museum; rather, they can also be found outside, in the broader popular realm. As I mentioned in chapter two, historical culture is not only comprised of institutions, entities and specific products; it also comprises these intangibles. In the specific case of history museums, some of these intangibles are values about national identity, for example, or preconceptions about the historical scholarship which have been ‘translated into museum presentations’ (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xvii) although, as Kavanagh argued, it is ‘difficult to gauge’ the impact of those preconceptions on museum practice (1990, p. 56). In other words, it is not as explicit or as direct as it seems. In the following section I will provide an analysis of certain aspects of the GHMC and the MNR that will permit some insight into those intangibles that seem to have influenced their approaches to the past, and the internal tensions or contradictions that lie within them.

In the case of the GHMC, an analysis of some of its constitutive elements allows us to identify five main interpretive axes: 1) a conception of history that attempts to have a broader social perspective (i.e. not focused solely on “heroes”) – although this is only partially achieved, 2) an essentialist personification of Mexico (i.e., the idea that Mexico has always existed and that it has always had an “essence”) with a teleological perspective (sacrifice points to progress and achievement), 3) a utilitarian perspective of history as teacher of life – *magistra vitae* – whereby the past is a clear voice of advice for the present and the future, 4) an emotional and *quasi*-religious history, where feelings and faith are essential components of historical understanding, and accordingly, 5) an idea of the museum as a place for “educating” citizens – especially the young – with

particular information (e.g., characters, deeds, slogans) and values that are presented as unquestionable.

Let us consider the inscriptions carved on the marble walls of the main entrance and exit of the GHMC, both written by Torres Bodet:

Fellow Mexican, understand, feel and respect the effort of all those who lived to bequeath you an honourable *patria*. The example of the men, women and even children who fought to offer you freedom, to defend your land and to strengthen justice amongst your brothers, will guide you through your life and in the rooms of this space. Bow down before this example. And always endeavour to be worthy of the heroes of the Independence, of Reform and of the Revolution; the people to whom you belong.

(Torres Bodet, 1960, p. 2)

We leave the museum, but not history, because history continues with our lives. The *Patria* is continuity and we are all builders of its greatness. From the lesson of the past, we receive strength for the present and hope for the future. Let us fulfil ourselves in the responsibilities of freedom, so that every day we are more deserving of the honour of being Mexicans.

(Torres Bodet, 1960, p. 3)

Throughout the trail, several of the text panels are linked with one or several of the abovementioned narrative axes. But not only texts; the dioramas themselves often provide scenes where historical characters feature in circumstances compatible with these axes. Scenes depicted in the dioramas are mythical in that they have a powerful emotional content and are important elements of popular history. A clear example is the representation of the national hero known as “*El Pipila*”⁶⁵, about which there is only one vague documented reference – hence his existence is generally rejected by most historians – but is a powerful popular symbol. The story goes that *El Pipila* tied a big block of stone to his back, in order to approach – without being hit by bullets – and set fire to the doors of a building in the city of Guanajuato where the last group of royalists had entrenched itself. He succeeded and the rebels could then take the building and claim control of the city, thus guaranteeing the success of the independence campaign. At the GHMC, this moment was depicted dramatically by focusing on the expression of “*El Pipila*” and by the way the diorama has frozen and immortalised this particular moment in time (see figure 12, p. 115).

⁶⁵ As mentioned in chapter three, this is a nickname with no particular meaning and no possible translation to English.

“*El Pipila*” is also an example of the strategy by which the museum tried to include a more popular perspective of history, by not focusing only on known historical characters. Thus, he is not only a hero of the Independence, he is also a popular hero; the poor miner, the unknown soldier, who is meant to symbolise the masses that participated in the Independence and are, thus, also presented as historical actors. However, all things considered, the narrative of the GHMC does end up being one where historical characters – mostly men, members of the military and elite politicians – dominate. The distribution of the contents – for example, three characters each have their own exhibition room – and the explanations of events in general still place emphasis on the actions of certain individuals.

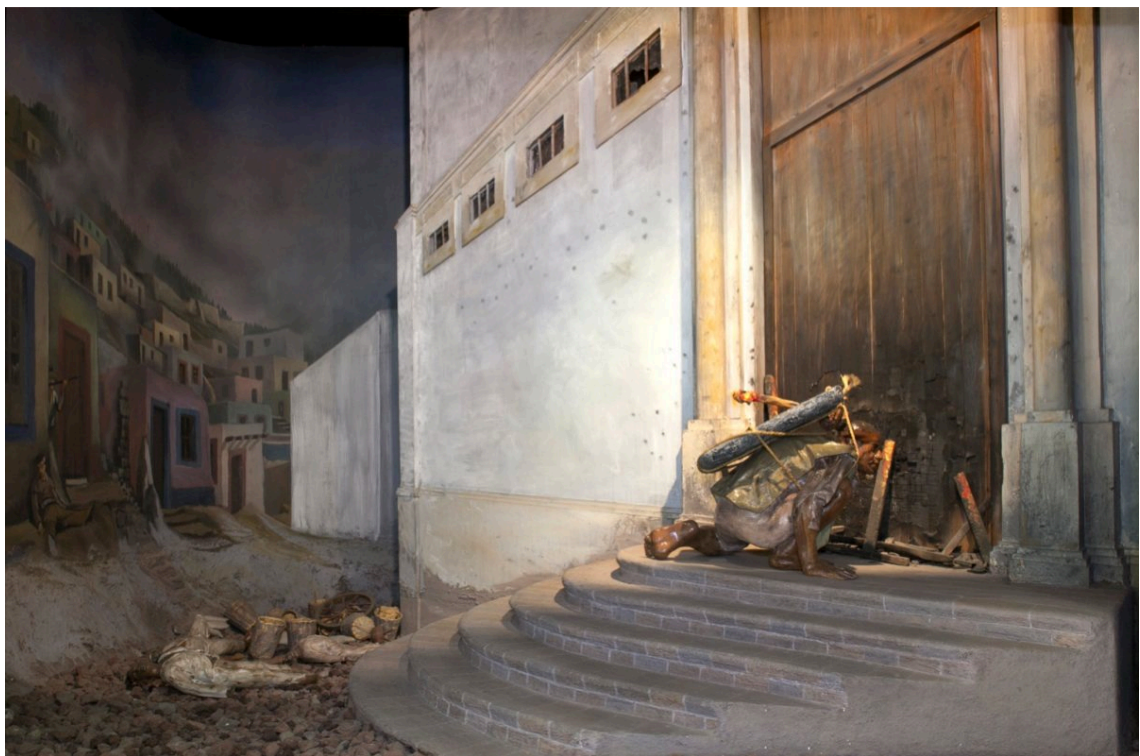


Figure 12 Diorama of the popular hero *El Pipila* at the GHMC. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

Another example is the diorama depicting Benito Juárez as a child. As stated in chapter three, Juárez is one of – if not “the” – most famous historical figure of Mexican history. He was part of transcendental events in 19th century Mexican history, such as the consolidation of a federal republic, the opposition to and military defeat of the French-supported Habsburg monarchy, and the proclamation of the Reform Laws – a series of legal dispositions that definitely changed society and politics in Mexico, by establishing a secular State over the power of the Church. In the GHMC he is depicted in at least four dioramas, but one of them is particularly striking. In room nine, called *The Republic and the the Porfiriato*, Juárez is not only depicted as a president and lawyer, but

also as a child in his home state of Oaxaca. This diorama is striking because he is the only character in the whole of the museum represented as a child. Furthermore, the diorama is strikingly out of place in chronological terms: the diorama depicts Juárez's childhood, which was in the early 19th century, whilst this part of the trail is addressing the 1860-70s. The name of the diorama is *Benito Juárez, as a child*, and its text panel is entitled: “*Zapoteco*⁶⁶, lawyer, liberal and president” (see figure 13).



Figure 13 Diorama at the GHMC of President Benito Juárez as a child in rural Oaxaca. Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

The reason for including this diorama must have stemmed from the mythical power of Juárez. He embodies the narrative of how a poor, indigenous, orphaned boy becomes not only president, but also one of the most important characters of Mexican history. He represents the idea that “anyone”, even the most disadvantaged – such as Indians and the poor, in the Mexican context – can succeed. Thus, Juárez has a strong popular appeal; one that not only the State but also people themselves use as self-encouragement. And, indeed, as we will see in chapter six, there is a pervasive understanding of Juárez in those terms within the interviewees’ comments.

Besides the dioramas, the GHMC has another element that embodies several of the mentioned key interpretive axes, especially those that have to do with an essentialist,

⁶⁶ Denomination of an ethnic indigenous group from southern Mexico.

patriotic and *quasi*-religious interpretation of Mexican history. This element is the *Recinto a la Constitución* [Constitution Chamber], the last room in the GHMC (see figure 14):



Figure 14 Chamber of the 1917 Constitution at the GHMC. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas.

In physical terms, this space is the final point of the trail of the museum; in metaphorical terms, according to the narrative of the museum, it is the climax, the ultimate fulfilment of Mexican history and of the Mexican people. It was built with a particular use of space, colours and symbols in such a way that, more than an exhibition room, it looks like a shrine.

As can be seen from the photograph, the Chamber is an almost empty space. It features national symbols – the flag and the coat of arms, which is the eagle sculpted in white marble – and a copy of the 1917 Constitution. An orange-tinted dome infuses the entire area with a special, very dramatic, light. Castaños (2013) has suggested that the coat of arms embodies one of the most cherished national myths: the story of how Mexico was founded in pre-Hispanic times by a divine sign – the eagle devouring a serpent standing on top of a cactus, the *nopal* – and continues to struggle for its fulfilment. As for the 1917 Constitution, in chapter three I reviewed the importance that it acquired throughout the 20th century as the symbol of the social rights obtained by the Revolution. The narrative of the Chamber is basically one whereby the oppression, the suffering and the struggle of the Mexican people were necessary sacrifices in order to become a modern and democratic nation, embodied in the 1917 Constitution. It seems to demand from visitors an emotional attachment and a “devotion” to the cult of the nation. The Chamber thus acts as a sort of civic shrine. And, based on the visitors’ comments, it does seem that this patriotic and emotional connection to history is achieved amongst some people, as we will see in chapter five.

As for the MNR, the analysis of its constitutive elements allows me to suggest that there are two interpretive axes. One of them, which can be also found in the GHMC, is the attempt to present a popular vision of history, although it also only partially succeeds. Through its texts, photographs and other elements, the MNR tries to argue that historical actors are not only the leaders, but also society in general; there is even an attempt to highlight, when possible, the participation of women. The most emblematic stance for this interpretation of history is a contemporary sculpture called *La Bola*, which is located in the centre of the museum.⁶⁷ It is visible from all the exhibition rooms and is the convergence point from any area (see figure 15, p. 119).

⁶⁷ There is no exact translation in English. *La Bola* – literally the ball – is a colloquial noun used to name a bunch or lot of people or “the masses”. It could be partially translated as “the mob” but without its negative connotation.

La Bola is an artistic representation of a conception whereby the motor of history is the people. It represents the men and women who brought about the Revolution; of different ages and physiognomies, mainly peasants, they are all pictured defiantly looking to the future. They embody the ‘myth of the Revolution’ (T. Benjamin, 2000) as a popular movement which, as seen in chapter three, is still a powerful element in present day Mexico. *La Bola* seems to act as a balance for the narratives of each of the eight rooms, all of which are still dominated by a vision of history as a chronology of famous characters and the consequences of their actions.



Figure 15 Contemporary sculpture “*La Bola*” at the MNR. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas.

The other interpretive axis that I identify in the current MNR is the attempt to present an objective and “neutral” interpretation of history. Unlike the GHMC, the MNR does not provide *quasi*-religious or essentialist narratives, nor a patriotic interpretation of history. It seems to be a museum that is not designed to present a passionate interpretation of the Revolution, but one that seeks to take an informative stand: to let visitors know what happened and why. In doing so, it is very different from the GHMC, which seeks to encourage the visitor to take a particular emotional stand from the first to the last stage of the trail. As opposed to the Constitution Chamber, the MNR ends its exhibition with a text panel entitled “Did the Revolution Change the Country?”, where it attempts to provide a balanced and open answer to the question. It asks the visitor to reflect about what was seen in the museum, not to believe in it. Unlike

the GHMC's vision of history, permeated by certainty and devotion, the MNR suggests that history is not clear-cut and that balanced opinions are necessary.

However, the MNR's attempt to create a dispassionate interpretation is not quite achieved. There are elements that counter this, some of which are *La Bola* itself, the reproduction of mural works which are known to depict historic scenes in a very dramatic way – as seen in chapter three – and, of course, the imposing presence of the Monument to the Revolution, with its heavy load of patriotism. But mostly, based on the results of the visitor study, what the museum does not seem to have accounted for is that the myth of the Revolution itself – through its images and stories – continues to exert a powerful impact on many people; an impact which is not countered by “neutral” exhibition strategies and interpretive stands. As we will see in chapter five, visitors to the MNH connected emotionally with several photographs, objects and elements of its exhibition.

The particular ideologies and interpretive stands of museums can also be analysed by looking in more detail at the way they address certain topics and historical characters. It was mentioned in the beginning of this section that historical narratives in the museum can be affiliated to theories or trends in historical scholarship, whether deliberately or unintentionally. In the last part of this section I will compare the way in which the GHMC and the MNR address the two main topics this research has focused on, the *Porfiriato* and Revolution. As presented in chapter three, these events are complex because they are the basis upon which the history of modern Mexico is interpreted. Several conclusions about the case study museums' theoretical or historiographical inclinations can be suggested, based on what they depict and what they do not. Museums often tell more about themselves by what they omit to present.

The *Porfiriato* is one of the topics of Mexican history that has experienced the most change in its interpretation throughout the years, and both the GHMC and the MNR reflect these changes. The GHMC, for example, was created in a context (the 1960s) where the *Porfiriato* and Porfirio Díaz were sensitive topics; on the whole they were condemned, or even omitted from national history. It almost seems as if at the time, there were no intellectual conditions to evaluate what they had meant. A visible sign of this is that in the GHMC there is not a single diorama of Porfirio Díaz during the *Porfiriato*. Porfirio Díaz is only depicted as a general of the republican armies – before he became a dictator – and the *Porfiriato* is vaguely represented with indirect dioramas – for example, life on an *hacienda*, the development of railways and the

persecution of political opponents. As mentioned earlier, despite its limitations, the GHMC was the first museum to articulate the *Porfiriato* into national history, as even the National Museum of History did not manage to do so until the mid 1970s – in a temporary exhibition – and more permanently only after the 2000 renovation (de Mello Vasconcellos, 2007; Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995).

The first revisionist works were published in the late 1960s, which fostered a gradual change in the intellectual approach to the period (Florescano, 1991, pp. 57, 58; Knight, 1988, p. 4). There has since been an attempt to explain the *Porfiriato* both in its relationship with – and not as a radical break from – the economic liberalism of republican governments of the mid 19th century, and as a time of development of certain sectors, such as technological and communications infrastructure, urbanism in Mexico City, as well as academic and educational development. At the same time, there continued to be recognition of the exploitation of indigenous populations, workers and peasants, which had been poignantly expressed in Turner’s essay *Barbarous Mexico*. As seen in chapter three, this balanced interpretation of the *Porfiriato* is now the norm, and can be found across different media and even at the popular level.

The “second” and new MNR, and the GHMC after the 1999-2001 refurbishment, all reflect this change in attitudes towards the *Porfiriato*, where there is a trend towards a more “balanced” interpretation. As already mentioned in this chapter, the MNR was created in 1986, so the curatorial project of Meyer and team included, from its inception, a detailed account of the period (Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995, pp. 99, 100). Although reduced in terms of space, the new MNR kept its “balanced” account of the *Porfiriato*. As for the GHMC, it was not possible to include or create new dioramas in the refurbishment, but the content of the text panels was changed and updated. Amongst the visitors’ comments, it is also possible to identify the existence of these diverse and changing positions on the *Porfiriato*, as we will see in chapter six.

The interpretation of the Revolution has also undergone changes throughout the past decades and analysis of the GHMC and the MNR offers insight into this subject. The GHMC provides an interpretation of the Revolution that was characteristic up until the revisionism of the 1960s. This is what has been termed the “classical” interpretation, that was sanctioned by the government at the time: the Revolution as a ‘monolithic, seamless and uniform’ movement (Knight, 1988, p. 8), where there were no internal divisions but only a collective upheaval for rights, out of which the 1917 Constitution and a popular government – the PRI – had arisen (Florescano, 1991, p.

77). The Constitution Chamber at the GHMC clearly embodies this idea; it merges all the past and all the future of Mexico into that iconic – almost sacred – object. The MNR also partially presents this over-simplified view of the Revolution, but it must be said that this is not due to the interpretation of the museum in itself, but because of its location under the Monument to the Revolution. As mentioned, this 1930s monument “solidified” – materially and symbolically – an interpretation where all internal divisions of this complex popular uprising were erased.

The revisionism of the 1960s and 70s fostered change in the interpretations of the Revolution, mainly by advocating that there had, indeed, been diverse and even opposing agendas between the different groups and leaders. It also allowed addressing “marginal” communities – such as women and indigenous groups – and the central role they played in the movement, which had hitherto been neglected because of the emphasis on male *caudillos* (military leaders). The “second” MNR integrated some of these revisionist elements into its discourse, although it still kept some elements of the “classical” interpretation (Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995, pp. 50–52, 97, 98), for example, its over-reliance on the importance of the 1917 Constitution as the ultimate achievement of the Revolution. The new MNR, in turn, drew on some revisionist elements from the “second” MNR, but it departed from it in that the final point of the museum was not the Constitution, but President Lázaro Cárdenas’ socialist government (Vázquez del Mercado, 2011, p. 21) and a question about the meaning and the impact of the Revolution, as already seen.⁶⁸ Still, although the MNR has indeed updated its historical narratives, the symbolic presence of the Monument imprints a “classical” interpretation and dominates above other alternative readings. As we will see in chapter six, many visitors’ ideas of the Revolution are still permeated by a sense of a uniform struggle for social rights, and of the importance of the 1917 Constitution as the guarantor of those rights.

⁶⁸ As mentioned in section 4.1, the MNR does not depend of the federal government since 1997, when it came to be managed by the local government – broadly associated with left-wing opposition. The government of Lázaro Cárdenas is a key period for those intellectual and academic traditions that sympathise with left-wing politics. Thus, it is possible to understand why the inclusion of *Cardenismo* – the period of President Cárdenas – in the historical script of the MNR was both possible and “natural” after 1997.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed how history in the museum is made. I have parted from the premise that museums have their own way of exploring the past, and that it is possible to analyse it through three different strategies: 1) the revision of their institutional history – an awareness of the particular context in which they were created and their processes of change, 2) the analysis of their exhibition strategies, with emphasis on the way they use material culture to explain history and 3) the narratives through which they convey particular interpretations of the past. The history of the institutions has been an essential part of understanding why museums depict or omit certain topics, and why there are certain contradictions or tensions within their narratives; it also helped elucidate the particular ideologies and concerns of those who created them and are responsible for them. Historicising the institution has been, indeed, an invaluable tool for understanding how historical culture operates more broadly, and how the museum fits into it. The analysis has also benefited from a more physical and detailed observation of the use of space, objects, narratives and all those elements that make of museums a special way of exploring the past.

While the analysis of how history is made in the GHMC and the MNR has been elucidating, it is still incomplete. We have seen how history is made in the institutions in relation to the broader historical culture. This research aims at understanding how people make sense of the past in the museum, and therefore, in the next two chapters it will look at visitors' experiences of the case studies. It is necessary to understand the way in which history in the museum is also "made" by visitors and their particular interpretations of the past, in relation to the past as it is exhibited in the museum and to the dynamics of the historical culture in Mexico.

CHAPTER 5

HISTORY IN THE MUSEUM: VISITORS MAKING SENSE OF THE PAST

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter addressed how history is made in the museum through its exhibit resources, space and narratives, and in general, how the museum has its own way of exploring the past. The particular histories of the GHMC and the MNR allowed us to see how their changes over time have, to a great extent, determined how they are at the moment; using Rüsen's terms, I have looked into their 'past conditions of the present' (2012, p. 45). As a result of this analysis of both their constitutive elements and their history, I showed diverse tensions and contradictions that exist in their historical narratives. This will now provide the setting against which I will analyse visitors' responses to the GHMC and the MNR. As has been argued so far, history is also "made" by the visitors as a result of their engagement with the exhibition. This chapter will enquire into peoples' historical understanding in the GHMC and the MNR and show the diverse ways in which people make sense of the past.

As mentioned in chapter one, I considered the qualitative approach to be the most suitable to address the matter, and semi-structured interviews as the most effective method for data generation. In total, 46 interviews with 81 adult visitors were used for the analysis that will be presented in the following two chapters.⁶⁹ The interviews were analysed using an interpretive approach towards visitors' comments, which means that, as a researcher, I felt the need to go beyond a literal reading of what visitors explicitly said, in order to gain a better understanding of my research questions (J. Mason, 2002, p. 149). After all, their comments are neither "evidence", nor an unquestionable reflection of social reality; they are interpretations thereof and, as such, often contradictory, ambiguous, not clearly verbalized or sometimes even obscure. Still, they can provide hints on, and insight into, the different meanings and dynamics of social life; in the specific case of this research, about the role of the past and meaning-making in history.

⁶⁹ It is worth remembering that appendices one to four present complementary information that the reader might find useful, including the pilot and main fieldwork interview protocols, the interviewees list, and different graphs with percentages of some of the main characteristics of the interviewees (such as age, gender, education, occupation, reasons for visiting and company during the visit and during the interview).

Taking an interpretive stand also means that the researcher must be aware of, and open about, his or her role in carrying out the interpretations; accordingly, I decided to *italicise* those interpretations that I myself construed based on the visitors' comments. The italicised ideas can thus be considered to encapsulate or condense patterns that I interpreted from their comments, and that I re-wrote using a metaphorical voice that draws on the arguments, words, expressions and tone that I perceived in several of the visitors' comments.

As a result of this approach, there are two methodological notes that must be made. The first is that visitors' comments will not feature as small, fragmented quotations, as is usual in visitor research that intends to "evidence" an idea by including pieces of several different interviews; in fact, interview quotations will be kept to the minimum, and used only when it is possible to include a meaningful section that provides a richer sense of the interpretive act of visitors and of the researcher.⁷⁰ Diversity might be lost but quality will, hopefully, be gained. Secondly, there will be no statistical or percentage quantifications, as the data is not statistically representative and, more importantly, it is not a "set" that together adds up to an ideal 100%. Fixed arithmetic is not appropriate when people have more than one opinion about something, as was often the case; their opinions can be variable and even contradictory.

As a result of the visitor analysis it was possible to conclude that people approach the past using different strategies. However, this was not straightforward and it took several stages of an iterative process of theory reading, coding, analysis and writing up. Whilst working on this process, I came across Saldaña's explanation of *Process Coding*; that is, coding by using words that connote action in the data (2009, p. 96). Saldaña explains that when trying to make sense of data, it is useful to think about how verbs can help grouping patterns. Based on this, I went back to the interviews and started reanalysing the data. Eventually, I noticed that there were indeed different processes or actions in the way people talked about the past. After further analysis, I came to the conclusion that there were five different ways or approximations through which visitors made sense of the past, and I named these as follows: remembering; imagining and empathising; explaining and interpreting; believing and belonging; and perceiving the

⁷⁰ Often the sections will be long as visitors do take time and space to express their ideas. After all, the style of the interview was conversational and visitors were not limited as in close-ended questionnaires. Another factor that impacted on the selection of sections of the interview was precisely their capacity to be translated without affecting the meaning as much as possible, both in terms of extension and of language, but remaining understandable for the reader.

material. This corresponds with other visitor research that has explored how meaning-making in a history museum takes place through different primary processes (interpreting, emoting, remembering and embodying) (Wise, 2011, p. 91).⁷¹ It also points at the complexity of historical consciousness and at the kaleidoscopic nature of the past in everyday life.

The analysis of the five processes also took into consideration the fact that the visitor research took place in two museums that have very different strategies for exhibiting the past, as seen in the previous chapter. Therefore, part of the analysis of the visitors' comments involved comparing and contrasting how those five processes seemed to happen at the GHMC and the MNR, in an attempt to identify a pattern – or lack thereof. As will be explicitly reviewed later, in certain instances there were elements to suggest difference, whilst in others there was a striking similarity.⁷² However, it is also possible that other factors beyond the particular exhibition strategy could feed into these differences and similarities, for example, personal reasons. After all, I did not interview the same people in both museums, so it is impossible to make a direct comparison. Still, some of the ideas that arose from this exercise could contribute to further research on this particular subject.

As with any categorization, divisions between the different approximations should not be taken too literally or as mutually exclusive. In visitors' comments it is often possible to identify that they are talking about two or more of them simultaneously, even if they appear to be contradictory or problematic. So, for example, visitors will “explain” more rationally why history is untrustworthy because it is tainted by official narratives, whilst also “believing” that patriotic history is necessary to educate the younger generations. I will now proceed to address each of the different approximations to the past that took place in the museum.

5.1 REMEMBERING

Museum literature has shown extensively how reminiscing is one of the core phenomena that takes place in the museum (Arnold-de Simine, 2013; Chen, 2007; Crane, 2000;

⁷¹ Susie Wise's dissertation is particularly useful for the present research as she did her study in the context of a history museum. As we will see, in my research I also identified the four processes she mentions; however, I suggest that there is one more process, that of the realm of belief and belonging, which is addressed in section 5.4.

⁷² Accordingly, there will be no specific reference where the proportion in the visitors' comments is equal or very similar in both case studies.

Johnstone, 1998; Kavanagh, 2000; Watson, 2010). Besides being a space for learning and socialisation, the museum has an important role as a place for memory and reminiscence. However, unlike most research which has focused on memory as a 'learning metric', my research was interested in memory as a sense-making process, just as in Wise's study (2011, p. 113). Thus, the emphasis was on what kind of memories were prompted, and how, at the case study museums of this research (the GHMC and the MNR). Memories of history taught at school were significantly stimulated by both exhibitions. However, there were other different types of memories, such as those of other museums or historic sites, those belonging to non-museal places or spaces, personal or family memories, memories of material culture and of fragmented information (such as names or slogans), images and photographs.

In total, for about 30 out of 81⁷³ visitors across both the GHMC and the MNR, visiting the museum *allowed remembering or confirming things learnt about history at elementary school, or seen in their textbooks*. Depending on the age of the visitors, this could have taken place less than three or up to 60 years ago. In most cases, scholarly memories were in general limited to fragments or lumps of time (scattered events, for example, invasions such as that of the USA in 1846), names or, in some cases, images. Visitors associated particular adjectives or qualities with specific names, fragments of narratives and even vague visual references to their textbooks; for example, five visitors commented specifically on having remembered aspects from their textbooks. An important point to note here is that the GHMC seemed to foster this type of scholarly memories much more than the MNR – in a proportion of two to one.

The connection between scholarly memories and the museum contents was generally harmonious, which means that visitors expressed that what they had learnt at school matched what the museum presented. There might be two reasons for this: first, as we have seen in chapter three, there are dominant narratives that circulate across media and in the public sphere, as a result of which there is a repetition of contents that reinforces particular interpretations. Secondly, it might be that the influence of school remains, throughout life, a powerful element with which visitors fit anything new they come to encounter, even if it is presented differently. But it was not only harmonious because of the coincidence of historical versions between the museum contents and their

⁷³ It must be stressed that these figures, and similar presented throughout chapters five and six, are not a statistical representation. They are only indicative of the number of responses from the people I interviewed.

memories; it was also because remembering aspects of scholarly history through the museum visit was a pleasurable experience, often permeated by nostalgia, or by satisfaction for being able to “retrieve” this information.

It is possible to perceive in some of the visitors’ recollections that, on the whole, in spite of being imprecise, they still had some structure or scheme, as if it was this (and not the contents) what they remembered after all those years. As mentioned in chapter two, memory contains “mental filters” (particular ‘schematic narrative templates’) that have been culturally determined; with the passage of time it is mostly this ‘general geist [*sic*]’ that we come to remember (Wertsch, 2004, pp. 51, 52; Zerubavel, 2003, pp. 4, 5). So, for example, 14 out of 37 visitors who spoke about the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata directly associated him with the memory of either one, or both, of his famous mottos: “*Tierra y Libertad*” [“Land and Freedom”] or “*La tierra es de quien la trabaja*” [“The land belongs to those who work it”]; 11 out of the 14 were GHMC visitors, so it would seem that this museum elicits this type of scholarly memory more often. There is no other character that visitors associate so clearly with a particular idea or social ideology, so it is indeed a striking pattern. This might lead us to conclude that visitors have been brought up in a historical culture where Zapata is constantly associated with these mottos. As Vaughan and Lewis have suggested, these slogans became national symbols of unity (2006, p. 4). This might be further reinforced by the fact that Zapata is often represented with a literal association with these mottos, as can be seen in the mural by Diego Rivera of the history of Mexico painted in the National Palace, (see figure 16, p. 129), or in a diorama at the GHSM (see figure 17, p. 129).

Besides school memories, several visitors mentioned memories of other museums or historical sites visited. Thus, for about 20 out of 81 people, what they saw at the GHMC or the MNR reminded them of other object(s) seen at other museums or, more broadly, of visits to other historic sites or museums. This stood out more clearly in the MNR – 13 out of the 20 people – probably because it has more similarity with other museums, unlike the GHMC, which is unique in its exhibition resources. Moreover, about half of the visitors (41) used memories from other museum visits, often unaware, to talk about the GHMC or the MNR. All this suggests that museum memories tend to constitute a special “network of recall” that is triggered on every new museum visit.



Figure 16 Diego Rivera's mural at the National Palace, fragment depicting Zapata. Source: Wikimedia Commons



Figure 17 Diorama of Zapata and Zapatistas at the GHMC. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas

As for the reasons why museums or historic sites visits tend to specifically foster the memory of other visited museums or historic sites, two reasons can be considered – although there may be more: 1) museums present the same type of contents (explanations with the same historical narrative) or present it similarly (a type of display that has a particular structure, such as showcases and text panels, for example) which makes it easier for visitors to make links between different museum visits; and 2) museum visits are an extra-ordinary activity that usually occurs only a few times during a person's lifetime, and therefore, to a certain extent it becomes a special event that is more easily remembered; for example, learning something new, or seeing things with a new approach that is deemed significant. This follows on some of the ideas expressed by Sandell (2007), according to whom it is precisely museums' "extra-ordinary" character that enables them to influence peoples' perceptions.

Another important aspect of approaching the past in the museum through remembrance, as perceived in the visitors' comments, is memories related to their own lives, or that of relatives. The museum visit triggered a more emotional rapprochement with the past through these personal memories. Note must be made, however, that when comparing responses from the GHMC and the MNR, it seemed that the MNR was more successful in eliciting this type of personal memories. Only six visitors at the GHMC talked about personal memories that the museum had elicited in them, compared to 19 at the MNR. As we will see later on in the chapter, this could partly be due to the particular characteristics of the exhibition resources – in one case dioramas and in the other objects and photographs.

Among the most mentioned "types" of personal memories are those related to childhood, to their parents' stories about the past and, even more prominently, family stories about the Revolution. For example, one visitor at the MNR used his childhood memories in order to understand what the time of the Revolution could have been like because in his town *they still use horses and there are peasants, just like in the photographs of those times*; while another interviewee also at the MNR understood the times of the Cristero War in relation to how her mother's religious marriage ceremony had to be carried out in a private house, in secret, and with a borrowed wedding dress.⁷⁴ In particular, there

⁷⁴ The Cristero War or *Cristiada* was a religious conflict that started in the end of the 1920s, when the post-revolutionary governments started cutting down the privileges and social presence of the Church, which Porfirio Díaz had granted them. Among those things, public religious ceremonies (masses) were proscribed. It must be born in mind that since President Benito Juárez and the Republican government

was a recurring comment amongst visitors that *their relatives lived the Revolution*, even in cases where a calculation based on the interviewees' age makes this seem unlikely. Therefore, it appears that there is some need to, or value in, linking their family histories with an event that is perceived to be very significant or mythical, almost as if this conveyed some sort of "prestige". In these cases, family stories are a means for understanding and connecting with the past by linking 'little narratives to big ones' (Rowe et al., 2002), that is, personal memories to history.

In the interviews it is also possible to identify a particular phenomenon of remembrance: in linking history with family stories and personal memories, some visitors used objects. For about seven visitors, museum objects allowed them to remember a familiar past, that is, material culture that was part of their own everyday life in the past or present. The objects mentioned included bank notes, pieces of clothing, weapons, agricultural tools, photographs, jewellery, furniture, suitcases and a saddle. It can thus be argued that objects and photographs from the MNR seemed to prompt memories much more than the dioramas of the GHMC. The reason for this might be that visitors established a personal and intimate connection with the contents of the museum – and, thus, were able to relate to the past – through seeing things that looked like other things with which they were familiar.

I will reproduce here a segment of the interview with Vicente and Mateo, which I believe provides a sense of the issues presented so far. Vicente is a 51-year-old man, who comes from a northern state of Mexico, father of several children, part-time peasant and part-time mechanic, who never finished primary school but seemed to have an interest in history. He was visiting the MNR with his friend Mateo, a 51-year old local politician and advisor, who has a B.A. in Public Administration:

Cintia: Ok, and from the things you saw, was there something you found familiar or that brought to your mind memories?

Vicente: Well, everything is history. You remember your childhood, your youth, when you study, when you learn and are being explained all about this...

Cintia: Indeed. And what about you Mateo?

Mateo: Yes, sure! We were talking about the silver coins that I saw, that we saw... I had the chance to see the silver coins, those that did make noise. And

published the Reform Laws in the 1850s, which severely limited the Church's possessions and social control (that it had developed throughout the Colonial period), the relationship between government and Church had been very tense. Díaz had smoothened things by negotiating some concessions, but in the 1920s, the new attempt of governments to control once more the power of the Church triggered a social upheaval from conservative sectors, priests, peasants and lower socioeconomic groups, who felt catholic religion was being threatened.

the machines... we were discussing that now it is really easy to send messages, but before there was the telegraph. The weapons... My father, he died when he was 93 years old; he was born in 1889, he practically lived the Revolution, and well, the 30-30 rifles, the Mauser, well, I saw those as a child ...Fortunately I did not have to endure all the chaos in the country, but my dad did, he did indeed.

[...]

Cintia: Did your father take part in the Revolution?

Mateo: Yes, he participated. I even have photographs of him, armed and on horseback, and well, you feel pride, and besides... it has more value to see all their struggles so that we are more or less at peace now [...]

Cintia: Vicente, do you have any family memory related to the Revolution?

Vicente: You see, my mom... she was born in 1918. She talked with us a lot about the Revolution, of her history...she read a lot of books. My dad also [...] My mom is gone now but it stuck with me, what they told us, the little we studied at school [...] And now, seeing it again, it's like living it all over again [...]

Cintia: Of course. And is there something in the things you saw in the museum that particularly struck you?

[...]

Vicente: I loved the riding saddle! [laughs]

Cintia: The one that belonged to Villa?⁷⁵

Vicente: Yes, the saddle because... I like horses very much. I am from the state of Chihuahua, that is where I come from. I have had [*sic*] my own horses. I really like, I really like the saddle ...I, when I was 14 years old I had my good horses [*sic*], yes, I was... in spite of being short I mounted them by running. Today I am... being 51 years-old, I am heavy, I can't ride them as rough [*sic*] but I do like riding. It's that: the horse saddle, I love seeing, I... well, everything, but particularly the saddle...Oh, how pretty it is!

This part of the interview illustrates several of the points discussed above. It shows how there is an effort, and even pride, in connecting their family histories with that of the Revolution – even when dates do not match or seem unlikely to match. It also illustrates how objects in the museum become part of reminiscing and help to integrate more organically the personal sphere with the historical narratives; they make the past familiar by linking it emotionally to the present.

Whilst the GHMC might seem to have been more effective in eliciting scholarly memories, as mentioned earlier in this section, the MNR was much more enabling of diversity in the memories; that is, visitors at the MNR remembered not only history taught at school but also some of the other types of memories mentioned, such as memories of other places, of museums or historic sites, of material culture and of family

⁷⁵ The MNR exhibits in one of the rooms the saddle of one of the revolutionary leaders, Francisco Villa, known colloquially as Pancho Villa. He was originally from northern Mexico and is one of the most iconic figures of both the Revolution and Mexican history.

memories. The variety of exhibition resources and the general approach to exhibiting the past might impact on prompting memory in particular ways. The GHMC, made up mostly of dioramas and with its very scholarly approach to history, as we saw in chapter four, seemed to trigger one particular type of memory – history learnt at school.

It might also be possible to suggest that artefacts (notwithstanding whether they are replicas or originals) have an evocative power that is different from that of dioramas or mock-ups, at least as perceived in this research. Drawing on material culture in museums theory, it is possible to suggest that the quality of the objects themselves can be the source of different engagements; that is, the ‘way in which we experience objects is shaped by [...their...] physical properties’ (Dudley, 2010b, p. 5) and as such, dioramas – for example – are evocative of certain types of memory (narratives, names, information learnt at school) but not others (family memories).

5.2 IMAGINING AND EMPATHISING

Besides memory, the museum can trigger other types of intellectual encounters with the past, such as empathy, feeling and imagination. The definition and analysis of these terms is a challenging task, as they cross several disciplinary fields and all have to do with human thinking, as a result of which there is often an overlapping of ideas. A high proportion of the academic production about empathy, feeling and imagination has come from areas such as psychology, philosophy, literature, and, more recently, history, to mention a few (Cocking & Murray, 1991; Coplan & Goldie, 2011; Hogan, 2011; Langdon & Mackenzie, 2012a; Reddy, 2001).

As for museum-related literature, some was produced around the 1990s and early 2000s, for example, Bruce Craig’s essay about imagination at historical sites (1989); Bagnall’s (2003; 1996) visitor studies focused on feeling and imagination; the articles contained in the book *Making Early Histories in Museums* (Merriman, 1999), which dealt with the challenges of imagining or visualizing prehistory and ancient history; and Pekarik, Doering and Karn’s (1999) visitor research of “Introspective Experiences”, which dealt with evocation and imagination in the museum. The problem with this research is that, because of its novelty, it was carried out at an exploratory stage and thus, the use of the concepts – for example the distinction between imagination and feeling – was often vague or imprecise. More recently, there has been an increase in research on areas such as imagination, feeling and sensation in museums (Dudley, 2010b; Gregory & Witcomb, 2007; Watson et al., 2012; Watson, 2010; Witcomb, 2013).

After reading some of the abovementioned research in the early stages of the PhD course, I became interested in the area, especially as regards how people imagine the past and empathise with people from it. The present research has sought to contribute to this growing area, not only by producing new ideas that enrich our understanding, but also by working on the precision with which we use the terms. Accordingly, the interview protocol of the present research was designed, from the early stages, to address the role of imagination, feeling and empathy in the visitors' experiences of the past in the museum. Visitors were asked how they imagined (explicitly using this word) life was like in the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution. By asking this, instead of something such as "what was life like in the past?", the question stressed the notion of *imagination* – and not factual knowledge or information-based logics – in thinking about the past. Some of them were also asked whether they thought that people from those times were different from them, and all were asked if they identified (using this word) themselves with any historical character; these last two questions were aimed at analysing the concept of *empathy*.

Imagination is understood here as how people create, based on what they already know and – equally important – making-up what they do not, mental visualizations of what the past was like, or better put, what they think it could have been like. Of course, memory is also involved in this process in that it is the source which triggers imagination. Hence, imagination here is understood both as a capacity for picturing things (image-making) that are somehow absent or unknown, and as a creative force of its own with power of synthesis, to bring things together in a new way (Cocking & Murray, 1991, pp. vii–xiii). It is, thus, a key concept for analysing how people understand history in the museum, because it has to do with how they combine what they are seeing in the exhibition with what they already know, or not, in order to give meaning to and visualize the past. It is possible to get a sense of this from some instances in the interviews. I will present here a fragment of the interview with Vladimir and Sara, a couple who visited the MNR:

Cintia: How do you imagine life was like in the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution?

Vladimir: In the *Porfiriato*, very posh.

Cintia: Why?

Vladimir: At least in Mexico City, it was very posh [...] Before, you had to go to the *Alameda* [a downtown park, famous for middle- and high-class leisure in the 19th century] with gowns [...] Everybody wore gowns, let's say well dressed. And then there were all the monuments because they brought all the... Porfirio Díaz

brought all the French ideas to Mexico City, so that is what he wanted to transform it into, he wanted to make a little France [...]

Sara: And then? I mean, because first you are saying that it was posh, so afterwards, what was it like?

Vladimir: [...] In the provinces, it was very rural, only going to church, to sow and plough, and the mines, the mines and the sowing.

Sara: Agriculture...

Vladimir: And a lot of mines, in the north [of the country] there was a lot of mining.

Cintia: And how do you imagine life was like in the Revolution?

Vladimir: In the Revolution, the first thing that comes to mind is the train [...] How do I imagine it? A lot of fields, from the south all the way up to San Luis Potosí [a state located in northern Mexico], and even further north, a lot of visual landscape [...] The train was a very important means of transport. You could sit and watch, watch everything ... and the journeys were long, so you could contemplate all the landscapes. That is what I imagine about the Revolution. As for people, well, peasants. When the Revolution broke out, when all the movement broke out, I imagine hills full of people fighting, total chaos, curfews all the time, loneliness. And if you were out in the fields, watch out that you weren't [caught] by the revolutionary or by the *Porfirista* army. I mean, a lot of uncertainty, and a lot of fear. I imagine that.

Sara: [Expression of amazement on her face] You should be a teacher! [to Vladimir]

Cintia: Sara, how do you imagine things?

Sara: Me... Peasants. I imagined it... I always imagined it that way, but now that he started to talk I felt like "wow, I had not seen it that way!" But yes, peasants.

The interview with Vladimir and Sara provides a sense of how certain visitors used their imagination intensively in order to create mental landscapes or visualisations of the past, whilst others did not use this strategy much. In this case, Vladimir, a 28-year-old lawyer, expressed with rich detail how he envisaged things when asked how he imagined life was like in the past. In comparison, Sara, a 29-year-old graduate of Cultural Management, seemed more concrete in her approach to the question.

It must be recognised that clear examples of this kind are not abundant in the interviews. Imagination remained an elusive concept to track, and enquiring into how visitors imagined the past was not an easy task. However, the analysis and subsequent interpretation of visitors' comments provided some additional insight to advance our understanding of the topic. As a result of the visitor study, it is possible to suggest that certain visitors did attempt to shape or give form to the past when imagining it. Some theories and authors provide ideas as to how this process of shaping the past occurs. One of them is narrative theory, which contends that giving shape to time is an essential human act of converting astronomical and mathematical time into an experiential and

meaningful one, through the use of narrative (converting unconnected events into a string of time that has a beginning, a middle and an end) (Porter Abbott, 2008, pp. 4, 5; Roberts, 2001, pp. 3, 6, 16). Another useful author is Zerubavel who, through social and cognitive psychology, contends that we build mental ‘topographies’; that is, ‘map-like structures’ with which we order the passage of time by giving it a formal feature, such as lines and circles (2003, pp. 1, 2). When combining narratives and topographies particular “shapes” of imagination can be created; for example, lines of progress or decline.

About 31 out of 81 visitors imagined the past as *a difficult or hard time, where violence, instability, hunger, slavery and poverty were ordinary things*. Similarly, 38 visitors considered that there had been an improvement in certain areas, like education, access to material things and a degree of equality in social rights. This can be read as a linear-progressive shape of time whereby *the present is better than the past and, although there is still much to be done, we essentially have better lives now than people in the past*. This linear narrative of progress can also be found in Mexican historiographies from the 19th century, and often in history school curricula throughout the 20th century, where students are taught according to positivis views of history and progress.⁷⁶ This finding goes hand in hand with Lee’s research about how ideas of the past are often affected by a ‘deficit’ view, where change equals progress and ‘things get better’ with time (Jones, 2011, p. 63; Lee, 2002, pp. 33, 34).

As explained in chapter three, the GHMC is a museum infused with a positivist view of history – in other words, as a linear path to constant improvement and progress. The MNR does not adopt this position or, at least, it is much less explicit about it. It is thus surprising that the way visitors imagined the past – as a line of progress with a deficit view of the past – had similar figures at both the GHMC and the MNR. In the GHMC, for example, 17 people talked about the *Porfiriato* and Revolution as a hard, difficult and/or violent time, whilst 16 people did in the MNR; in another example, 22 visitors at the GHMC talked about the improved conditions in the present compared to the past, and 18 people did so at the MNR. This might suggest that people have certain overarching ideas or patterns for imagining the past, regardless of the exhibition

⁷⁶ As we saw in chapter three, ideas of progress according to the philosophical doctrine of Positivism were pervasive during Porfiriato and were later on integrated into 20th century historical narratives (Matute, 2010, pp. 217, 218). It must be said, though, that this linear progressive conception of history is not exclusive to Mexico but a rather common view in the Western world (Bowler, 1989).

resources with which the museum presents the past. The reason might be that positivist views of history are present in other elements of the historical culture such as popular media, textbooks or commemorations, often for political purposes, whereby the State legitimizes itself by highlighting “improvement” in comparison to previous governments. It does make sense to think that there are greater influences that impact on the progressive way in which visitors create narratives of the past, both at GHMC and the MNR. I will address this further in chapter six.

As for empathy, it can also be understood as a type of imagination but its specificity is that it focuses on imagining peoples’ life in the past; it is about “putting oneself in someone else’s shoes”. Empathy refers to how visitors position themselves as human beings in or of the past, how they identify or relate to other people, and the different levels of involvement this can take. Some are more cognitive, a sort of ‘cold empathy’ type, and some are very affective and emotional; a sort of ‘hot empathy’ type (Hawes & Dadds, 2012, p. 47; Langdon & Mackenzie, 2012b, p. 3). Through the analysis of visitor interviews it was possible to identify the varying ways in which people linked to other people from the past.

I will present here, in order to provide a sense of these different levels of empathic engagement, a section of the interview with Miriam, a 61-year-old retired nurse, and her son Oliver, a 21-year-old marketing student, both of whom were visiting the MNR casually, out of a shared interest in history. Almost at the beginning of the interview I asked them their opinion about the *Porfiriato*, a very contested period of Mexican history, as seen in chapter three, and they began talking about it with some ambivalence, partly because they seemed to have different positions on it:

Miriam: [...] If a dictatorship is good, then ok, but dictatorships...well... as a type of government, are not good if they do not benefit the poor...Indeed... It is not ok...

Cintia: Sure... And do you think that the *Porfiriato* was successful in that respect?

Miriam: Well... it was a bonanza but only for... some

Oliver: Well, that is because there will always be... There are always those who have more and those who have less, but there are times in which things are more or less balanced.

Miriam: Yes.

Oliver: That is how I see it, I don’t know...

Miriam: And if things are indeed even, then probably people would make do, and what happened afterwards would not actually have happened: the times of the Revolution.

Cintia: Sure. So, Miriam, is it your view that there was a bonanza, but only for some...?

Miriam: Yes.

Cintia: And then, as a result, came the unrest that became the Revolution?
 Miriam: For the masses...for those that did not have...You can see it in the images, you can see destitute people, the uneducated, the illiterate...Oh! That makes me... [her voice quivers with rage and she contains an impulse to cry]
 Oliver: She feels angry... [talking to me]
 Miriam: It hits me really hard! [wailing and with a strong voice]
 Cintia: Yes? Why?
 Miriam: Why? Because of the inequality. That's why. Sorry... [She stops talking and starts crying...]
 Cintia: Don't worry. Do you want me to stop the recording?
 Miriam: [Says no with a movement of her head]
 Oliver: Why are you crying mom?! [laughs]
 Cintia: How do you see the *Porfiriato*, Oliver? [asking him in order to give Miriam time to recover]
 Oliver: Well, as I told you, for me it is the best time that Mexico has ever had and will ever have, because who knows how we are going to be in the coming years!
 Cintia: Well, the museum does present delicate issues... There is a lot of history in here! [Again, giving Miriam some time to recover]
 Miriam: A lot of history! Well, and also what happens is that my grandparents, my paternal grandmother...
 Oliver: Oh, now I see!!!
 Miriam: She was practically an *Adelita*...
 Cintia: Really?
 Oliver: Yes, I think what happened [why Miriam cried] was that she was thinking about my grandfather, that means her dad, because she [the *Adelita* grandmother] was very old [...]

What happened during the interview was that Miriam developed a very intimate connection to the topic of the Revolution through her family memories; specifically, her grandmother and her father. She herself experienced rage when speaking about the harsh conditions of the past, but her emotional engagement was mediated by family stories and personal family memories. She experienced a “hot empathy” type of approach. However, Oliver is significantly distanced from the moment and seemed to think in a more “rational” way, without any further emotional involvement, but clearly understanding his mother's circumstances. After all, his family connection is more distant, and so too is his emotional engagement.

The range of answers by visitors shows that all those levels of involvement exist, from imagining how their life would have been like and achieving some cognitive level of understanding, although without any emotional element included, to the most emotional answers, where visitors almost seemed to personally experience sadness, rage, tenderness, fear, vulnerability or love. When this type of “hot empathy” took place, there seemed to be other personal factors involved, such as challenging personal

circumstances or family memories, as seen with Miriam. In any case, it showed that visitors were able to connect at an intimate level with the past in the museum through triggering empathy. In her visitor research, Wise found that ‘emoting is a foundational aspect of sense-making’ through affective responses to the exhibits, and also that it was often combined with other processes (2011, pp. 122–125).

It remains an open question, though, to what extent museums can induce or prompt empathic responses and how much of it is an involuntary or spontaneous expression that depends entirely on the visitor. Based on the interview analysis, the exhibition strategy and resources have a certain level of impact as to what type of identification visitors can establish with historical characters. For example, the MNR was clearly more successful than the GHMC in fostering amongst visitors an empathic connection, in particular with women of the past, whether in the 19th century generally or the *Adelitas* of the Revolution. As seen in section 4.3, the “second” and new MNR included women more prominently in their historical narratives, as part of their updating of contents, so it is possible that their strategy worked. For example, only eight visitors at the GHMC referred in some way to the participation or experiences of women in the past, compared to 24 comments at the MNR, many of which were not only an intellectual recognition of their role but also an emotional connection with them.

The comparison of both case studies also suggests that photographs and objects of everyday life, especially any type of clothing (whether replicas or originals) were much more conducive to fostering empathy than the dioramas. This corresponds with Dudley’s claims – mentioned in section 5.1 – as regards to how the physicality of certain objects affects our engagement with them (2010b, p. 5). In particular, at the MNR several women seemed to feel empathy for women of the 19th century and the Revolution through an exhibited dress – a replica of a mid-19th century gown – and photographs of *Adelitas*, both of which encouraged them to think about women in the past (see figures 18 and 19, p. 140). This did not happen with any of the dioramas at the GHMC; only four visitors mentioned one of the few “heroines” of Mexican history, Mrs. Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez – whom I will briefly discuss in section 6.2 – but only two of them linked her to a particular diorama.



Figure 18 Glass case with replica of 19th century dress at the MNR. Source: Cintia Velázquez



Figure 19 Photograph of *Adelitas*, the women of the Revolution, at the MNR. Source: Cintia Velázquez

At the MNR, the photographs of *Adelitas* and the replica of the 19th century dress were often the cause of comments charged with emotional empathy. About 15 visitors talked about women's life in the past, or their participation in the Revolution. In

particular, women (11 in total) showed a higher degree of empathy – a “hot empathy” type, with a stronger, emotional link – than men (four in total). Female visitors commented on things such as *the difficulty of raising children in harsh conditions, suffering with their monthly periods during war, having to cope with the discomfort of wearing tight and thick dresses during hot weather and the horror of facing fear and hunger on their own whilst also having to look after their family*. Men’s comments were about how the condition of women had improved through time, a sort of “cold empathy” approach.

Thus, although there is certainly a personal factor involved in how much people emotionally engage with exhibitions, as the cases of Miriam and Oliver suggest, or the differences of engagement between men and women, some types of exhibits seemed more effective at eliciting empathic responses. At the MNR, for example, the clothing and photographs were powerful triggers of emotions. This matches with what has been found in other visitor research in the USA, which argues that ‘different objects can engender different sense-making processes’, by showing how photographs encouraged more reminiscence and emotions than other elements (Wise, 2011, pp. 126–127, 134).

This points at the need for more research into the specific dynamics of the ‘visitor-exhibition encounter’ (Sandell, 2007), for example, on how much cultural contexts impact on the empathic responses to particular objects, or whether some objects are more conducive than others to prompt pre-set responses in visitors. In any case, I consider that the broader perspective should not be lost. After all, images and narratives about the past in the museum are related to the historical culture where they are immersed. Thus, for example, whilst photographs of *Adelitas* might have been an exhibit resource that enhances more empathy than dioramas, there is a whole socio-cultural context – as seen in section 3.2 – that could explain this: images of – and even songs about – the women of the Revolution have a strong popular appeal in Mexico.

5.3 EXPLAINING AND INTERPRETING

Among all the different ways of approaching the past, this is the one that has gained the most attention and accounts from researchers; especially, those from the history didactics area, as they focus on how people come to learn about and interpret the past at school. As mentioned in chapter two, authors have debated about how children use historical concepts, how they develop an understanding of the tools to make history, and how they come to build an idea of truth and evidence in history (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Lee, 2004; P. N. Stearns et al., 2000). In visitor studies, interpretation has also

been a more developed area of research compared to the others I have presented so far, such as remembering, imagining or empathising. This has been the case mostly because it focuses on what messages the visitors get and whether this was as intended, or not. As Wise notes, '[i]nterpreting is often what we think of when we think of sense-making in museums' (2011, p. 97).

In the first place, half the visitors (40 out of 81) perceived the museum as *a place that allows us to acquire information, know more about the past and educate oneself*. Unlike more recent learning theories – especially constructivism, developed from the 1960s onwards – that conceive learning as something much more complex, beyond the mere acquisition of information (Hein, 1996, pp. 31, 32), amongst visitors, learning is still about “education”. It is about being told, or absorbing, important information one should know about to become a more “cultivated” or knowledgeable person; that is, for those visitors, learning is conceived as increasing their ‘amount’ of knowledge in a linear way (Dierking, 1996, p. 5) with knowledge being conceived as factual information. This information includes not only what could be called “hard” data – names, dates, events – but also values that they consider are essential, and that any Mexican should be thus familiar with.

This particular conception of learning – acquisition of factual information combined with a strong moral overtone – seems to be an important aspect of Mexican society, where authority – in this case, the museum – is highly respected, as Briseño and Anderson recently argued (2012a, p. 167). For example, for 15 visitors, the role of the museum was *to educate new generations*, meaning by this both the provision of information and also of certain “national values”. However, this perspective of the museum as a source for acquiring unquestionable information – values included – and of history as truth is not without its problems. As we will see later on in section 6.2, the State’s involvement in both museums and historical affairs creates conflicting views about truth, learning and knowledge.

But the interpretation of the interviews also allows us to identify learning in a different light, although visitors themselves might not express it as explicitly. For example, about 36 out of 81 people expressed ideas that suggest that the museum had awakened their curiosity, had made them look at things differently, or simply helped them make sense out of things they had not considered before. The interviews also suggest that certain aspects of the museum allowed them to connect information, in order to build an explanation of a particular aspect, for example, of what life was like in

the past, how it relates to the present, how the present is understood as a result or consequence of the past, or simply, how things changed, evolved or turned out as they are. Therefore, for these visitors, the museum was more than a place for acquiring knowledge; it was a place that allowed them to interpret the past more holistically, and they did so in a variety of ways.

The explicit comparison of the past and the present was a constant feature of the visitors' interpreting activity. It must be recognised that the interview protocol did contain two questions that encouraged this comparison (broadly speaking, they were asked whether they thought that life and people in the past were like those of today). Still, in many cases it was the visitors themselves, some from the very beginning, who spontaneously started to use past-present comparisons to answer questions. A considerable proportion of visitors seemed aware of the complex relationship between the past and the present; for example, 31 out of 81 visitors thought that *the present was like the past but different* and/or that *it was very similar but not exactly the same, as some elements from the past continue to exist*. Furthermore, out of these 31 visitors, five used popular expressions or proverbs to express the idea of *same song, different tune*. These perceptions point at some of the central issues of the academic literature on historical consciousness which I referred to in chapter two: the relationship between the past, the present and the future (Rüsen, 2004b), and how there is a very intimate connection between the past and the present, to such an extent that people find it difficult to think of one without the other.

Janine's interview at the MNR provides a sense of the way in which the present and the past were perceived to be *the same but not equal*, or very similar. She is 23 years old and is about to finish her training as a secondary-school history teacher. Probably because of her professional bias, she was aware of her own reasoning throughout the visit; however, she also spoke about her everyday life from the perspective of a layperson. In both cases – whether speaking as a teacher or not – it is possible to perceive the confusion and the sort of intellectual effort involved in trying to explain the relationship between present and past:

Cintia: And, about the people, Mexicans... Do you think that Mexicans from the 19th and 20th century, well, from the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution, were similar to you? Or are we very different? If so, in what way?

Janine: No, I think we are similar. Actually, I really like to do this comparison with my students. Supposedly we tend to look at things like "ah, that was in the Revolution, that was in 1910!", things like that, but in the end, if you analyse things a bit more, there are all sorts of things that we repeat all over again. It came to my mind whilst I was looking at an image of Francisco I Madero [one of

the Revolutionary leaders, based in the north of Mexico] with his boots and all, and I said to myself: “well, they used them like that, and now it is the fashion among young girls to use boots and trousers tucked down inside them”. So, I think that even when we see things as distant, there are many... well, we are similar, and in the end, we repeat, we have many trends or things that they did in their everyday life. We too have it in our everyday life, but sometimes we are unaware of it, I mean, we don’t even think about it, despite the fact that they are things or customs that we have been with us, or we have dragged with, us since those times. So, I think we are the same... The same but in different times! [laughs].

[...]

Cintia: Do you see things from the Mexico of the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution in today’s country, or do you think the country has changed a lot?

Janine: No, I think that... How can I say it? We are the same, in everything. There are many things that obviously changed, right?, and there is that abyss between what was then and what is now. But as I told you, I think it is a matter of analysing aspects of certain things or paying attention to the details and you realise that some things don’t change, things continue to be the same [...]

Visitors also carried out interpretive activities through the use of the resources of the exhibition. Their understanding of the past was impacted by the way they approached the exhibits as historical sources, whether the museum building itself – for example the meaning of the Monument to the Revolution –, digital devices, objects, images or texts. In about 28 comments it is possible to identify instances where the interviewees describe how they interacted with the museum, what they did, and how they reached a particular conclusion about history. For example, visitors commented on how *they had not seen everything because they did not have a lot of time, but that they quickly scanned the most important things*; that *they found that the museum had too much text* or, on the contrary, that *the museum did not have enough information*; that *the museum had different types of things and this made history more tangible, accessible and appealing*; that *they had been amazed to see the detail of the objects/dioramas and had thought about how they were manufactured*; how *they shifted between reading the text and seeing the objects*; or how *they had spotted missing information or gaps in the content*, among others. These are all processes that according to contemporary and constructivist theories can be considered as “learning” (Hein, 1996), and that point at meaning-making (interpretation).

An important aspect of the way in which visitors interpreted the museum was through the discussion and exchange of points of view with their companions for the visit, often their children, which ranged from topics as diverse as what life was like in the past, comments on specific exhibits or characters, personal memories and family stories, and criticisms of “official history”. In about 31 interviews, people verbalised comments

that suggest that for a considerable proportion of visitors (about 53 out of 81) the interpretation of the past is closely related to how they learn with their relatives. This has been explored in museum literature, for example, by Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson (2002) and McManus (1994). I will address this in more detail in chapter five.

Finally, for visitors, an important aspect of approaching the past through interpretation was being able to explain historical events and characters. However, in my view, the explanations that visitors gave were not “new” or endogenous to the museum. Rather, they seem to be related to the narrative schemes they acquired in everyday life, through family contacts and school, as seen in chapter two. Visitors drew on particular elements or exhibits of the museum in order to refresh or re-articulate these explanatory paths that they already knew. As seen in chapter four, the GHMC and the MNR have some similarities, but also differences in the narratives and strategies by which they explain particular events. In spite of this, visitors in both cases shared similar explanations for things. In this sense, it is possible to agree with recent findings from an Icelandic perspective, according to which people “impose” on, or confirm in, the museum previous understandings that they have (Whitehead, 2013, pp. 285, 286).

5.4 BELIEVING AND BELONGING

In chapters two and three I discussed national identity and its relationship with history, drawing on ideas provided by ethno-symbolism, everyday nationalism, myth and narrative. As I clarified then, this research is not focused on national identity, but it does recognise that national identity is a central element of historical culture and of peoples’ historical consciousness. Also, as different authors have pointed out, one of the places where ideas – and even myths – of the nation and nationalism are displayed more intensely is museums (Aronsson, 2011; Knell, 2011; R. Mason, 2007; Preziosi, 2011). As Mason argues, national museums provide ‘an origin story’ and claim to represent the nation or significant parts of it; they also provide the possibility of ‘knowing the nation’ (2007, pp. 73, 84, 90). People visiting museums engage with those issues, not only because they are exhibited in the museum, but also because they are part of everyday life. As the analysis of the interviews suggests, besides remembering, imagining and empathising, explaining and interpreting, another approach by which visitors make sense of the past is through belief and belonging, based on ideas of nationalism and collective identity.

In the first place, some visitors perceive history to be something beyond mere knowledge or information. From about 18 peoples' comments it is possible to interpret that *history is about connecting with our ancestors and our roots*; it is an element of identity based on our need to belong to a community and is something which they perceive to be *inherited or part of a tradition*. Moreover, a few visitors (four) even claimed that, *unlike other countries – especially the USA – Mexico has a lot of history*, which they stated with a certain dose of pride.⁷⁷ Visiting the history museum is discovering oneself with a common past and being part of a cycle, in contact with, and reproducing, that tradition; it is a sort of “symbolic pilgrimage” to the origins of the nation.

The idea of the history museum visit as a pilgrimage goes hand in hand with the perception of the history museum as a place that *safeguards national identity*. Thirty-two people expressed this in different ways, for example, that the museum *educates and puts us in contact with our own past*, that it *fosters nationalism and love for our country and our ancestors*, that *it makes you appreciate and recognise all that has preceded us*, and that *it makes you more aware of your own culture*. Based on these ideas, it is possible to suggest that history is cherished by visitors not only as something that roots them in the past, but also as something that provides an orientating element in the present. This idea was present, broadly considered, in both museums; however, when looked at in more detail, it was possible to identify a subtle difference. From the abovementioned narratives, visitors in the GHMC were more inclined than those in the MNR to talk about the museum as *a place to foster nationalism, love and admiration for the country* – six in comparison to one. This could be partly due, following the analysis I presented in chapter four, to the particular configuration of the GHMC, which stresses patriotic feelings through different means.

The interview with Esther provided rich insight into the idea of the past as a source of collective identity. She is a 55-year-old house-wife who only studied elementary school and was born to an indigenous family in southern Mexico, which migrated to Mexico City around the 1960s. She was visiting the MNR of her own free will, out of love for history. We had been talking about the purpose of museums and why she thought they were important:

Cintia: Do you think that museums have a function?

Esther: Yes.

⁷⁷ As a side comment, it was interesting to identify that although literature tends to closely relate heritage and identity (Gaynor Bagnall, 1996; Macdonald, 2005), and even in spite of the fact that *patrimonio* [heritage or patrimony] is a word that significantly circulates in the public sphere in Mexico, the word is practically absent in the interviews (only two visitors tangentially used it).

Cintia: Which one?

Esther: Yes. They have a function. For example, this museum [is] to teach the new generations, so that the lads that come, they can know all the history of Mexico, as I was telling you before, all that happened, that our ancestors underwent so that we can now enjoy this, freedom and all, because a lot do not know where we come from or all that was before. But this museum has all that, all the history of ancient Mexico.⁷⁸

Cintia: Why is it important to know?

Esther: Well, I think...For example, I have grandchildren and I want to bring them because, well, they are young, seven years old, but they do know how to read, and I imagine that if I bring them I will teach them and explain to them what I know, for example, about my ancestors and my mom, my grandparents and all that. I will explain this museum to them and it will help me because it has many things from our ancestors. So then, with that, and seeing, reading and telling the little I know, well, I think that perhaps they will learn [...]

Cintia: So, for you, it is important to know history?

Esther: Oh, yes! Well, for me it is!

Cintia: Why?

Esther: Well, because I like it. As I was saying, I like to know how our ancestors lived, where we come from... I mean, I have that curiosity of...For example, classes inter-mixed...because the Spanish came and all that, and they mixed... How can I say it?... Yes, the blood...

Cintia: The *mestizaje*?

Esther: Yes, *mestizaje* mixed [*sic*], so I think to myself “probably I am a descendant of... I don’t know, of Zapata”...Because we all have an ancestry, so all this is part of our past. We did not see it, but that is what the museum is for. I am glad that they rescued all this from our history, from our ancestry. If these museums did not exist, then our grandchildren would not know anything about that. We might have an idea, but now, after seeing, well... For example, I was looking at the photos and all, my mind flew backwards [*sic*], to how they lived, how they died, what their descendants were like, I don’t know... So, I also want my grandchildren to at least know about where we come from, about everything that was before them, before us.

From Esther’s comments it is also possible to get a sense that the concept of the past as roots and ancestry gives way to admiration, even affection, and a feeling of identification with the country’s history in general, both in “good” and “bad” times. About 17 out of 81 visitors seemed to perceive that *as a culture, Mexicans have resulted from all that previous generations endured through time and all the sacrifices that they made for us to be better now*. This perception matches what Castaños has called ‘Mexico’s master myth’ (2013, p. 88), as seen in chapter three: a pervasive collective narrative according to which people have followed a prolonged course of action, marked by a constant effort to

⁷⁸ By “ancient history” Esther was referring to 19th and 20th centuries, the time period addressed in the museum.

overcome certain conditions, in order to reach the decisive point, that of becoming “the Mexican nation”.

As seen in chapter two, myths are particularly relevant in the realm of national identity; they are one of the anchors by which societies in the present root themselves in the past, and thus guarantee continuity. Besides, they are highly appealing because of their emotional component (Bottici & Challand, 2013). Indeed, amongst some of the visitors’ comments it was possible to identify a certain pride, or emoting, when referring to certain aspects of Mexican history, such as *gaining independence and the freedom that we now enjoy*. In section 5.2 I will address the topic of myths and narratives in more detail.

But the museum does not only preserve national identity in an immaterial way, through myths and narratives. Putting people “in contact” with their national identity also means that the museum provides space for the exhibition of a physical manifestation of that identity. The analysis of the interviews suggests that certain exhibited objects do have a “tokenistic” presence. As Edensor has argued, objects have generally been associated with consumption, labour or status, but they are seldom seen in their dimension as an expression and experience of national identity; that is, how ‘things are partly understood as belonging to nations’ (2002, p. 103).

Both the MNR and the GHMC present certain objects that, as seen in chapter two, are central to the idea of Mexican identity and the country’s history; no wonder visitors responded to them. In particular, the 1917 Constitution was the single most mentioned object in both museums. In total, nine visitors considered it to be the thing that they had found most interesting, or had liked the most. There were other exhibits at the MNR that people found interesting, for example, clothing (14 mentions), documents, newspapers and journals (another 14), and photographs (eight), but these are all generic labels to sets of things, not specific objects. Unlike them, the 1917 Constitution replicas stood out as the one thing they specifically named and praised, whether in the Chamber at the GHMC or in the glass case at the MNR. All this substantiates the argument that some artefacts have certain symbolic character because of the myths and tales associated with them (Hawes 1986 cited in Kavanagh, 1990, p. 138).

5.5 PERCEIVING AND EXPERIENCING THE MATERIAL

Last but not least, visitors’ comments allow us to delve further into one of the most important issues in museum-related research: how can we gain knowledge or

understanding of the past from sources that are not written. As Wise notes, historical understanding in the museum requires a reflection about how we ‘read’ (2011, p. 103) objects and the exhibition resources in general – space included. As mentioned in section 4.2, the empirical notion that objects embody a part of reality (and thus a part of the past) is central to the museum but not to historiography (Kneall, 2007). However, it is precisely the facticity of the past in the museum which arouses historical consciousness in many visitors, and in different ways. Rosenzweig and Thelen found in their survey in the USA that visiting a history museum or historic site was the second context – family gatherings being the first – through which people felt most connected to the past (1998, p. 20).

For about 30 visitors, the museum is a place that *allows being close to and seeing real objects and material evidence of the past* or a place that *makes history palpable*. The museum provides visitors the possibility of being in physical contact with the past – even if separated through a glass case – thus making it open to scrutiny, observation, probing and also appreciation. This is an experience that rarely forms part of everyday life. Among other things, visitors considered that the exhibited objects had special qualities, that *they were rare, ancient, fragile, unique and important*. As a result of this materialisation of the past, the museum seemed to enhance historical reflection through the objects. Comments in the MNR were more about the “pastness” of the objects and in the GHMR about the atmosphere or context that the diorama created, but on the whole, in both cases visitors expressed the view that *the museum created a more immersive, palpable and sensorial experience of the past*, and how *it made the past engaging and accessible* by materialising abstract phenomena such as everyday life in the past. In this context, the museum has provided an ‘unmediated experience’ of the past for some visitors (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p. 22).

Looking in more detail, in about 45 visitors it is possible to identify some reference to how objects aroused personal connections or thoughts about history. Material things are appealing to visitors for different reasons, for example: because they create emotional attachment, empathy or memories of familiar places; because ancient objects – whether originals or replicas – have a particular aesthetics of their own, related to fragility and the passage of time; because they are perceived to have symbolic or “historic” properties; or because they have an explanatory power to show what something was like in the past. This range of diverse and rich ways in which visitors linked to the material world suggest, as Dudley indicated, that objects in museums are

not only a gateway to “education” or learning – in terms of a cognitive understanding of certain information – but also to powerful emotions and sensory experiences, such as wonder (Dudley, 2012, pp. 3, 7).

Comparing the two case studies, the MNR fostered these material encounters between the visitors and the past more than the GHMC. Among the 45 interviewees who commented positively about their engagement with objects – whether the dioramas, mock-ups or artefacts – 31 were from the MNR and 14 from the GHMC. Not only were visitors at the MNR able to talk more about their experiences with a wide array of objects from the past, but also, it would appear that their historical consciousness was more stimulated by them than visitors to the GHMC had been by the dioramas. For example, 14 visitors at the MNR expressed wonder at, and appreciation for, journals and documents because *they were vulnerable elements that had managed to survive the passage of time*. For these visitors, journals and documents embodied history, acting as a sort of physical testimony of the past. Similarly, clothing, weapons and other objects, such as furniture, fostered amongst visitors reflections about life in the past.

The dioramas of the GHMC were not as successful as objects in the MNR in fostering reflection about the past. What stands out from the interviews at the GHMC is that most visitors seemed to answer the questions, or generally talk about historical matters, without making references to specific mock-ups or dioramas. The interviews suggest that people had trouble remembering or identifying particular exhibits. Out of more than 70 dioramas and mock-ups, only 10 were mentioned by visitors, and of the 44 visitors interviewed at this museum, only 14 remembered – sometimes vaguely – a particular diorama or mock-up. The most popular were the two mock-ups of the 1846-1848 USA invasion – which, as seen in chapter three, is a popular episode of Mexican history – and they only got three mentions each (the other eight dioramas were only mentioned once).

On the whole, the pattern at the GHMC was that visitors commented on the physicality of the dioramas and mock-ups in terms of how they were made or what they looked like, and not on the historical contents that they were originally meant to convey. And it is this physicality – their manufacture – of mock-ups and dioramas that visitors valued the most. For example, 11 visitors out of the 44 interviewed at the GHMC were *amazed by all the work involved in producing the dioramas and mock-ups and by the careful way in which the details had been taken care of*. It might well be, as I have suggested in chapter four, that the stripping off of the original contextual elements of the dioramas and mock-ups,

in the 1999-2001 renovation, has affected their capacity to convey ideas of history or to foster reflections about the past.

Still, as we will now see, dioramas, mock-ups and other elements such as replicas, should not be discarded as valuable elements to engage people with history and with museums. The interviews provided me with a very rich and different insight into this matter. Let us consider the interview with Trinidad, a 34-year-old mother of four children (the eldest of which was 20 years old), who was visiting the GHMC as part of a school assignment of one of them. She had only finished elementary school, was irregularly employed at the time and seemed to be struggling with a particularly difficult personal situation, as she manifested during the interview. Despite this, the interview flowed well as she got quite immersed in the discussion and was outspoken in her views:

Cintia: [...] Do you prefer objects, museums that show ancient objects or objects from those times [the Independence times, as she had been talking about this period], or do you prefer instead museums like this, with mock-ups and dioramas?

Trinidad: Well, I think that the real ones [*sic*] are better. I think the real ones are better, but also these ones [dioramas and mock-ups] look pretty, they are not far behind, because of all the effort by the people who made them, and to have the curiosity [patience] to put it all together, little things that measure less than a centimetre... I mean... they are... Kudos to them! But of course, what is real also looks very pretty, because I did see it in the *Castillo* [Chapultepec Castle, where the MNH is], yes, the weapons, all that, they are very real, they are real. But then, making this [the dioramas and mock-ups of the GHMC] also presents a challenge [...]

[...]

Cintia: And, do you think that museums [...] are more trustworthy than other types of sources [to learn about history], like films or paintings? Or is it the same?

Trinidad: Well, I think it is almost the same, but I think it is prettier to see it in the museum, because as you enter you go seeing, and like, if you focus a bit, you can even [feel] you are looking at history, as if you were there. And now everybody does it on [internet]. Before you did it through books [...] But now, all you do is on internet; you can look for everything on internet. And I think it is not that pretty anymore, not as pretty anymore on the internet. On the other hand, looking at it like this [in the museum]?! Well, you see the little figures, you feel like touching it and feeling it! And on internet, what? You only download things, you see them and that's it. I think that it is not the same as seeing them like this, pretty, the figures and all, almost touching them. Yes...

One of the main outcomes of the analysis of how people made sense of the past through the material was that it changed the preconceptions about originals and replicas which I had at the beginning of the process. Surprisingly for me, several instances of the interviews suggest that the appeal of the material is not exclusive to originals. The

interview protocol asked, for example, if visitors preferred museums with original objects or those with replicas and other interactive elements (as was the case of the GHMC). In doing so, I was following an academic line of thinking that tends to oppose originals “against” copies or replicas. Starting with Benjamin’s (1977) idea of the aura of the original and Grennblatt’s (1991) ideas of resonance and wonder, followed by other later works (Dudley, 2010b; Saunderson, Cruickshank, & McSorley, 2010), research has focused on how objects – by this meaning, generally, “original” objects – can trigger potent experiences. This research does not deny the power of objects, but it adds nuance to the debate by suggesting that objects do not need to be originals or, rather, that *objects* and *originals* are concepts that should not be confused. Objects have the capacity to prompt approximations to the past, regardless of whether they are original or not (for example, replicas or dioramas).

The analysis of the visitors’ comments shows that many people do have rich and nuanced perceptions of objects, whether originals, replicas or dioramas. For example, around 23 people manifested preference for originals *because they were real and historic, given that they had witnessed history* or *because they had the appeal of age* or an emotive element (e.g., *somebody important had used them*). But only three people among them openly claimed that *museums should only exhibit original pieces*, and even in these cases it should not be interpreted as a total rejection of replicas.⁷⁹ Among several of the interviewees (about 23 people) there was a recognition of the qualities of replicas, for example, that *they show things from the past and allow us to learn, by illustrating or giving an idea*; that *they allow to preserve or not damage the originals*; and, more generally, that *they increase access by showing things that simply no longer exist or that the museum does not have*. This results matches the research carried out in the National Museum of Anthropology, where Moreno Guzmán (2001) found that, on the whole, visitors accepted, understood and appreciated the role of replicas of pre-Hispanic objects.

Besides these comments, some 45 other people answered the question about “replicas vs. originals” with more relative opinions, and these allowed me to gain a new understanding of the problem at stake. For example, visitors commented that *the*

⁷⁹ It is important here to highlight the rejection of a rigid system of quantification, in that people most frequently manifested opinions that were not completely logical or congruent but rather made up of several arguments and ideas, often contradictory. For example, somebody might argue that museums should only exhibit originals whilst also saying that exhibiting replicas is good to preserve originals. My view is that this opinion should not be counted as an ‘either/or’; the visitor is advocating both for the power of originals and for the qualities of the replicas. Thus, there has been no attempt to do an arithmetical counting of comments that adds percentages to an ideal 100%.

exhibition of copies or originals depended on the type of museum; that exhibiting originals involved conservation risks, and even, that making replicas presented a challenge and had a value of its own. Regarding this last point, it is possible to think that replicas themselves, after featuring for long periods of time in exhibitions, become originals themselves, or historic, as happened with the *Early Denver* diorama in the History Colorado Center, in the USA (C. Martin, 2012), and significantly, with the dioramas of the GHMC as well – as seen in chapter four. In conclusion, the interviews with visitors, as illustrated with Trinidad's, provided me with significant insight into the complex ways in which visitors gave value to the material in the museum, and the ways in which that impacted on their understanding of the past.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is the first of two that present the analysis of the visitor research carried out with 46 interviews and 81 interviewees in the GHMC and the MNR. Through semi-structured and conversational interviews, I was able to generate data in order to understand how history in the museum impacts on peoples' understanding of the past. Unlike chapter four, where I focused on how history is produced by the institution through specific strategies and approaches for exhibiting the past, in this chapter I specifically looked at visitors' experiences and perceptions – how they “made” history.

Through an interpretive stand, I analysed the interviews and suggested that visitors made sense of the past through different approaches, not all rational or aimed at building a coherent explanation. Their historical consciousness also depended on how they reminisced and used their personal memory, how they creatively imagined or wondered about what the past could have been like, how they established empathy and liaised emotionally with people from the past, how they let themselves be overtaken by feelings of belonging and collective identification – even belief – and how they materialised an abstract concept such as *history* out of their contact with the physical past.

The varied processes through which visitors made sense of the past were not clear-cut or fixed; they constantly used, and shifted between, different approaches. The museum, with its diversity of resources – text, images, objects, dioramas, other people – “concentrates” the possibility of using these different approaches in a defined space, making it a suitable environment to research what has generally remained an elusive and abstract phenomena: historical consciousness. After all, the past is so pervasive and

mundane in peoples' lives that it becomes difficult to grasp its impact, precisely due to its ubiquity.

The analysis also allowed me to identify specific points in which there seem to be differences in the way visitors made history in the GHMC and the MNR. By comparing the two case studies it is possible to suggest that the GHMC clearly fostered more memories and historical consciousness related to history learnt at school, with a more nationalistic tone. As for the MNR, it was more able to foster a material-based reflection of history through objects and photographs than the GHMC through its dioramas, and it was also more successful in creating a more versatile range of memories and of empathic encounters.

Despite certain differences between visitors' responses in the GHMC and the MNR, the analysis of the two case studies also showed striking similarities in the way visitors talked about, and seemed to think about, certain historical matters. It is to these similarities I will now turn. In the next chapter, I will focus the analysis on how the processes of making sense of the past in the museum are related to the broader dynamics of everyday life outside the museum, and to the fact that people belong to a particular historical culture. Individuals are unique and they each have their own world view, therefore they have their own understandings of the past, as seen in this chapter. But, at the same time, they belong to a historical culture that shares certain codes. This also applies to the case studies: although different and unique, they are also immersed within the same historical culture. The study of the similarity of visitors' interpretations at the GHMC and the MNR will allow a better understanding of the connections between history museums, visitors' historical consciousness and the broader Mexican historical culture.

CHAPTER 6

HISTORICAL CULTURE IN THE MUSEUM: INSIGHTS FROM THE VISITOR ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the first part of the analysis of interviews. It suggested that visitors “made” history in the museum through the use of a diversity of approaches to the past. This diversity could be due to several factors, such as the complexity of the past itself, individual differences in how we experience and perceive things, and also, to a certain extent, to the impact of the museum itself. It also suggested how the particular strategies of the GHMC and the MNR for exhibiting the past fostered, in specific instances, differences in visitors’ approaches to the past.

However, the previous chapter also showed that, despite variability, there were many similarities in peoples’ responses, even in the two different case studies. In this last chapter I will present the second part of the analysis, now focusing on these similarities. I will show the connections between topics that seem to emerge from the interviews and certain aspects of the greater historical culture in Mexico, presented in chapter three. As Rhiannon Mason has argued, visitors’ responses are not a matter of ‘individuals freely choosing’ but also of ‘structural factors within society’, which in turn create certain patterns or consensus in peoples’ views (2007, pp. 206, 210). In the specific context of this research, this means that peoples’ historical consciousness is impacted by the historical culture where they grew up.

Therefore, this chapter argues that, in order to understand the similarities in responses to the past between interviewees as well as between the GHMC and the MNR, it is necessary to look at what happens outside the museum. Visitors’ ideas and experiences in the museum are highly dependent on the external realm; visitors take into the museum the dynamics, problems, narratives, topics, myths and other elements of popular understandings of history and of the configuration of the historical culture in Mexico. Because of this, analysing visitors’ experiences of the history museum is also a way of analysing more broadly the role that the past plays in relation to some of the present circumstances of Mexican society.

6.1 FAMILY SOCIALISATION AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST IN THE MUSEUM

Based on the analysis of the interviews, it was possible to identify that certain dynamics of socialisation highly impacted on the way people understood the past, both in and outside the museum. The original interview protocol did not contemplate a question to address this in particular, as it was not something I had envisaged or been aware of from the beginning. Rather, it was during the later phases of the coding and analysis that it became clear, in subtle ways, that visitors expressed different ways in which their interaction with other people, mainly relatives, was related to their historical consciousness. In the research by Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) and by Merriman (1991, pp. 128, 129), there is a recognition of the role that family plays in how people approach the past, but their reflections do not specifically address the museum context. As mentioned in chapter one, there has been a vast academic production about history learning at school, and there is some research on family learning in museums in general, but there is a lack of specific research about how family socialisation impacts on our understanding of the past in the museum. The analysis of the interviews I carried out provided some insights into this matter.

In the first place, it is necessary to talk about school and the way it impacts other domains, such as the museum and family. The analysis of the visitor interviews suggests that the relationship between school and museum should not only be understood in terms of the fact that both the GHMC and the MNR present similar historical contents. As seen in chapter five, memories of history learnt at school were the most frequently mentioned by visitors. But school and museum are also connected by the dynamics of visiting, since going to the history museum is often a compulsory school activity, either as a school field trip, or as a homework assignment, done over the weekend or in the evening with parents. In Mexico – and apparently in other parts of Latin America – museums are socially seen as ‘resourceful educational sites where students can access information’ for their school assignments, just as they would use the library or the internet (Briseño-Garzón & Anderson, 2012a, p. 165). Among the people interviewed, 14 out of 81 had specifically come to the museum as part of their children’s school assignment, or accompanied someone else who had come for the same reason⁸⁰; 11 mentioned having gone to the museum in their own school years, or at other times

⁸⁰ It is worth remembering that this research is focused on adults, as defined by the legal majority of age in Mexico (from 18 years onwards). No children or adolescents were interviewed.

because of their children's homework. Often, children visit the museum with a specific sheet of questions or tasks set by their teacher.

As a result, for many visitors the museum acts as an extension of the history education they received at school, and is thus permeated by it. Furthermore, the compulsory museum visit becomes a bonding activity through which parents not only accompany their children, but also help with – and even do – their children's homework, thus becoming once again students of history in their adulthood. As mentioned in section 5.3, for many visitors, learning is about “education”, about acquiring the information that they consider any Mexican should have, especially in the early stages of life. This creates conflicting issues about the trustworthiness of history and the past, which I will address in more detail in the next section.

In this context, visitors' experiences of the past and understandings of history in museums are affected by family links; links that exist outside the museum but that are brought into the museum, either as result of a leisure activity or as a compulsory school assignment. In their interviews, 21 visitors commented on some of the things they discussed with their relatives, which shows that the visit triggered an exchange and various forms of interaction between parents and children (and even between grandmother, mother and daughter in one particular case) or between partners, in regards to historical understanding. For example: some visitors said they explained to their younger relatives particular events depicted by dioramas; others mentioned being asked by their children, or asking them, specific questions about particular exhibits; other visitors mentioned reading labels about historical characters with or to their children; and finally, some others talked about how they exchanged personal memories in relation to the contents of the exhibitions.

Whilst this type of socialised understandings of the past can have a special flavour when carried out in a museum, probably because of the power of engagement with the museum space and its exhibits, it is not exclusive to it. For example, 11 interviewees mentioned that they help or do homework with their children or young relatives (nephews, for example) on a regular basis (that is, outside the museum). Their comments about *explaining things to them, sitting down with them, reviewing the homework tasks, reading the books, and helping them study for their exams* provide a rich account of how, through helping the younger generations in their history school assignments, they *as adults, are relearning and once again establishing contact with history*. Some of the visitors were very explicit on this point: studying with their children, reading their textbooks and visiting the

museum with them *allowed them to regain a sense of the importance of history, which they had mostly forgotten since their school days.*

Another point about how family links outside the museum shape visitors' understanding of the past in the museum is *historical disposition*, as seen in chapter one. This term was used in a report by Bennett, Bulbeck and Finnane (1991) to describe the ways in which people established connections with history in the museum and in relation to their everyday life, and the different shapes that this could take. Historical disposition refers to a positive attitude towards history, whereby the past is considered by the person as an interesting, relevant, curious, important, fundamental or beloved aspect of life, depending on the intensity of the connection. What the report from Bennett, Bulbeck and Finnane showed, as does other research such as Rosenzweig and Thelen's (1998) and Merriman's (1991), is that historical disposition is not directly related to class or education; these can impact on the type or dynamics of that disposition, but do not determine its existence in individuals. The analysis of the interviews from this research also suggests a similar conclusion.

Among the people who manifested a historical disposition in any way, whether in the form of a vague curiosity to know about how people from the past lived, an intense link to their own family history and origins, or an intellectual predisposition to knowing about history, there was often a family element involved. Ten people referred to how their parents or grandparents had *nurtured in them an interest in, or love of, history*, how *they like talking with their relatives about history*, or even more, how *they intend to pass on to their children or grandchildren that interest and love for history*. Among these visitors, going to the museum is one of the ways in which they share their historical disposition, but there are others, such as exchanging ideas or general conversation about history in their family gatherings, collecting things (inherited from parents and seeking to bequeath them to the next generation) or visiting historical sites. In short, for these visitors, liking, thinking about or being interested in history is something that they seem to have inherited, and which they take with them to the museum; it is the continuation of a positive attitude towards the past that permeates their everyday life and family bonds. Rosenzweig and Thelen reached similar conclusions in their research in the USA (1998, p. 21).

I will reproduce certain sections of the interview with Pablo and Marcela, two Mexican visitors who live in the USA and were visiting Mexico City as tourists. He is a 52-year-old restaurant manager and she is 50-year-old housewife. They seemed to be

enthusiastic about visiting museums and historical sites. They were visiting the GHMC and the Chapultepec Woods in general. The conversation was very long and interesting:

Cintia: And why do you like old objects, museums with old objects? What does this kind of museum offer you as visitor?

Marcela: Good question! I am a collector of things.

Pablo: She has things....

Marcela: Coins...In my house, in the backyard of my home, I have flat irons of the kind you used to heat, they were heated in the fire, I have things that I have been given because people know I like them, and others that my dad had, that were inherited from his grandparents or I don't know from whom, and he left them to me. I have an old writing machine of those Remington ones, the big black ones, I also have an old sewing machine...

[...]

Cintia: So you have been buying old things and you have also been given others?

Marcela: Mostly given, given, because buying... it is very rare to find people that want to sell. Mostly given, and well, things that my dad had and that I had told my mom: "the day that my dad dies, I want his things", and yes, all those things...

[...]

Cintia: So your dad also collected things?

Pablo: Yes. More or less. She inherited that from her dad! [laughs]

Marcela: He collected a lot of coins, notes... I have one *peso* notes, old notes, worn out and everything, but I have my little collection box...

[...]

Cintia: Do you think this museum has a message?

Marcela: To return to history, I say, to return to history.

Pablo: To remember where we came from.

Marcela: Yes.

Pablo: Right?... To know thanks to whom we are here.

Marcela: And so that the children of today can remember, that they start to see all of the past, even though we did not live anything of this, right?, but these are things that we saw in primary and secondary school, yes, all that.

Pablo: Yes, our own parents also spoke to us, just as we now talk with our children, right? Our parents too. This comes by generations. And more than anything, I think this museum is for the new generations. As she says, "children did not live any of this", yes, they did not live it, but you can still teach them, and well, some children might not be very interested, but, perhaps three out of five will be! [laughs] That is something! Those three will stay, and those three, when they have children, they will bring them, and so on, right? [The purpose of this museum is] not to lose history, mostly. To know where we came from, isn't it?

[...]

Marcela: I could... We have two children, I know my son would not have been very interested in the museum, but my daughter would have been. She would. He is more... well, you can say more modern [laughs] and my daughter, there is not a lot of age difference, only three years, but I think that she would have liked this more.

Pablo: I feel that my daughter is just like Marcela with her dad....

Cintia: She inherited...

Pablo: Inherited, isn't it? And also from me [...] I don't collect things but I do really like history....

This long excerpt provides a sense of the way in which attitudes towards the past are part of the family dynamics, and thus suggests that socialising is an important aspect of historical consciousness, both in and outside the museum. This has also been found in research carried out by Seixas at a multicultural school in Canada, where family experiences and information from outside school 'strongly influence[d] the way in which students understand history' (1993, p. 301). Furthermore, it attitudes and ideas about the past can be inherited, or at least, are sought to be passed down through the generations. All this matches with recent research about learning in science museums in Mexico, where interaction between family members is perceived to have a prominent role as a perpetuator of values and of cultural identity (Briseño-Garzón & Anderson, 2012a, 2012b). Of course, this is not the case for all the visitors or their families. Most visitors did not explicitly express that knowing history, even their own or their family's, is something essential for everyday life. It may well be that their sense of historical disposition is not clearly verbalized or that they relate to the present and the past in more subtle ways.

6.2 TRUST, HISTORY AND THE MUSEUM

Another salient issue from the visitor study that is related to the dynamics of the broader historical culture is the existence of patterns of mistrust, both towards the museum and towards history. From its inception, the research wanted to delve further into the status of the history presented in the museum; that is, analyse visitors' perceptions about the style and type of historical knowledge exhibited therein, and on the whole, about the museum as a source of information about the past. Accordingly, the interview protocol included a question that was worded more or less as follows: "Do you trust the museum?" (or "Do you think the museum is trustworthy?").

Thus, from the outset the analysis had material to work with as regards the issue of trust. However, it took several months of analysis for me to realise that peoples' responses about trust in the museum were not always related to the questions I had asked. For example, early on in the interviews or before I even asked the question, several visitors spontaneously talked about "official history", often to contest it or complain about it. I started noticing that the issue of trust in the museum, verbalised by visitors as an issue of "official history", was a major aspect of the research, as it was very

pervasive throughout the interviews. This realisation deeply impacted on the direction of the research project, and required of me a new thinking about its theoretical and methodological aspects. Therefore, the analysis of the role of the State in the production and dissemination of history, as well as visitors' reactions to it, became more prominent than I had originally intended.

There was variability in the responses to the abovementioned questions about whether visitors trusted the museum or not, but they could more or less be divided into those that did trust it (40 people), and those that did not trust it, either partially or at all (35).⁸¹ At first sight, what is surprising about these figures is that they are so similar; that, a certain mistrust in the museum is as high as is trust. Looking closer at the specific arguments and explanations that the interviewees provided shows that the issue is a highly contested one, and that there are mixed or conflicting perceptions.⁸²

In total, the 40 visitors who considered the museum to be trustworthy provided different explanations as to why they held this opinion; yet, it was possible to identify two main arguments that were frequently mentioned. On the one hand, 21 visitors mentioned that *they trusted the museum because the information they saw in it matched what they knew, remembered or had seen in other places and sources*. This perception points at our argument about how the museum does not stand in isolation, but in close contact with other entities that deal with the past, all of which coexist within the historical culture. The museum is part of a network of information, narratives, even ideas, that is part of peoples' everyday life, and this can also be backed by the findings of chapter five in regards to how the museum prompts memories of familiarity (whether data, people, images, objects, etc.).

On the other hand, ten people trusted the museum more as a result of a moral stand than of a contents issue; that is, they argued that *the museum had to present the truth, was obliged to do so, because it was a public institution* or, as they bluntly – and somewhat tautologically – stated, *because it was a museum*. In these cases, it was perceived that visitors trusted the museum as an act of belief more than one of analytical probing of evidence or comparison between sources. For example, about five visitors manifested being aware that *the history in the museum was the official history they were normally told at school and elsewhere*,

⁸¹ A few visitors did not answer to the question or said they did not know.

⁸² For this reason, and following the methodological criteria of chapter five, the analysis has not sought to square percentages to an ideal 100%.

or that *it was made with a certain bias, but still, they believed in it or they trusted it despite that fact*; one couple mentioned not knowing enough to contest the position of the museum.

However, there was also a large proportion of people that manifested mistrust in the museum to different degrees, from a mild uncertainty to a clear rejection or scepticism about the possibility of truth (35 in total). Those that did not trust the museum did so for several reasons but there were a few that stood out, just as in the case of those that did trust it. The high degree of mistrust in the museums in the present visitor study is very different compared to other contexts, where public trust in the museum is high; for example, in the UK, a study found that people considered museums had a unique position of trustworthiness in comparison to other organisations, such as media and government (Britain Thinks, 2013), and in the USA, Rosenzweig and Thelen found that history museums were considered the most trustworthy source for finding out about the past (1998, p. 21), whilst Canadian museums had a similarly high rate of public trust (Conrad & et al., 2009, p. 31). The analysis of the interviews showed that in the Mexican case study museums, there were three main reasons why people did not find museums trustworthy or totally trustworthy.

In the first place, nine visitors manifested mistrust in the museum because *it lacked information or had gaps*, or because *it had selected or – even – invented some aspects of history at its own convenience*. But it is not clear from these nine comments why they thought the museum had those limitations. In the second place, 13 visitors manifested a certain mistrust in the museum *because history is uncertain and unknowable anyway*. This suggests that, unlike in the first case, visitors considered that the reason why the museum is imprecise in addressing the past is because the past itself is unknowable and history is an uncertain affair. During the interview, for example, 47 interviewees manifested in different ways a perception that history is something unreliable because *there were many versions about what happened*, because *there was no possibility of knowing what happened in the past, as only witnesses could know what happened and they were all dead now*, because *there was a bias in the things we are allowed to know about the past*, and because *history is always written by the winners*. Moreover, nine visitors openly claimed that *history is a matter of belief or of personal opinion*.

In this context of conflicting – and even contradictory – views about trust in the museum and in history, it is worth remembering, as was addressed in section 5.3, that about half of the visitors considered the museum as a place for acquiring information; information that they considered reliable and useful, or they would not be interested in learning it in the first place. Furthermore, about nine visitors seemed to be aware that

the history they learnt as children was of a nationalist slant and that their perspective as adults had shifted their understandings of history. For them, truth is something reliant on age and on growing up, on developing a criterion of one's one about what to believe in, and what not. Expressed this way, this "disenchantment" with history resembles that experienced by children when they find out that Father Christmas does not exist.

The unreliability of history mentioned in the interviews raised questions about history as a discipline. Overall, the analysis of the comments evidenced an absence of the historical discipline in the interviews, both as a profession and as a field of knowledge capable of generating trustworthy information about the past. For example, the word "historian" is only mentioned a few times: from 46 interviews with 81 people – which produced approximately 26 hours of recording – it only appeared 15 times in seven interviews (in one it was mentioned six times, but in the rest either once or twice, so the presence of the word is practically insignificant). When mentioned, it was associated with a critique or with mistrust, for example, how *historians demonise certain characters* or how *they produce biased history*, or with their absence (*who are the historians who made this museum?*). Similarly, references to anything related to the historical method were only timidly mentioned on a couple of occasions.

The third reason why visitors do not trust the museum is *because it presents official history*. For about 17 visitors, the museum was seen as a branch or extension of the government and is used as a means to disseminate a particular State ideology and control the past through "official history". For these visitors, scepticism towards the museum is a result of their scepticism towards the entire system that depends on the State (including school, books, media and any governmental institution, for example). Amongst the visitors interviewed there is a mention and critique to "official history", which is questioned precisely because there is mistrust in the State itself. There is a perception that *official history cannot be trusted because it is imprecise, tricky, tainted and corrupt*. Furthermore, about six visitors went even further by suggesting that "official history" is part of the strategy by which government controls, or "brainwashes" people, *preventing them from developing a critical consciousness or seeing things as they really are, as this might question the State itself*.

Some of these visitors' uncertainties about both history and the museum can be exemplified with a section of the interview with Laura and Axel, a couple of lawyers, both about 50 years old. They were visiting the GHMC as a Sunday leisure activity. They both seemed generally well informed on basic names and notions of history, and

commented on specific characters and events depicted in the museum. At one particular point in the interview, I asked them if they thought that the museum was trustworthy and a conversation about a particular diorama took place (see figure 20).



Figure 20 Diorama at the GHMC of Mrs. Josefa Ortiz and her involvement in the Independence movement. Source: Jorge Moreno Cárdenas.

The diorama in question is called “The whisper of the *Corregidora*” [*El aviso de la corregidora*]. A *corregidor* was the local governor or magistrate of a particular city during the Colonial period. At the time the War of Independence broke out, in 1810, the *corregidor* of the city of Querétaro was Miguel Domínguez. His wife was Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, hence the nickname “*la corregidora*” (female of *corregidor*). Mrs Ortiz participated actively and hosted in her home literary gatherings, which towards 1808 became secret political gatherings to plan the Independence uprising. The relationship with her husband has been ambiguously addressed in history, as it seems he did not support the meetings or the independence cause; or at least not openly, given his position. Mrs Ortiz de Domínguez has been immortalised because, the story goes, although she was locked up at home by her husband, she managed to tell fellow supporters of the independence that their conspiracy had been discovered, and that it was necessary to call for the uprising immediately (thus the Cry of Dolores two days later). She is a heroine because she delivered ‘the whisper at precisely the right time’ (Gutiérrez Chong, 2006, p. 346): the diorama depicts her at the precise moment when

she is passing through the door the message that the conspiracy had been revealed. The text panel of the GHMC says that Mrs. Ortiz had been locked up by her husband “to protect and isolate her from the other members of the conspiracy”, which – truth be told – seems a bit contradictory, not to say bizarre. It is about this diorama that Laura and Axel talked:

Cintia: How trustworthy is this museum for you?

Laura: Mmmmm, well, for me... I mean, what the mock-ups and all the rest [of the museum] present are probably things that I had already read in other museums [...] But no. History belongs really to those who win, history is written by the winners [...]

[...]

Axel: Well, for example, my wife [Laura] was asking me questions a few moments ago and she made me think...think whether the *Corregidora* actually...

Laura: Oh, yes!

Axel: Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez had had that... what do you call it?... had excelled, as they said she did. I mean, because, considering the period... In that period, just like Leona Vicario [another woman who participated in the Independence], women were subjugated. So there was a mock-up where... History says that Mrs. Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez was locked up. So my wife tells me: “I think that they locked her up so that she would not mess around in men’s businesses”. As was common practice in those times, right?

[...]

Axel: And so she left me thinking. So I said: “Perhaps that is what happened”, isn’t it? And now they are giving it another interpretation, isn’t it?

Laura: Yes, precisely. Well, it could well be that.

Cintia: That is very interesting. I will look at the diorama again and think about it! [...] So that means there are things we don’t know about the museum...

Laura: Well, not about the museum, about history! Because that is what we have always been told, I mean, in a men’s world. It is only now that we women are excelling a bit more, you can come and go, have more human rights. But in that time, as you [Axel] say, women were subjugated, well, women did not excel. If now we are being told that Mrs. Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez [excelled], it might be in order to give history a bit of women’s presence. But in reality not, I think not [laughs]. I think that, rather, her husband locked her up so that she wouldn’t gossip [laughs]. Right? Yes, he kidnapped her rather. Yes.... It was a kidnap!

Cintia: And how trustworthy is this museum in comparison to other sources? What do you think?

Axel: Well, for me, as my wife says, I think that what we have read, what we have been told through different books, there are things that we did not remember or that we had not noticed [...] So in this case, I could not unequivocally answer whether the museum is or isn’t trustworthy, because I do not have any comparison, because as I just said, it is what we have been repeatedly told about history in books.

Laura: Yes, me too [...]. It is what we have seen in other museums, what we have been told about history, in the primary and secondary school textbooks, and all that... Yes. So I cannot tell you: “You know what? I read something else in another book”. Right?

What the interview with Laura and Axel indicates is that visitors somehow perceive that there is no guarantee, either in history or in the museum, but that they feel they *have to trust it because that is what they learnt and have been told about*. So there is a sort of mild acceptance of history, but with reserves or a certain degree of mistrust. This conflicted perspective was present among many other interviewees and can be further suggested by other elements of the analysis. For example, 47 interviewees expressed ideas about the unreliability of history, as mentioned earlier. This number surpasses that of visitors who claimed not to trust the museum (35) and is even higher than those saying that they did trust it (40). In my view, this apparent inconsistency in the data points out how complex it is for visitors to take a stance regarding the trustworthiness of either history or the museum, and that they often have contradictory or shifting positions. Furthermore, it could point to the fact that, whilst there is a more conscious stand to specifically trust the museum, there is a deeper or more unconscious feeling of mistrust towards history. I consider that this general mistrust of history might be partly connected to the particular configuration of the historical culture in Mexico, whereby pervasive political intervention by the State and dominant groups is common practice, as seen in chapter three.⁸³

In this context of mistrust of “official history”, it is also possible to suggest that visitors are calling for “another” history, one that they consider is critical and, ultimately, “true”; one that they consider to be the “right history”. Fourteen interviewees spoke in particular about the importance of the museum *telling history as it actually happened*, a phrase that closely resonates with one of the most debated ideas in the historical discipline since Leopold von Ranke penned it in the 19th century. Another 15 visitors talked about *a more human perspective of historical characters, with both their good and bad sides*. Strictly speaking, this call for a “human perspective of historical characters” is a pleonasm, but taken as a metaphor, it can be interpreted as the visitors’ desire for a history that presents the everyday life, insecurities, character and other personality traits of historical characters, who are usually depicted as “heroes” with no personal lives beyond the political events or feats they took part in.

⁸³ In comparison, in contexts like the UK where state intervention in history museums is not direct, visitors manifested a high degree of trust in museums based on their perception that, unlike government and media, they do not have a political standpoint (Britain Thinks, 2013), as mentioned earlier. However, it must be highlighted that this perception is debatable in that not because the state does not directly or explicitly intervene in history museums means that these institutions are not political. As the issue of the *1807 Commemorated* project showed, museums in the UK are also highly political places.

These ideas can be further substantiated by the fact that, when visitors provided specific names of authors or books that they liked, or that they considered an example of “good history” (34 references in total), they were generally historical novels, biographies or popular history books (or historical books) that challenge the idea of “official history”. For example, visitors mentioned novels by author Martín Moreno, audio-visual material and books by the private publishing company *Clío* (owned by historian Krauze), books such as *Contra la historia oficial* [*Against official history*] by José Crespo or *Barbarous Mexico*, which I addressed in chapter three. On the whole, visitors seemed to perceive that these materials had allowed them to learn about the “other” side of things, or that which they had not been told by “official history” at school, in textbooks, or even in museums.

6.3 NARRATIVES ABOUT 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY MEXICAN HISTORY

We will now move on to look in more detail at the ways in which visitors’ understanding of particular events and characters in the museum relate to broader popular history that circulates outside the museum. As seen in chapter three, however, the particular socio-historical conditions in Mexico do involve assigning the State a prominent role. Accordingly, I suggested that, whilst it is not possible to deny State intervention in historical affairs, it is necessary to deal more critically with the notion of “official history”; for example, to stop conceiving it as a single, monolithic block that remains unchanged but, rather, as several dominant versions that exist in the public sphere and constantly interact (or clash). In this section, I will develop this argument more specifically by exemplifying the different narratives that exist in regards to specific events and characters.

As mentioned in chapter two, the interviews in museums were well suited to identifying peoples’ understanding of the past through the historical narratives they tell. From the analysis it was possible to interpret certain patterns in the way people talked about particular events or characters. I suggest that these patterns are, precisely, the narratives about history that people have learnt, reproduced, adapted and used throughout their lives outside the museum. Because of the permeability and volatility of narratives, it is not possible to locate where or when people acquire them; they are not something fixed that comes from a single source. As seen in chapter two, they are not something that is learnt once, but something to which we are constantly exposed, deal with on a daily basis, and are in a process of constant reinterpretation (Bottici & Challand, 2013, pp. 90, 91; Samuel & Thompson, 1990, pp. 14, 15). Thus, it makes

more sense to consider the visitors' historical narratives as something dynamic that has been generated through different environments, such as school, family, popular culture, television, and that this will continue throughout their lives. Whilst it is not possible to locate where or when people acquired these narratives, it is possible to identify their contents and how they relate to different contexts.

The research was carried out in two museums broadly devoted to 19th and 20th century Mexican history, but the interview protocol specifically focused on the periods that both had in common (the *Porfiriato* and Revolution), as a way of gaining depth and narrowing down the topic. The analysis revealed several patterns in the way visitors talked about the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution. Visitors also debated and commented on particular events and characters from the mid 19th century that had not been referred to in the interview but that were part of the exhibitions. Some of these 19th century topics have also been included in the analysis because they show that they arouse interest or are meaningful to visitors.

About 13 visitors mentioned the issue of the tense foreign affairs and invasions of Mexico by other countries in the 19th century. An unexpected result of the research was, thus, discovering how meaningful this topic remains for visitors and the extent to which it permeates their interpretation of Mexican history on the whole. As regards this topic, there are two main events that marked 19th century history in Mexico: the 1846-1848 invasion by the USA and the French invasion of 1862-1867. Mentions of the French invasion, during which a monarchy under the rule of Maximilian of Habsburg was briefly installed (1864-1867), only feature marginally. The predominant focus of visitors' attention and emotional distress is the USA invasion and, most probably, this is due to the outcome: as a result of this invasion – and related conflicts with the USA around those years – Mexico definitely lost 55% of its territory. It is not an exaggeration to claim that many Mexicans feel this loss even today (Mraz, 2010, p. 13); several visitors manifested it and their words and body language were infused with tones of anger and resentment. To date, there is a complicated and tense relation with the USA, and it is no mystery that the effects and “social trauma” of the invasion of 1846-1848 have significantly contributed to the narratives that exist to date on the subject.

The interpretations of 19th century history are surprisingly similar amongst those interviewees that did mention them. It could well be that because of distance, because of the nature of the topic (the particular history of permanent tension with the USA) or even because of Mexico's particular history (having been the colony of a foreign power),

there is wide popular agreement on this matter. It could also be that the Mexicans' resistance against foreign invasions has become mythical and is not questioned but, rather, engaged with in a powerful way, partly fostered by a current context where foreign investment is seen as a new form of domination over Mexico by some visitors (eight referred to this). Current national politics, for example, in relation to drug crime and economic policies, is intimately linked with USA politics, and increasingly – since the 1990s – with international markets, as seen in chapter three. No wonder the debate about power, sovereignty and foreign affairs is a topic that filters into the discussion about the past.

The uniformity of visitors' perceptions about the 19th century invasions contrasts with the diversity of their comments on other topics. The *Porfiriato* and the Revolution are best exemplify the conflicting nature of narratives about the past; moreover, it is a conflict that exists between different official histories (dominant narratives), and not only between interviewees and “official history”. As seen in chapter three, the State itself undergoes pressure and tensions between different interpretations of the past that exist within it.

As for the *Porfiriato*, it can be perceived in the interviews that there is both a survival of interpretations of history that follow the style of the post-revolutionary nationalism of the 20th century, coexisting with other visions of history. About 40 visitors referred to the *Porfiriato* as *a harsh dictatorship, where there was inequality, abuse and repression*, whilst 13 conceived it as *a time where some rights were sacrificed for the sake of progress and economic development*, and 14 more talked about it as *a time of modernisation and development*. Thus, although there were more mentions about the *Porfiriato* from the dominant narratives of revolutionary nationalism (negative views), there is a considerable number – almost half as many of the “negative” narratives – of alternative views of this period. This not only shows that there is not one but several narratives which are dynamic and permeable, but also, that certain dominant versions become stronger or weaker as others start to consolidate popularly. As commented in chapter three, there has been a “rehabilitation” of Díaz and the *Porfiriato* since the late 1990s, which has intensified this year due to the 100th anniversary of his death. It is reasonable to assume that in 50 or 100 years time, perception of the *Porfiriato* will have changed even more – probably more towards the “positive” – as the revolutionary nationalism continues to fade and new patterns arise in the historical culture and narratives.

The interpretations of the Revolution are also different although, rather surprisingly, visitors talked less about it than about the *Porfiriato*. For those visitors that did comment on the Revolution, there were two main positions. On the one hand, those who considered it had been *a popular struggle for the rights of peasants and workers* (10 visitors) and on the other, those who thought it had been *a time of instability, guerrilla warfare and violence that shattered the peace brought by the Porfiriato* (six people). There were also a few comments that did not try to pass a moral judgement on the Revolution but, rather, seemed to try to evaluate its complexity and its meaning, for example, that *what we call the Revolution was not one but many revolutions* (four visitors). The results from the interview suggest that, whilst the ‘myth of the Revolution’ (T. Benjamin, 2000) as a popular movement of vindication of rights was pervasive for a good part of the 20th century, as seen in chapter three, it does not seem to be exerting the same power in Mexico nowadays.

The existence of different narratives about history can also be identified in the visitors’ comments about historical characters. Benito Juárez, Porfirio Díaz and Emiliano Zapata provide further material for the analysis of how visitors understand the past and create their historical narratives. Benito Juárez was a key figure of the 19th century, as presented in chapter three, and it was interesting to note how pervasive he is amongst visitors. I did not ask anything about him in the interview, yet he was still the third most mentioned historical character (21 references) after Díaz and Zapata (with 34 apiece), about whom I did ask specific questions. As seen in chapter two, Juárez has been visibly represented in mural paintings, images reproduced in textbooks, on bank notes and public monuments; furthermore, he is the only historical character to have his birthday celebrated as a public holiday (21st of March). No wonder he was so present in visitors’ comments.

Perceptions of Juárez show that there is a diversity of ways of thinking about characters, even about those that, in theory – according to those who advocate for the existence of a single “official history” – are unquestionable heroes. There are three main trends amongst the 21 visitors who mentioned Juárez. One is an interpretation according to which he is a moral figure and an example of personal achievement: for seven visitors, he embodies the idea of *how a poor, indigenous and orphan shepherd boy made his way up to become president of Mexico*. Another three visitors mentioned that *he had been consistent with his own indigenous origins*. As seen in sections 2.3 and 4.3, these two have been the most pervasive views of Juárez throughout time, and can be found in museums –

such as the GHMC through its dioramas –, textbooks and mural paintings (for example, those at the MNH). In these terms, Juárez has been used as a popular figure for civic indoctrination, especially of children, and it has had a mythical appeal (Escoto Díaz, 2008, p. 52). But visitors also provided other interpretations, and these actually questioned the mythical view of Juárez. For example, four visitors claimed that *Juárez might not have been or was not as good as he was depicted*, and a further three visitors mentioned what they considered were his “negative” traits (e.g., they mention that *he was a landowner*, that *he was also ambitious for power* and that *he was a contradictory man*). It is thus possible to suggest, based on the interviews, that Juárez’s figure is not as “stable” as it has been argued, or that it is changing in comparison to the dominant interpretive trends of the 20th century.

This same diversity in visitors’ perception of Juárez was also present in comments about Porfirio Díaz. Like his period in office (the *Porfiriato*), Díaz himself is a very controversial figure. A detailed analysis of the comments made by visitors suggests that there is a complex mosaic of different narratives about him, several of which cannot be labelled as “positive” or “negative”. It is as if most visitors found it hard to describe Díaz with single adjectives. Thus, from the analysis of comments, for example, I identified the following narratives amongst the 34 visitors who mentioned him⁸⁴:

- *Díaz was a character who brought order and progress, but at a high socio-economic cost* (18 references)
- *Díaz was a brilliant statesman and visionary, but had been fatally corrupted by ambition and power* (12 references)
- *Díaz was a successful and important military hero but later on, as president, showed several flaws* (10 references)
- *Díaz favoured the rich and foreigners; he was obsessed with Europe and rejected the indigenous world to which he belonged* (12 references)
- *Díaz has been misjudged and demonised by history* (7 references)
- *Díaz did good and bad things* (6 references)

I identified other narratives, but these had less than three mentions. What can be interpreted from visitor comments is that there is not a uniform perspective on Díaz. People are aware of the complexity of this historical character and they provided rich comments about different aspects of his life. Advocates of the existence of an “official history” (only one) may insist that Díaz is generally condemned as a dictator but, based

⁸⁴ As was the case in certain parts of chapter five, some visitors expressed more than one idea about Díaz. I have counted them all, as a result of which the numbers do not add up to 34. Rather than considering this a problem, it strengthens the argument that people have often simultaneously different opinions or shifting views about the past.

on this analysis, it would seem that people have very diverse understandings of this character and, furthermore, that there is a tendency towards seeing him in a more “positive” light, as mentioned above.

Emiliano Zapata, however, presents a very different pattern. Unlike Díaz, and even the Revolution, visitors have a predominantly “positive” image, and one that is more or less uniform, or based on very similar narratives. From the analysis of the interviews, I identified the following dominant narratives about Zapata:

- *Zapata was truly interested in fighting for the poor, the peasants and their right to the land* (25 references)
- *Zapata was a socialist* [interested in collective wellbeing] *and an idealist* [honest and consistent with his moral values and ideas, not corrupted by power] (16 references)⁸⁵
- *Zapata (and Zapatistas) had good and bad things* (7 references)
- *Zapata was an illiterate man but a social leader whom people followed* (4 references)⁸⁶

Three more people spoke about Zapata in a vague way, only associating him with one or both of his mottos (“Land and Freedom” and “The land belongs to those who work it”), but without providing further comments. In comparison to comments about Díaz and even Juárez, perceptions of Zapata were predominantly positive and heavily loaded with moral associations. This did not occur with any other character in the interviews. I suggest this could be due to the fact that Zapata is a mythical figure who continues to exert a powerful influence, and who can rally hopes and political ideals in the current Mexican context. It is these that I will now address.

6.4 THE PRESENT CONCERNS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PAST

As I have argued throughout the thesis, this research has been as much about the present as about the past. Peoples’ historical consciousness is reliant on the current conditions in which they come to face the past; in Rüsen’s words, ‘the present conditions

⁸⁵ In this narrative I have decided to keep the words *socialist* and *idealist* that visitors used because I considered them to be highly significant of the tone with which they talked about Zapata. Aware that they are problematic terms because of the many possible meanings, I provided in brackets the interpretation that they referred to when using them.

⁸⁶ From all the perceptions about Zapata and Díaz, the last two about Zapata were the only ones where there was a clear difference between the two case studies. All seven visitors that considered that *Zapata had good and bad things* were from the GHMC, and all four that considered that *he was an illiterate man but a social leader* were from the MNR. I do not have a precise answer for this, but it could be that people at the MNR tended to be on the whole more favourable to Zapata, whether because they visited the MNR precisely due to their interest in the topic or because the MNR was more specifically devoted to the matter and thus the figure of Zapata was more emphasised. Other reasons might be also playing its role, but more research would be needed in this particular point.

of the past' (2004b, p. 198, 2012, p. 45). Based on this, it is also necessary to analyse visitors' comments about the past in the light of what they tell us about the present. Thus, in this last section I will present some of the main issues that seem to stand out from the visit to the history museum (in this case, the GHMC and the MNR), and that allow us a richer understanding of the historical culture in Mexico as it is in the first decades of the 21st century.

Visitors' comments about the relationship between past and present are scattered throughout the interviews, often in unexpected parts. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of the visitors' comments that will be used for this section arose as a result of two specific questions from the interview protocol. These questions were, first, if they identified any link between Mexico from the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution with that of today, and second, whether they thought that Mexicans from those times were similar to those of today. I was aware early on in the process of methodological design that the latter was a problematic question to ask, because it can be argued to be ahistorical and somehow suggesting that all Mexicans are a "unit". Despite these risks, it was kept in the definite interview protocol because it had proved to be very useful during the pilot tests to stimulate dialogue with visitors on their conceptions of the past, history and change.

On the whole, based on the interpretation of the interviews it seems that the current climate of socio-economic inequalities, political scandals and increased violence by organised crime are negatively impacting on peoples' perception of the country. Throughout the interviews, there is a pervasive appearance of comments related to issues of inequality, corruption and violence; they were verbalised along with expressions of helplessness, anger, irony, and other strong emotions. In this process of thinking about the past from the present, a considerable proportion of visitors considered that, in general, there is a deterioration of Mexican society. Often using similar words and phrases, interviewees expressed the idea that *in present day Mexico, there is a loss of values, of civic responsibility and respect for fellow countrymen*. For example, 38 out of 81 visitors somehow expressed different ideas that could be summarized as a perception that *Mexicans are in a state of moral decay and loss of values*. Similarly, 26 visitors held views whereby *the Mexicans of today are different from those of the past because they are morally inferior: they are less active, they do not love their country and they are individualistic*.

The interviews also suggest that the realm of the political occupies a significant role in Mexicans' views of the present and of the past. The interview protocol did not contain words such as "class", "politics", "politicians", "State" or "government" at all,

yet, interviewees frequently and spontaneously talked about them. It showed that, for these visitors, talking about history meant talking about current politics, or rather, that they were explicitly interpreting the past through the lens of the political present. About 60 out of 81 interviewees complained in different ways about current conditions, by somehow expressing the idea that *things had not changed and that they continued to be the same as in the past*. Therefore, the problems of the present are perceived as a continuation of a past condition. Among the problems denounced by visitors, there were two topics that clearly stood out: 1) those related to political interests and the struggle for power – authoritarianism, corruption and the ambition of politicians – (36 references), and 2) those related to class inequality – for example, poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunities amongst peasants and workers – (35 references).

As for political issues, about 22 visitors interpreted history as *a struggle between different ambitious politicians who were all the same, because they were only interested in power*. Thus, politics is not seen as a broader sphere of social activity, of negotiation between entities or of citizen participation; rather, it has been reduced to individuals obsessed by gaining and retaining power as much as they can, using any means at their disposal. Consequently, history is perceived and explained *as a continuum of disputes between individuals competing for power, as a never ending and permanent struggle of ambition*; in other words, as power for the sake of power. This vision of things is also present in the views of the present. Alan's interview gives a poignant idea of this. He is a 22-year-old law student who was on a leisure visit to Chapultepec and the GHMC with his partner:

Cintia: And do you see something from the Mexico of the *Porfiriato* and the Revolution in the Mexico of today, or not?

Alan: I think I do. That struggle to keep power, that conflict between power and society, I believe is still very evident. As usual, people are always waiting to see what the government decides, and the government will always decide regardless of the people, not caring what people think, whether people agree or not. And, like, it is practically always the same thing, we are like in a cycle, practically the same; the only thing that changes are the characters. But, I think that [change] precisely depends on the people, but people are used to being marginalised, and they accept that. Because, for example, looking at the case of elections, if we know that throughout all history we have been marginalised by a single political party, and only...what?...12 years have passed, and now we return to the same. We like being mistreated by... we are some kind of masochists. That is how I see it... I think we haven't changed a lot, We are used to being mistreated by the upper class and politicians. I believe that's the way it is.

As for issues of class inequality, visitors' comments generally seem to be closely related to discussions about the Constitution. This is not surprising since, as seen in

chapter three, the 1917 Constitution is one of the most symbolic emblems of social rights and it is generally conceived as the document that contains the ‘social pact’ between the popular sectors that participated in the Revolution and the State (Córdova in Florescano, 1991, pp. 128, 129). So the 1917 Constitution is celebrated both as a thing in itself, an object of power, and as the body of laws that protect individual guarantees and social wellbeing. This can be seen in the fact that several visitors (nine mentions in total, as seen in section 4.4) had specifically and more intensely engaged with the constitution exhibited in both museums. It may also be seen in the fact that some visitors considered that there had been *an improvement in comparison to the past, because there are more rights, equalities and opportunities*. Eleven visitors talked generally about increased rights and improved social conditions for the people; other visitors talked about specific rights, such as public education (13), freedom of expression, greater democracy and less political repression (11), and women’s rights (seven). At present, and since the late 1990s, there have been changes to economic and social policies as a result of adopting a neo-liberal model, as seen in chapter three. This has also been accompanied by changes to the original text of the 1917 Constitution, which has altered its original popular and collective ethos. This context helps to explain why several visitors discussed topics related to social rights, particularly criticism of loss of the social wellbeing guaranteed by the Constitution, or apprehension owing to a perceived threat thereof.

Inequality is also addressed in terms of one of the most important and long debated aspects of historical culture in Mexico: that of the peasant communities, as seen in chapter three. Following the Revolution, Mexico changed significantly: it went from a rural and agricultural society to an urban one, and from 20 million people to almost 80 million in 1990 (Lomnitz-Adler, 2001b, p. 54). This change in the productive and social structure of the country impacted on the role and perceptions of the rural realm. As Lomnitz Adler claims, there is currently a ‘crisis’ that springs from the contradictions between nationalism and modernisation, as the ‘dismemberment’ of those values upon which the revolutionary State was founded seems a necessary step in order to move the country forward into the world market economy (2001c, p. xxi). Moreover, some authors claim that this conflict started back in the early 19th century, and intensified as early as the *Porfiriato* (Guerra cited in Florescano, 1991, p. 65). It is even possible to suggest that the conflict between traditionalism and modernity has been a significant ingredient in the configuration of the historical culture in Mexico. If this is the case, it is

not surprising that visitors' comments about the past are still today impacted by conflicting views about modernity and tradition.

As mentioned above, almost all the interviewed visitors sympathised with the peasant cause of Zapata's revolution and there is not a single comment that somehow labels peasants as backward, or that in any way discredits or undervalues them. Thus, most visitors praise the ethos of the peasant and of the indigenous roots linked to the land, *of the poor and working people who feed the country*. But, paradoxically, many among them also praised the modernisation processes of the *Porfiriato* and of the neo-liberal model, which have implied the rejection, denial and destruction of that ethos for the sake of progress based on Western dynamics of industrialisation; a modernisation in which there is no room for the rural and indigenous ways of life and values.

Looking more broadly into visitors' comparisons between past and present, the main conclusion that stands out is that peoples' historical consciousness – understood, in Rüsen's terms (2004a, pp. 66, 67), as orientation in time – is conflicting and characterised by contradictions. Earlier on, in section 5.2, for example, I showed that many visitors imagined the past with a “deficit view”, whereby they considered the present was preferable, because things had changed for the better. However, when looking at their comments about the present, it turns out that many people feel things had not changed after all. Similarly, visitors talked about certain improvements in the realm of social rights, but they also talked about the persistence of long-standing issues such as inequality, authoritarianism and corruption. Peoples' contradictory views about modernity and tradition can also be placed as part of this same conflicting context. Therefore, on the one hand, the visitor research has been enlightening in regards to showing these contradictions of historical consciousness in present day Mexico, but on the other, it has opened larger and deeper questions that need to be further researched in new studies.

CONCLUSION

In this second chapter of the visitors' interviews analysis and last one of the thesis, I have presented the connections between peoples' understanding of the past in the museum and the broader historical culture in which they are immersed. Accordingly, the chapter has also addressed the complex past-present relationship. Whilst chapter five was more interested in analysing the different ways in which individuals can make sense of the past in the museum, this chapter had a more “horizontal” style. It focused on identifying

collective patterns in the way people understand the past, in order to highlight the shared condition of historical consciousness.

The chapter highlights certain patterns that, in my view, are constitutive of the historical culture in Mexico. This means that through visitor research in the museum, it was possible to identify certain dynamics and topics that provide insight into the ways many Mexicans relate to the past. This has not been a comprehensive analysis, as that would require a much larger study, beyond the limits of this chapter. It focused instead on four specific points. First, family socialisation was an important element through which visitors developed their historical consciousness; furthermore, family exerted its influence not only in private contexts – the home – but also in public settings and through interaction with other entities of history-making, such as the museum and school. Second, the interviews suggest that people were often concerned about the possibility of museums providing reliable information about the past, and that the conflicting views they had about their trustworthiness seem to be related to the fact that the State has constantly intervened in historical affairs. Third, the analysis of narratives allows tracing certain patterns in which key historical events and characters are interpreted, as well as the contradictions and complexities of those patterns. And fourth, several of the points visitors raised about the past seem to be related to their context in the present; issues of corruption in politics, socio-economic inequality, social rights and modernisation account for a good part of the comments. It is important to be aware that they probably say more about the present than about the past.

Some literature has attempted to explain certain aspects of history-making, historical consciousness and historical culture in Mexico solely through a theoretical or historiographical perspective, as seen in chapter three. The findings of this chapter drew on that literature but sought to complement it by providing the practice-based research that had hitherto been missing. In doing so, the research has opened new paths of analysis and of interpretation, and has contributed to the knowledge of the area in different ways. I will now address these issues in the conclusion of this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS

WHAT HAS THIS RESEARCH DONE?

This thesis presents the processes and results of a research carried out over four years (2011-2015). Broadly speaking, the interest that has inspired it has been the enhancement of our understanding of history museums: what they are, why and how they have become what they are, what happens in them and how they are used by society. My research was based on a conception, shared by several authors (Kavanagh, 1990; Schlereth, 2004; Watson, 2010), that museums have their own way of exploring the past, but it is one about which there has not been enough research.

I decided to address this ‘intellectual puzzle’ (J. Mason, 2002) – history in the museum – by carrying out visitor research, and more specifically, qualitative visitor research. There were many other possibilities but, in my view, this study about history museums would have been incomplete if it did not look at those they seek to serve, and without whom they would be purposeless: the visitors. One of the particularities of history as it is exhibited in the museum is the fact that it has large numbers of visiting audiences, to whom it speaks, or speaks with. Unlike monographs or films, which can sit on the shelf with no one noticing them, museums cannot do without audiences; they are accountable to society for the number of visitors they cater for and the quality with which they do so. In this context, it seems natural, even obvious, that an essential part of museum research is – or should be – visitor studies. Thus, the research analyses history museums, but it does so through the lens of the visitors’ experiences. In so doing, I am agreeing with Sandell (2007) that the analysis is not about the exhibition or about the visitor themselves but, rather, about the specifics of their ‘visitor-exhibition encounter’. It is about how people make sense of the past in the context of the history museum.

Because my approach was to focus on how “ordinary people” – visitors, not curators or professional historians – interpreted history in the museum (Seixas, 2004, p. 8), I drew on the academic literature about what has been broadly termed *historical consciousness*. Aware that this concept is not without its problems, mainly because of the diverse interpretations it has had, I focused on the way a group of authors, such as Rüsen, Seixas and Sánchez Marcos used it (or others such as Rosenzweig and Thelen, but with a different terminology) to name the phenomenon of how people in general make sense of the past and ‘orientate’ in time (Rüsen, 2004a), or, in other words, how they develop an idea of present-past-future.

In order to study historical consciousness in the museum, I tested different qualitative methods of data generation. I had no doubt that this type of subject required the nuance and depth that qualitative research provides; what I was not sure about was its details. The best option by far was semi-structured or conversational interviews. These were the most suitable method for eliciting a comfortable and engaging environment in which to establish a dialogue with the visitors. I defined a series of topics that I wanted to discuss with the interviewees, but I also kept open to the possibility of emergent topics, to give the research an adequate balance.

Another aspect that made a qualitative approach suitable for my research was the fact that it is context-sensitive. *Historical culture* – the other backbone concept of this thesis – considers that each society has particular ways of relating to the past, in other words, that there are certain patterns or cultural definitions in our ideas of the past (Sánchez Marcos, 2009). I needed to be fully aware of the cultural specificities of the two Mexican museums I was researching and, as such, I had to draw on complementary concepts that seemed to be important for this context. For example, issues of State intervention and the production of official narratives ended up being a significant part of the research, because of the particular configuration of the historical culture in Mexico.

But not all the research was qualitative. A great proportion of it was what we could term historical research, in that I used a diachronic perspective in order to understand the phenomenon I was looking at. As Leon and Rosenzweig stated, ‘one cannot fully understand current practices without uncovering their origins’ (Leon & Rosenzweig, 1989, p. xxiv). I have tried to understand what is happening now in relation to what has been, and this applies not only to the visitor research but also to the case studies. As seen, my analysis of the GHMC and the MNR took into consideration their history, not as a secondary but as an essential element of the argument. In this sense, my own personal condition – a historian who has “migrated” to the field of museum studies – has played its role. All things considered, this project has been both about historicising the museum and about musealising history.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS?

As argued in chapters one and four, research about history and museums is scarce in comparison to other topics. Visitor research in history museums is even scarcer. Put bluntly, we do not have enough understanding of how people experience the past as it is

presented in history museums. This is not only limiting our understanding of what the roles and functions of history museums should be, depending on their specific contexts; it is also limiting the advancement of museum practice and their social provision. More generally, it is limiting our understanding of how the past operates outside the professional historians' domain. We need more nuanced and specific – more historically and culturally aware – knowledge of our history museums, in order to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” set of theories and practice. In this context, my research contributes by adding to our knowledge about these important but under developed fields. Although it is based in a particular context – Mexico – I consider that the results obtained will be of relevance for research carried out in other countries, because of the way it has been theoretically framed.

From its inception, this research has led me to think deeply about how to respond to the specific context of Mexico, even more so because of the lack of previous research in which to find guidance. Besides the contextual Mexican sources, most of the academic production that I have found useful comes from four main foreign contexts: the nucleus of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, debates about public history, museums and material culture in the USA, research about public history and consumption of the past (mostly the UK and Australia), and research about historical consciousness (in Germany, USA and Canada). In the Mexican context, the shortage of published research about history museums and, more specifically, about visitor studies, is a serious issue. I have, of course, used the handful of Mexican academic productions available, but as is now evident, on the whole, the research is based theoretically on foreign contributions.

This reliance on foreign authors raises questions about the suitability of the frameworks employed during the research process and, thus, ultimately, about the validity of the results. I was aware of this since early on in the process and have accordingly tried to make a critical use of those frameworks. This has meant recognising where a particular theory could not be implemented further because of the type of visitor study I carried out – for example Rüsen's developmental model of narrative competencies –, identifying and stressing those concepts or topics that were essential for the Mexican context – “official history” – even if they are not so pervasive in foreign literature, and more generally, relying on my common sense and own cultural background as tools for the analysis.

In this research it is undeniable that the “insider-outsider” question played its part. On the one hand, I had the advantage of being an insider of the historical culture I was analysing. This meant that I was able to grasp the subtleties and nuances of the symbols, narratives, names, processes, institutions and, on the whole, of the specific cultural references, which might have remained obscure or gone unnoticed by an outsider. On the other hand, this same permeability with the context limited my vision of the broader implications and dynamics of the historical culture. This limitation arose not only from the fact that we do not tend to be conscious or analytical about things that are familiar to us, but also from the fact that my perspective is one that belongs to a very specific socioeconomic condition. I often had to be reminded of the importance of explaining and questioning my own preconceptions. It was also necessary to try to distance myself – both intellectually and physically – from my country and from my own world views, and try to look at things from another perspective. However, I still believe that this distancing can only be partially achieved.

WHAT HAS THIS RESEARCH FOUND?

This research has sought to contribute to our understanding of history museums, with an emphasis on Mexico. The term *history museum* encapsulates what is, in fact, a wide variety of approaches for exhibiting the past in the museum, often so different to each other that it is difficult to believe that they belong to the same category. As seen in section 4.2, several authors have suggested that there are many varieties and strategies for presenting history, whether historic houses, “traditional” object-text glass cases exhibitions or period rooms, among others (Gable, 2008; Moore, 1997; Pearce, 1992; Schlereth, 1990a). The analysis of the GHMC and the MNR substantiated this argument about variability. By looking at their histories and by analysing their contents and exhibition strategies, it is possible to suggest that different styles of historical representation in museums tend to coexist at the same time. There is not one, but several, competing strategies for exhibiting the past, depending on broader educational policies, the politics of history at a particular time and even the profile of the staff and historians involved.

The GHMC represents (on the whole) a nationalist way of museum making specific to the 1960s, whilst the MNR does not. The GHMC has a historical narrative that emphasises patriotism and teleology. Dissidence and divergence seem to have been eliminated; all the country’s past is merged into one major achievement: the 1917

Constitution. The new MNR represents a different way of history-making in museums; one where political dissidence and also historical revisionism have impacted to a certain extent on the monopoly of the PRI over historical affairs. The MNR presents the Revolution as a watershed for the country, but its consequences and benefits are not as explicit as in the GHMC. The meaning of the past – and of the Revolution – is less clear. This different approach to the past can be clearly seen in how the two museums use the same object very differently: in the GHMC the 1917 Constitution is exhibited as an object of reverence – and in a setting which resembles a shrine –, whilst in the MNR it is just another object within the glass cases that illustrates a particular aspect of the Revolution.

So, broadly speaking, the GHMC and the MNR represent very different ways of doing history. However, when observed closely, it turns out that the difference is not something to be found only between institutions. A very significant finding of the research has been that variability in the strategies for exhibiting the past can also be found *within* each museum. The analysis of the history of the case studies, of their exhibition resources and of their narratives has shown that history museums are not uniform; they do not present totally coherent interpretations. Rather, they are places where the layering of change has left its mark, and where history-making is a ‘messy’ (Gable, 2008, p. 110) affair, often with contrasting positions and expectations.

One of the reasons for this internal variability within history museums is because they are a reflection of the many roles that the past plays in society, as Kavanagh has argued (1990, p. 5). In the case of the GHMC, for example, the past is both an element of national identification, often permeated by feelings of devotion to the *patria*, but also a place that seeks to “rationalise” learning in a dispassionate way. The MNR is less inclined to a patriotic view of history in its exhibition contents; however, its location under the monumental and highly patriotic Monument to the Revolution places it in a similarly compromised position. Thus, the research allowed me to identify that in the case study museums – and most probably in other history museums throughout the country – there is a tension between the museum as a place of unquestioned worship of the past and one for the acquisition of reliable information about it.

Can museums be both a place for acquiring trustworthy information, whilst also remaining places where there is no room for debate? Looking at Mexican history, it seems this has been attempted. Morales Moreno has argued that since the 19th century, Mexican society developed a sort of “secular devotion”; this is, a synthesis of two

apparently incompatible strands: science and religion (2007, p. 37, 2012, pp. 217, 218). The “cult” of the nation and the idea of history museums as ‘civic cathedrals’ (de Mello Vasconcellos, 2007) are two good examples of this synthesis. As seen in chapter four, the Constitution Chamber at the GHMC and the Monument to the Revolution clearly embody this duality: a didactic explanation of history culminates in a shrine to the Constitution or to the Revolution.

One of the issues that I consider best embodies the competing roles of history museums is the issue of trust. As presented in section 6.2, visitors had conflicting views in this regard. On the one hand, a considerable proportion of visitors conceived the history museum as both a place where they could acquire information about the past, as well as moral and civic values. This is further reinforced by the idea of learning as “education” – seen in section 5.3; as the acquisition of both data and values. On the other hand, visitors have grown up in a historical culture where State intervention is so pervasive that there is a considerable level of mistrust in the museum, due to their perception that it has been tainted by “official history”. This situation of uncertainty towards the history museum is further enhanced by the fact that many visitors considered that knowing about the past is a “speculative” activity, not a science or a discipline with its own methods. The historical discipline simply does not feature amongst visitors’ comments as something that can provide reliable knowledge about the past.

Internal variability within history museums is also due to the fact that each museum has the potential of simultaneously containing diverse ways of approaching the past or of containing different – at times contrasting – historical narratives. This can happen, on the one hand, because of processes of change in the institutions themselves. The historical method was invaluable in identifying this internal variability, as looking into the history of the institutions allowed me to understand the changes they have undergone. For example, in section 4.3 I showed that the GHMC was not able to update its historical discourse about the *Porfiriato* and Porfirio Díaz in its dioramas, but it did change its text panels, as a result of which it now provides two different interpretations of that period of history. Furthermore, variability can also be the result of simultaneous use of different exhibition resources that create different approximations to the past. An example of this is the display of an art element such as the sculpture *La Bola* at the MNR, which appeals to imagination or empathy, along with information-based resources such as text panels or documents. This also happens in the GHMC, where

informative text panels coexist with the Constitution Camber, a very patriotic and emotive part of the museum.

Finally, variability within history museums can also happen simply because of how visitors respond to them. Just as is the case of history made by institutions, there is no uniformity in the history “made” by visitors. The analysis of the interviews showed that there is significant variability in peoples’ understanding of the past, which is partly due to their using different approaches for making sense of it. In other words, peoples’ historical consciousness was triggered by at least five different approximations to the past: 1) as a result of specific connections with personal memories, through which broader historical happenings were filtered, 2) by imagining alternative or hypothetical scenarios about what things could have been like, or felt like (empathy), 3) by building an explanation that attempted to be coherent or rational and information-based, 4) by believing and professing devotion to what they perceived as a given – a “History” or origin with which they identify –, and 5) by simply being in contact with a physical past – objects that embodied the passage of time – which allowed them to “materialise” ideas of history. These approximations to the past are not clear-cut categories and their boundaries are flexible. Visitors shifted from one to the other, or simultaneously held several – even if some were contradictory. The museum was a privileged ground to watch these processes and shifts take place.

The analysis of the variable ways in which people make sense of the past in the museum also provided valuable insight into how this happens in everyday life – outside the museum. In particular, the visitor research showed that constant family socialisation is one of the factors that impacts the most on our development of historical consciousness. As presented in section 6.1, the dynamics of this exchange between generations is taken into the museum and forms part of the visit. In addition, our scholarly memories – albeit only vague fragments – seem to remain throughout life as a reference through which we interpret the past; textbooks, which are a more permanent influence and are often physically present in the home, often reaffirm this in adult life. And it is precisely through socialisation with younger relatives that those scholarly memories are re-activated in adult life.

The analysis of narratives was an important aspect of the research, as it helped pin down certain issues of historical consciousness that might otherwise have remained unclear. Historical consciousness sources from, and operates based on, ideas of the past, events, characters, and even of the meaning of history itself, which are conveyed in the

narratives. Thus, the analysis of narratives was a gateway to understand how the past performs in our daily life, both individually and collectively. In sections 6.3 and 6.4 I showed that in both the case studies and among people from very different backgrounds, there were similar ways or patterns of talking about certain events or characters, for example the *Porfiriato*, Porfirio Díaz, Benito Juárez or Emiliano Zapata, or about the 1917 Constitution. Some of these match the broader arrangements of the historical culture in Mexico, which were presented in chapter three. This suggests that narratives are a sort of “building block” that inform peoples’ ideas of the past in a collective dimension; they are interpretive filters that we have developed through our socialisation as part of a specific historical culture. It also suggests that, whilst there is an individual dimension to how we make sense of the past – for example, by using or preferring one of the abovementioned approaches to the past –, there are also ‘shared readings’ within groups, based on the socio-cultural context (R. Mason, 2005, p. 206).

The analysis of narratives showed that one of the most relevant issues in the context of Mexican historical culture was “official history”, and this was so because, as I suggested in section 3.1, State intervention in historical affairs has been so pervasive that it cannot be disregarded. At the start of the project, my line of thinking – which can also be found extensively in Mexican literature on history, museums and related matters – was that the State exerts a direct influence on, and manipulates, what is considered history and what is not; history in textbooks and museums is part of this ‘ideological apparatus’ (Gutiérrez Ramos, 1995) of the State. But this argument was not helping me explain what I was identifying in the narratives mentioned by visitors, or in those contained in the case studies. The nuance of qualitative research, as well as the broad-encompassing perspective of historical culture, made me go back to the literature with a different vision and start questioning the idea of “official history” which I had hitherto taken for granted. I needed to think differently about how the State intervenes in historical matters and what “official history” is.

Thus, the notion of “official history” was re-evaluated and used in a more critical way. As seen in chapter three, whilst Mexico’s particular condition does point to the fact that the State has consistently and significantly used and managed aspects of the past, there is room for other views that need to be brought forward. One of them is the coexistence of several official *histories*; “official history” is not a single, monolithic and unchangeable structure. On the contrary, there are different dominant narratives that coexist and challenge each other. One of the narratives (or rather, parts of it) might be

more visible or pervasive than others, and this is what people generally refer to when they talk about “official history”, but it is not the only one. We must bear in mind that there are different groups of power – not only the State – that disseminate their own interpretations of history; among them are intellectuals and historians, the Church, local communities, unions (for example, of teachers or workers), the army, and even businessmen and private companies – which could be the case of *Clio*, as mentioned in section 3.2. Even within the State, there are different interpretations and versions of what a sanctioned history should be. For example, the textbook debate of 1992 demonstrated that there were conflicting views on the interpretation of history within the State itself; the arrival of an alternative political party to power in 2000 made this more evident, even if the PRI is now back in the reins.

It is also necessary to understand that these dominant views do not appear out of nowhere, nor do they disappear instantly. They are not an *invention* that is “manufactured” through a sort of mechanical and premeditated process. They have all been developed through time and *tradition*, to borrow Rüsen’s term (2012); they are the sediment of longer ideas, narratives, and even myths, that have a social appeal because they embody popular feelings and ideas of belonging, just as Smith (1999a) and Edensor (2002) argued. In this sense, whilst we can say that the State “reproduces an official history”, meaning by this a series of sanctioned narratives that are contained in particular ceremonies, comments and media – textbooks being the best example –, we cannot say that it is solely responsible for the popular and broader ideas of history that circulate in the public sphere. The State *draws on*, adopts (appropriates) and capitalizes on that pool of popular understandings of history, in order to legitimise itself. In the Mexican case, for example, the PRI monopolized the popular appeal of the Revolution and used it as its “ideological pedigree”. Similarly, museums have complemented their versions of history through the incorporation and reproduction of murals which themselves sourced from elements of the broader popular culture, as seen in chapter three.

Because I had to re-evaluate the notion of “official history”, I also had to re-evaluate that which is generally considered its opposite: “critical history” or, better said, academic history. The detailed revision of the history of the GHMC and the MNR, and more broadly of history and museums in Mexico, brought to the surface the fact that professional historians have been intimately involved in State projects. This coincides with arguments made by authors such as Camp (1991) and Lomnitz Adler (2001a), who

claim that the close connection between intellectuals and the State has been a significant trait of the historical culture in Mexico. Hence, a more careful thinking about the role of academic history and its relationship with power was necessary. For example, we saw how well known historians in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Silvio Zavala and Arturo Arnaiz y Freg, or Eugenia Meyer in the 1980s, found a way of reconciling their own historiographical positions with their roles as public servants. We also saw how the historians who created the curatorial script of the new MNR used particular historiographical positions in order to imprint the museum with an alternative interpretation, in a context of political struggle. Historians are at the heart of the political uses of history; it is no longer possible to consider that “official history” is made by the State as if it were an abstract force with its own free will or, in the best case, by public servants who have no links with the historical discipline. Some historians work with and for governmental initiatives, and in this sense, research about how history is made in museums needs to think about the role of intellectuals in the politics of history.

This rethinking of the concept of “official history” and of historians and their involvement with the State has been possible, to a great extent, because of the concept of historical culture used throughout this research. As defined in chapter two, historical culture is inclusive in that it does not reduce history-making to an elite of professional historians and academia. It conceives that history – both as historical consciousness and as more concrete products – is made by many different agencies, in a constant process of exchange in everyday life, rather than being produced in the isolation of academia. Similarly, the history museum is not something isolated from, or alien to, the world (Witcomb, 2003); it is integrated into ordinary life, a convergence point where historians and many other history-making entities come together, and where boundaries between academic and popular histories are not clear-cut.

Using the concept of historical culture also allowed a more dynamic interlinking of the past and the present. The visitor study was particularly illuminating in this regard, as it showed in various ways how people interpret the past through the lens of the present and, consequently, how their uncertainties about the past are related to their uncertainties in the present. In this research, the recurrent comments about the lack of trust in history, of the violence of life in the past, of the importance of social rights and of the 1917 Constitution, of the difficult lives of women, of class inequality and so on probably say more about present conditions in Mexico than about its past. In Mexico, questioning history is questioning the State. As seen in chapters one and six, some

peoples' current feeling of discontent and anger towards the government is also triggering a questioning of history (especially of what they consider to be "official history") and the need to look for what they perceive to be "another" history – probably as a way of looking for another future.

In this context, the frequently contradictory and conflicting views about the relationship between past and present could be considered as a symptom of a crisis in 'orientation' – to use Rüsen's term (2004a) – among many Mexicans. If historical consciousness is about how people orientate in time (past-present-future), this analysis has revealed that the way many interviewees are now making sense of the past – or rather, not making sense of it –, or being very critical about history and its potential to make any sense at all, is precisely due to a rupture in the way they perceive the future. The current state of anxiety and frustration could be partly seen as a crossroads in orientation. How to make sense of the past? How to make sense of the return of the PRI? What did "change" consist of?, or even worse, have we changed at all? What comes next after the PRI? What is the future going to be like if we are once again back where we were before? What does the Revolution mean in a country where the principles of the Revolution seem to have been diluted?

HOW HAS THIS RESEARCH CHANGED MY VIEWS?

Four years ago I started this research with a very strong feeling about the need to "help" Mexican history museums become what I then believed was better: to become "critical" institutions that questioned patriotic views of history and challenged official narratives. Furthermore, I assumed that this was necessary in order to enhance their links with their visitors. Now that the PhD journey is almost over, I cannot claim to have this perception as strongly as I once did. I have become more aware of the complicated position in which history museums are placed, and also of the complexity of how people generally make sense of the past. The visitor study and the historical perspective from which I analysed it made that change in perception possible.

One of the toughest parts of the research was the realisation that official histories and nationalist museums play a social role, not only because the State backs them, but also because many people themselves assign them this value. To think that patriotic history is merely a State product and an imposition is actually minimising – not to say denying – the role that people play in learning, valuing, changing and bequeathing the history that they find meaningful. History museums are not only accountable to the

government but also to society – their visitors – in that there are certain expectations about what they should be or do. For some visitors, history in the museum is about instilling values among the new generations and reaffirming them in adults; for others, the museum is about presenting “proper” history, comprehensive and true, with “good as well as bad things”. For yet others, museums should do both things. In this complex landscape of expectations, history museums are placed in a very difficult position.

Any attempt to reform the contents of history museums, and especially – because of their symbolism – those that depict national history, should be aware of the power of popular history, of myths and of peoples’ expectations regarding such museums; in other words, be aware of the configuration of its historical culture. Failure to do so may result counterproductive in that changes upon which a museum embarks hoping to strengthen its social impact might damage their relationship with visitors. Provided there is the institutional support to carry out this reform – which in Mexico means approval from the government, whether local or federal, in order to receive funding – the major difficulty in attempting to modify a museum’s historical interpretation is to satisfy the abovementioned competing social expectations. Furthermore, this attempt at reform would only be successful if broader and larger changes in the historical culture take place, and this cannot be done by a single institution, nor will it take place in a short lapse of time.

I have also come to realise that history museums are not only about an opposition between the State and citizens or about acquiring “the right” information on the past. They are also places for wonder, for imagination and for reminiscence, not only sources where we go to find concrete information about the past. The past, after all, is much more complex and cannot be pigeonholed into a single function. I am aware that the debate about truth in history is a very sensitive one and that, to a great extent, most of the criticisms by certain professional historians of history made in the museum come from a concern about the accuracy of the information provided therein. But in the obsession to focus solely on which version of history museums should provide, we might be missing the opportunity to engage more people with the past and with the historical enterprise broadly. After all, it might well be that museums exhibitions are not the best place to destroy myths or to present a comprehensive explanation of “X” or “Y”; a book or a conference may be better at this. But museums may well be better placed to do other things. I think that the challenge here is avoiding that the debate

about what is true or not in history limits our thinking about the value of the past, and about all the things history museums can do (and mean) for people.

HOW CAN THIS RESEARCH BE CONTINUED?

To a great extent, this research has been exploratory. It has sought to gain an initial understanding of a topic that is not sufficiently represented in the literature in general, and even less so in the Mexican context. Because of this, the main contribution of this research, on the whole, has been that it has produced knowledge about a liminal area which, as mentioned in the introduction, is under represented in both historiographical and museum-related literature. Historians could benefit from this research by thinking about the impact and consequences of their activities beyond the academic domain, and they might also benefit from seeing the ways in which practice-based social research can improve their understanding of the role the past plays in peoples' lives. Museum professionals, both researchers and practitioners, could benefit from seeing how a holistic analysis – one that pulls together the broader context, the museal institution and its history, as well as its visitors – can produce deeper insights than those that have a more fragmented perspective. They can also benefit from thinking about the relationship between disciplines and the museum, and the way in which knowledge is impacted by the specificities of the museal institution.

Thus, this research has opened new possibilities for further research. On a first level, the database generated by this research offers the possibility of alternative readings. I am fully aware that the approach used for the present thesis is only one of the various choices that could have been made with the same information. Working with other theories or concepts could help to further understand, to test or even to question some of the results that have been suggested in the present thesis. For example, theories and concepts such as *cultural capital* or *class* could help elucidate the way in which socioeconomic conditions impact on how people understand the past in the museum. Another alternative would be to conduct a more text-based or discourse-analysis type of research, where the focus is on how people describe and talk about certain things, and thus delve into the relationship between language and issues such as power, memory and cognition.

On a second level, this research points at new research that others could carry out to generate different data, including, for example, quantitative information. One of the ways in which this research could be continued is by widening the scope, which

could take different forms. For example, it could seek to look into children's and adolescents' understandings of the past, in order to analyse how visiting a history museum is affected by age and by generational conditions. It could also mean carrying out a larger study that is statistically representative, for which larger samples would need to be generated. Or it could widen its time frame, to address different periods of Mexican history, incorporating other case study museums and attempting a comprehensive understanding of public perceptions of national history.

Another alternative way to continue the research would be to follow the path of methodological experimentation; that is, to focus on how different methods can be employed, and with which results, in order to study historical consciousness in the museum. Certain visual methods, such as mind-maps and picture identification, were tested for the present research, as well as other options, like tracking and observation in rooms. At the time, and for the purposes of this research, none of these methods seemed appropriate. This does not mean that new attempts should not be made, whether applying existing or developing new methods, making the reflection about them the centre of the research. The area of didactics of history has developed several alternatives for studying historical consciousness, but this has not been the case in the museum studies context. More studies in this area would significantly benefit research about visitor studies and history museums, and even the field of historical consciousness.

There is also the potential to carry out research on a much larger scale, but this would, of course, require the relevant institutional and financial resources. At present, I can foresee two main alternatives whereby the continuation of this research would yield interesting insights. The first is to carry out cross-institutional research; in other words, a research where history museums are analysed in conjunction with other agencies of history-making, for example, elementary schools, universities, research institutes, local history groups and media outlets. Although there would be considerable methodological challenges – for example, the liaison with and coordination of different gatekeepers – a study like this would provide a more comprehensive and articulated understanding of historical consciousness and the role of museums within it. The second alternative would also be a cross-institutional research, but limited only to museums. In this case, the proposal would be to design a study whereby the focus of analysis would be to compare how visitors make sense of specific aspects of the contents of museums devoted to different areas of knowledge, for example, art, anthropology and science.

In a different line of work, this research could be developed from a more “orthodox” historical perspective. There is a serious lack of histories of Mexican museums and it is urgent to produce new studies; ones with an attention to detail, that trace the different processes of change institutions have undergone since their inception, and that document and adequately reference their arguments. As in many other countries, in Mexico the history of museums mostly remains undocumented and, therefore, lost for the future. Museum staff are constantly struggling to perform the practical duties of their institutions, so there is rarely time or financial resources to research and reflect about practice within institutions, which has ultimately resulted in a limitation of museum practice itself. Mexican museums need to better understand where they come from, in order to better understand where they are at now and where they can go.

SOME LAST THOUGHTS

Now being midway between the historical discipline and museum studies, I feel very strongly about the need to build bridges. This research highlighted the fact that history as an academic/university-based discipline is practically invisible at the popular level. History professionals are indeed producing valuable and unrecognised research, made through years of perseverance and hard work, but they have not given that much thought to how this knowledge could bring about social and public benefits generally. As for history museums, they cater for thousands of visitors with limited resources and have a wide social impact, but they often do not have the expertise, or ways of keeping up-to-date with historical research. In Mexico, this situation is even worse due to the fact that most history museums simply do not have researchers. In other words, museums have stopped being institutions which can carry out research, whether visitor studies, historical research based on the museum’s collections, buildings or archives, or even research about museums generally. Collaboration between these two spheres of history-making could yield many positive results, both for society in general and for the parties involved. We need to ensure not only that these exchanges start taking place soon, but also that they become embedded and common-practice in institutions. This research represents a step forward in this direction, and I hope that both museum practitioners and historians alike will find some of the ideas presented here engaging.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. PILOT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PRELIMINARY FIELDWORK (2012)

VERSION OF 2ND APRIL 2012

1. Demographic questions (to be asked in the end and preferably using cards)

Age 19-24 25-37 38-50 51-67 67 more	Gender Male Female	Education (highest reached) Primary Secondary High school University Postgraduate Technical qualification	Education Private Public Mixed
Income (per fortnight, in Mexican Pesos) 500 to 1000 1100 to 3000 3100 to 5000 5000 to 7 500 7 500 to 10 000 10 000 or more	Work situation Looking after the house Retired Student Unemployed Working part time Working full time Self-employed Other	Work domain Academic Private sector Government employee Commerce/enterprise Arts/Culture/humanities Other	Do you have children/grandchildren? Children Grandchildren Neither No answer
Living neighbourhood Name: District:	Place of origin/birth City: State:		

2. Know about visitors' basic visitation pattern/condition

Is this the first time you come to this museum? Yes No	When was the last time you were here (if repeat visitor)? This year Last year More than 5 years ago	With whom are you today? Friends Partner Family (partner/children/relatives) Alone Group	Why did you choose to visit this museum?
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3. Questions about visitors' ideas of history and the past

<p>Please write down what the word History means to you</p>	<p>Please write down what the word Past means to you (if the same as history, indicate so)</p>
<p>If you wanted to find out about local history or some old local place, what would be the most enjoyable way of doing it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visiting a museum - Reading a book about it - Visiting the local area or site myself - Having a guided tour of the local area or site - Asking in your local library - Watching a television programme about it - Listening to an expert talk about it - Seeing a movie about it <p>Other:</p>	<p>What would you say were the single best and worst things about living in (XXX: according to the museum)?</p> <p>The best thing about life in XXX was that...</p> <p>The worst thing about life in XXX was that...</p>
<p>How much would you like to live in (1 to the one you would most like, 2 your next choice and so on):</p> <p>First half of the 20th Century 19th Century, after independence New Spain period Mesoamerican and Pre-Columbian civilizations Prehistory The present Other</p>	<p>How far do you think life was better or worse in the past because of the following things? (A lot better, a little better, a little worse, a lot worse, not sure)</p> <p>Because there was less industry Because there were no computers Because women were much less free than today Because people lived closer to nature</p>

4. Questions about visitors' opinions regarding history in a museum

<p>These are some of the things that visitors have said about history museums. How far do you agree or disagree with them? (strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You can imagine how people lived in in the past) - You can imagine how was the past - Historic museums) provide good facilities (café, toilets, shop, etc.) - You can be in contact with true/authentic old things - You can remember things of your own life 	<p>Has any exhibit of today's visit liked you significantly/ Has any object deeply impressed you?</p> <p>If so, which one?</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You can relate some things of the past with today - History museums bring the past to life better than other options - They only show the life of the rich (the famous, the politics, etc.) - Not enough information is provided about history/the past/objects (the objects/the past) - The explanations are too complicate 	
<p>What attracted you most about the object? (one tick only)</p> <p>It might be valuable Family links (sentimental value) It gives you a direct sense of life in the past It is better made than modern things It is beautiful in itself Don't know Other</p>	<p>In general, after your visit today to the museum, has anything of this experiences appealed to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imagining other times and places - Reflecting on the meaning of what I was looking at - Recalling my travels/childhood experiences/other memories - Feeling a spiritual connection - Feeling a sense of belonging or connectedness

VERSION OF 30TH APRIL 2012

1. Demographic questions (to be asked in the end and preferably using cards)

Age	Gender Male Female	Education (highest reached) Primary Secondary High school University Postgraduate Technical qualification	Education Private Public Mixed
Work situation Looking after the house Retired Student Unemployed Working part time Working full time Self-employed Other	Work domain Academic Private sector Government employee Commerce/enterprise Arts/Culture/humanities Other	Do you have children/grandchildren? Children Grandchildren Neither No answer	Living neighbourhood Name: District: Place of origin/birth City: State:

2. Information about the visit

Is this the first time you come to this museum?	When was the last time you were here (if repeat visitor)?	With whom are you today?	Why did you choose to visit this museum?
Yes		Friends	
	This year	Partner	
No	Last year	Family (partner/children/relatives)	
	More than 5 years ago	Alone	
		Group	

3. Questions about their perceptions of the visit to the museum

From all the happenings presented, is there any that you found particularly interesting?	From the objects and things you saw, what do you think about them?
Why?	Is there any that you found particularly interesting? Why?
Did the museum allow you to know, imagine or both of them? To travel in time?	How do you imagine life was like in X (depending on what they previously mention)

4. Questions about the personal experience and memories associated with the visit

What things from Mexico of the Independence/Revolution do you see in today's Mexico, and what you don't?	After your visit to the museum, did you remember of anything related to your family history or your past?
Did you remember anything about your history lessons at school? If so what?	What types of memories do you have from your school years?

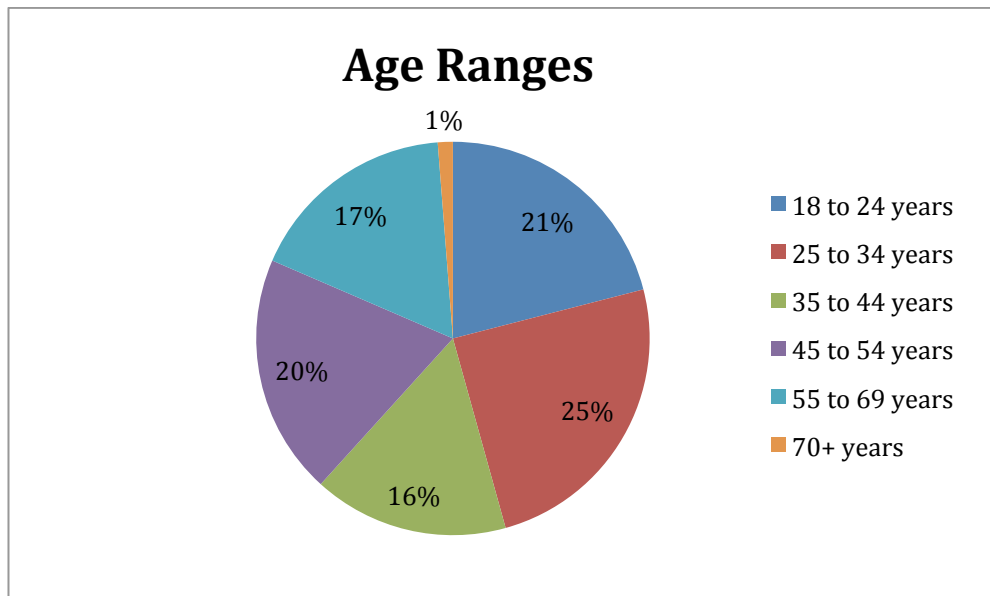
APPENDIX 2. FINAL VERSION OF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR MAIN FIELDWORK (2013)

Theme	Questions
A. Context of visit and bonding with interviewee (after this either go to B or to C, depending on the case)	<p>A.1 Is this your first time in the museum? Yes /No (When was your last visit?)</p> <p>A.2 Why are you visiting today this museum? (with whom and whether they knew or not about the museum before coming)</p> <p>A.3 What is your opinion about this museum?</p> <p>A.4 Before entering did you have an idea of what would you see?</p>
B. Different imaginative processes related to the past	<p>B.1 How do you imagine life was like in the Porfiriato and in the Revolution?</p> <p>B.2 Do you see something from that past in today's Mexico, and if yes what?</p> <p>B.3 Do you think that people from the Porfiriato and Revolution were like you?</p> <p>B.4 Is there any historical character you like or are interested in?</p> <p>B.5 What is your opinion about P. Díaz and E. Zapata?</p>
C. Impact of exhibition strategies in the interpretation of the museum	<p>C.1 Are you familiarized with or do you recognize something from the exhibition? Do you have any memories related to what you saw?</p> <p>C.2 Is there anything that interested you in the exhibition? Why?</p> <p>C.3 Would you have rather prefer seeing something else? Is there something missing?</p> <p>C.4 What do you think about original objects vs. replicas?</p> <p>C.5 Do you prefer dioramas or historic objects to address history? (in the Spiral Museum)</p>
D. The museum idea	<p>D.1 Do you think the museum tells a particular message or story?</p> <p>D.2 Do you think that the dioramas (or showcases, depending on the museum) present a truthful view of the past? Do you trust in the museum?</p> <p>D.3 What do you think is the function of this museum? (what do we want them for?)</p> <p>D.4 What does a museum give you in comparison to other sources devoted to history?</p> <p>D.5 What do you think about commemorations? Are they more important than visiting history museums?</p>
E. Demographics	<p>E.1 Where do you remember having seen heard or read about Revolution and Porfiriato?</p> <p>E.2 When and which one was the last museum you visited, if any at all?</p> <p>E.3 Age</p> <p>E.4 Last level of education and school history</p> <p>E.5 Work condition</p> <p>E.6 Area of work</p>

	E.7 Place of residence E.8 Place of origin
Notes (basic identifiers of the interviewee for my later reference)	
Date	
Name	
Recording number	

APPENDIX 3. GRAPHS OF PROFILES OF INTERVIEWED VISITORS

Age of visitors

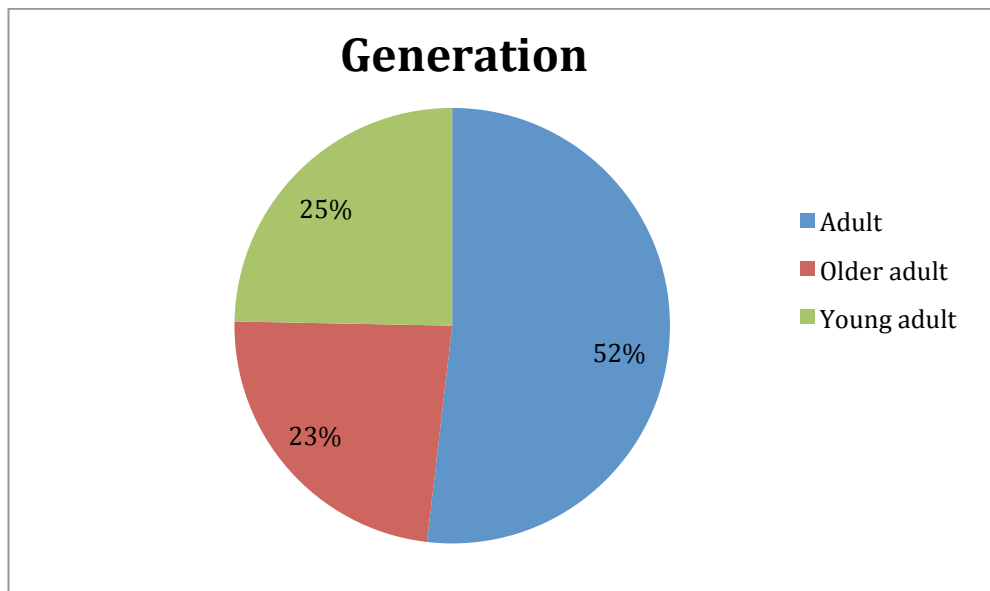


Age of visitors by “generation” where:

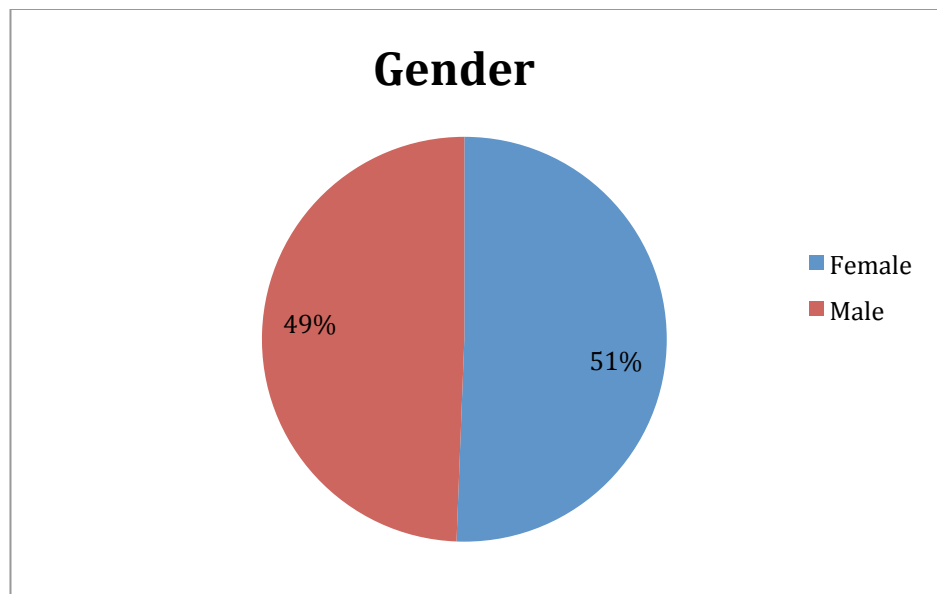
Young adult: 18 to 25 years

Adult: 26 to 51 years

Older adult: 52 and above



Gender:



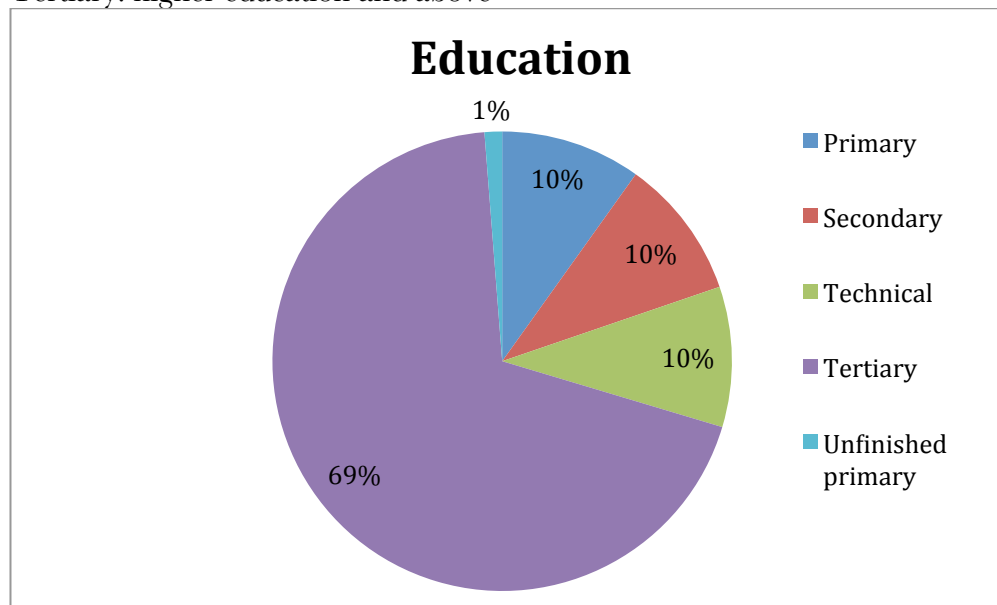
Education attainment where⁸⁷:

Primary: elementary school (grades 1 to 6) (approx. 6 to 12 years old)

Secondary: mid-level education (approx. 12 to 18 years old)

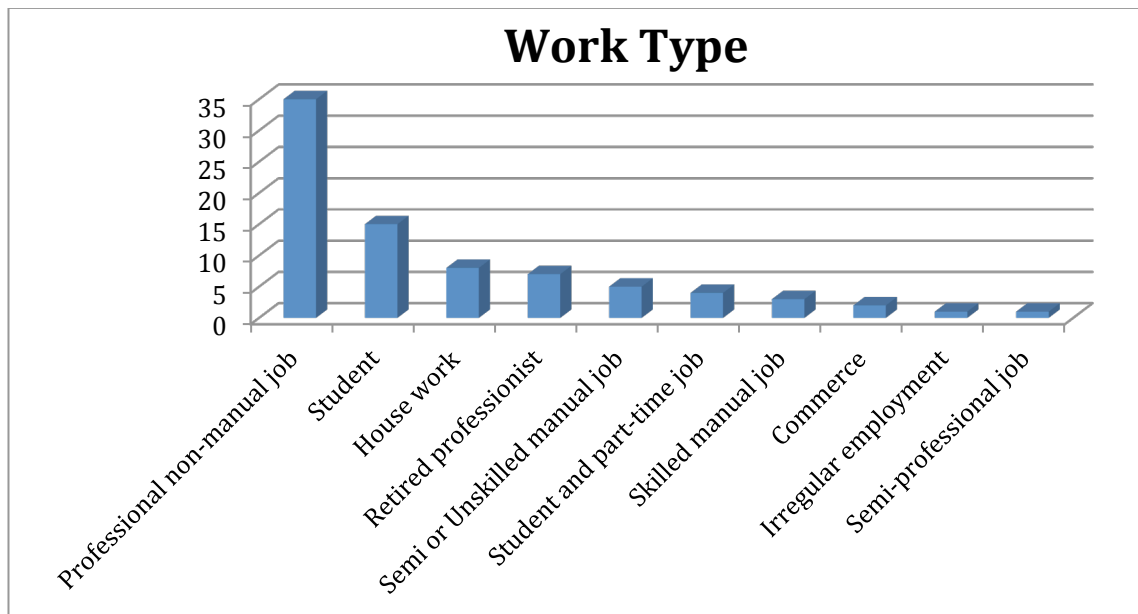
Technical: studies that mix-level education with technical basic higher-education for those that do not study university (16 to 18 years old)

Tertiary: higher education and above



⁸⁷ These percentages cannot be considered statistically representative of general education attainment figures in Mexico or of museum visiting. The graph shows a majority of people with tertiary education but this does not match with official statistics – where only the minority of the population has higher education. The reason for this can be explained partly due to the fact that several of the visitors I approached who seemed to belong to a lower socio-economic sector declined my request of an interview. This could mean, for example, that people with a higher educational attainment felt more confident to participate in the interview.

Employment or professional condition:



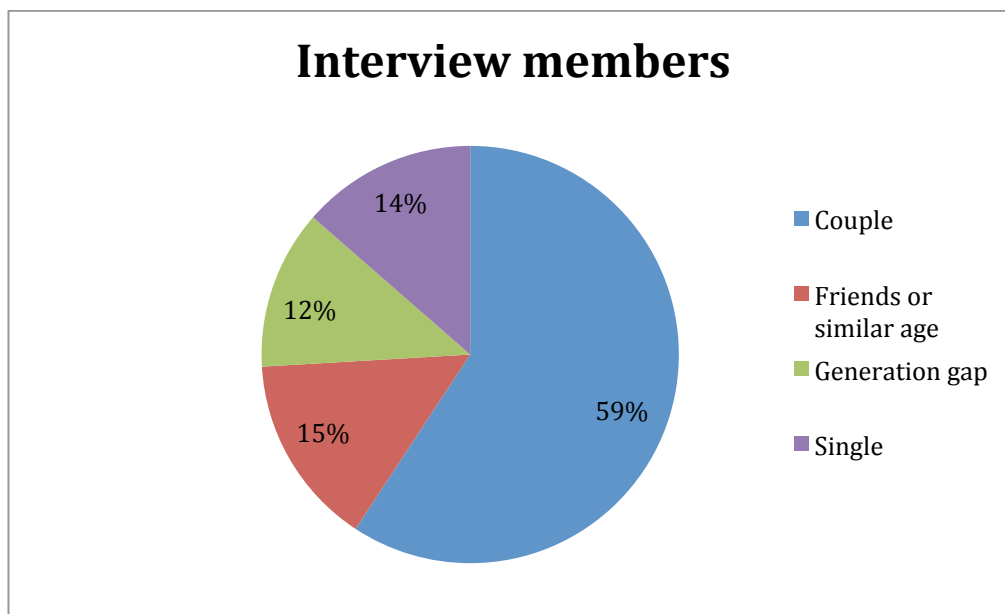
Interview members where:

Couple: boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, partner, husband or wife.

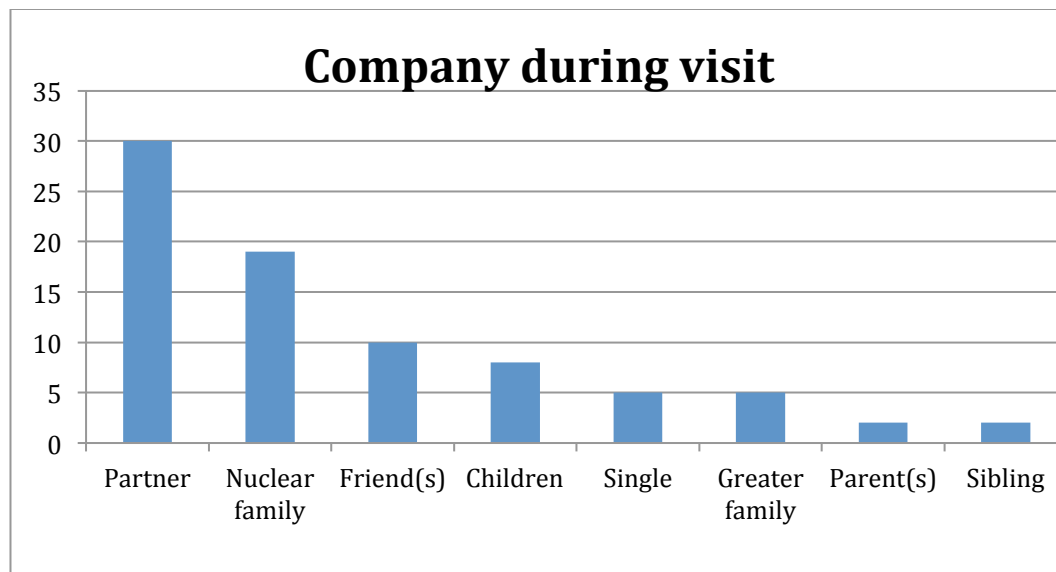
Friends or similar age: friends or siblings

Generation gap: parents and children, grandparents and children, older and younger relatives (i.e. aunt and nephews)

Single: people interviewed on their own



Members visiting the museum:



Reason for visiting the museum where:

Leisure activity near by: were visiting the area as a family or weekend leisure activity and ended up visiting the museum as well.

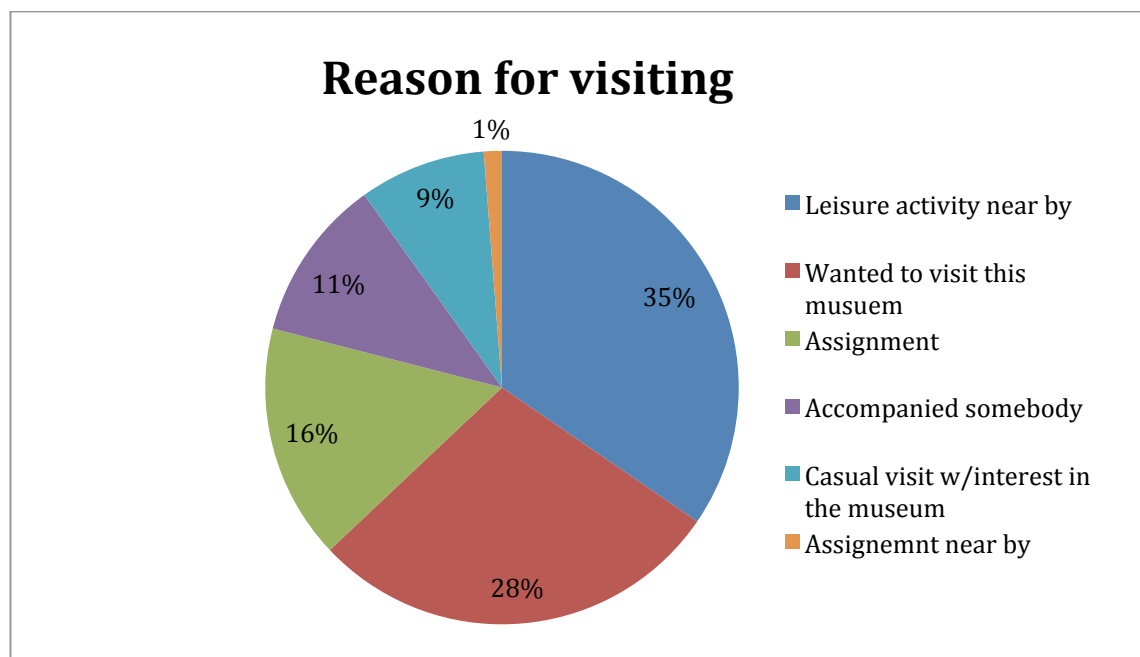
Wanted to visit this museum: the visit as programmed specifically to know that museum

Assignment: the visit was made as part of a school or professional assignment

Accompanied somebody: somebody else of the visiting party wanted/had to visit

Casual visit w/interest in the museum: visitors were near the museum for other reasons but had preliminary knowledge and interest in the museum so decided to visit it then

Assignment near by: visitors had to visit another museum but then passed by this museum and decided to go inside as well.



APPENDIX 4. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

No.	Name	Visited museum	Age	Sex	Work condition	Education	Company during visit	Interview members	Museum visiting	Reason for visiting
1	Abril	MNR	45	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Children	Single	Last 3 months	Assignment
2	Adalberto	GHMC	22	Male	Student and part-time job	Tertiary	Single	Friends or similar age	4 months to less than a year	Leisure activity near by
3	Adela	GHMC	34	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
4	Alan	GHMC	22	Male	Student and part-time job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	4 months to less than a year	Leisure activity near by
5	Alexis	MNR	55	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Assignment
6	Alicia	MNR	18	Female	Student	Secondary	Partner	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
7	Areli	MNR	40	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	1 to 5 years	Assignment
8	Arturo	GHMC	25	Male	Student	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
9	Axel	GHMC	54	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Leisure activity near by
10	Aura	MNR	20	Female	Student	Secondary	Greater family	Generation gap	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
11	Bertha	GHMC	30	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
12	Celia	GHMC	46	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	4 months to less than a year	Accompanied somebody

13	César	GHMC	27	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
14	Claudia	MNR	40	Female	Skilled manual job	Technical	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
15	Daniel	MNR	77	Male	Retired professional	Tertiary	Single	Single	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
16	Diana	GHMC	46	Female	House work	Primary	Children	Single	4 months to less than a year	Assignemnt near by
17	Edmundo	GHMC	40	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	4 months to less than a year	Leisure activity near by
18	Elvira	MNR	58	Female	House work	Secondary	Partner	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
19	Esther	MNR	55	Female	House work	Primary	Single	Single	Long time ago/can't recall	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
20	Federico	GHMC	23	Male	Student and part-time job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
21	Felipe	GHMC	43	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last 3 months	Assignment
22	Flor	GHMC	21	Female	Semi or Unskilled manual job	Secondary	Nuclear family	Generation gap	Long time ago/can't recall	Leisure activity near by
23	Gabriel	GHMC	42	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
24	Geraldine	GHMC	28	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
25	Gema	MNR	56	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Sibling	Friends or similar age	1 to 5 years	Accompanied somebody
26	Germán	GHMC	59	Male	Semi or Unskilled manual job	Primary	Children	Single	Long time ago/can't recall	Assignment

27	Genoveva	MNR	63	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Sibling	Friends or similar age	1 to 5 years	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
28	Gina	GHMC	31	Female	House work	Secondary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
29	Gisela	GHMC	45	Female	Skilled manual job	Secondary	Nuclear family	Couple	4 months to less than a year	Leisure activity near by
30	Gonzalo	MNR	41	Male	Commerce	Primary	Children	Single	1 to 5 years	Assignment
31	Horacio	GHMC	62	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Accompanied somebody
32	Humberto	MNR	32	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
33	Ignacio	GHMC	32	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
34	Íker	GHMC	27	Male	Student and part-time job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
35	Irene	MNR	32	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Accompanied somebody
36	Jaime	MNR	34	Male	Student	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
37	Janine	MNR	23	Female	Student	Tertiary	Single	Single	Last couple of weeks	Assignment
38	Javier	MNR	65	Male	Retired professionist	Tertiary	Single	Single	Last couple of weeks	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
39	Jesús	MNR	67	Male	Retired professionist	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
40	Jesús C	GHMC	47	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	4 months to less than a year	Wanted to visit this musuem
41	José	GHMC	22	Male	Student	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	1 to 5 years	Leisure activity near by

42	Juana	MNR	43	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	1 to 5 years	Accompanied somebody
43	Joaquín	GHMC	29	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
44	Julián	GHMC	30	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
45	Karen	MNR	30	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Single	4 months to less than a year	Accompanied somebody
46	Laura	GHMC	53	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Leisure activity near by
47	Laura F	GHMC	39	Female	Commerce	Primary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last 3 months	Assignment
48	Lucía	GHMC	22	Female	Student	Technical	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
49	Lucio	MNR	23	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	Last couple of weeks	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
50	Magdalena	MNR	61	Female	Retired professionist	Tertiary	Greater family	Generation gap	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
51	Maite	GHMC	20	Female	Semi-professional job	Technical	Partner	Couple	1 to 5 years	Leisure activity near by
52	Manolo	MNR	37	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	1 to 5 years	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
53	Manuela	GHMC	19	Female	Student	Secondary	Partner	Couple	Long time ago/can't recall	Accompanied somebody
54	Marcela	GHMC	50	Female	House work	Technical	Partner	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Leisure activity near by
55	Margarita	GHMC	51	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Children	Single	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
56	Martín	GHMC	53	Male	Semi or Unskilled manual job	Primary	Nuclear family	Generation gap	Long time ago/can't recall	Leisure activity near by

57	Mateo	MNR	51	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	1 to 5 years	Wanted to visit this musuem
58	Minerva	MNR	23	Female	Professional non-manual job	Technical	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
59	Miriam	MNR	61	Female	Retired professional	Technical	Children	Generation gap	Last 3 months	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
60	Nadia	GHMC	26	Female	Student	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
61	Ofelia	MNR	69	Female	House work	Technical	Greater family	Generation gap	Long time ago/can't recall	Accompanied somebody
62	Ofelia G	MNR	44	Female	House work	Tertiary	Greater family	Generation gap	Last 3 months	Assignment
63	Oliver	MNR	21	Male	Student	Tertiary	Parent(s)	Generation gap	Last 3 months	Casual visit w/interest in the museum
64	Oscar	GHMC	38	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
65	Pablo	GHMC	52	Male	Skilled manual job	Secondary	Partner	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Leisure activity near by
66	Ramiro	MNR	66	Male	Retired professional	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
67	Roberto	MNR	30	Male	Semi or Unskilled manual job	Primary	Partner	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
68	Rubén	GHMC	47	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last 3 months	Assignment
69	Roxana	MNR	47	Female	Student	Technical	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Assignment
70	Sara	MNR	29	Female	Student	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	Last couple of weeks	Wanted to visit this musuem
71	Samuel	GHMC	20	Male	Student	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	1 to 5 years	Leisure activity near by

72	Tamara	GHMC	24	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	1 to 5 years	Leisure activity near by
73	Tobías	MNR	22	Male	Student	Tertiary	Parent(s)	Generation gap	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
74	Tobías P	MNR	66	Male	Retired professional	Tertiary	Children	Generation gap	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
75	Trinidad	GHMC	34	Female	Irregular employment	Primary	Children	Single	4 months to less than a year	Assignment
76	Valentín	GHMC	38	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Greater family	Couple	Last 3 months	Leisure activity near by
77	Valentina	GHMC	35	Female	House work	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last 3 months	Assignment
78	Vicente	MNR	51	Male	Semi or Unskilled manual job	Unfinished primary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	Long time ago/can't recall	Wanted to visit this musuem
79	Vladimir	MNR	28	Male	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Friend(s)	Friends or similar age	Last 3 months	Wanted to visit this musuem
80	Ximena	GHMC	50	Female	Professional non-manual job	Tertiary	Nuclear family	Couple	Last couple of weeks	Accompanied somebody
81	Zoé	GHMC	25	Female	Student	Tertiary	Partner	Couple	1 to 5 years	Leisure activity near by

APPENDIX 5. BASIC CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORICAL AND MUSEAL EVENTS IN MEXICO

Year	Historical context	Museums context
1810	Start of the Independence war	
1821	End of Independence war and creation of Mexican Empire (constitutional monarchy). Agustín de Iturbide crowned monarch	
1823	End of Mexican Empire. Federal Republic is proclaimed. Lucas Alamán is appointed Minister of the Interior and Exterior	Lucas Alamán points at the need to create an institution to administer “national memory”
1855	Republican government – amongst them Benito Juárez – start publishing <i>Reforma</i> Laws	
1864	Prince Maximilian of Habsburg is named Emperor of Mexico	Maximilian reunites the so far dispersed collections of the National Museum into the building that they would occupy for the following decades
1867	Maximilian’s empire is brought to an end by the Republicans, at the head of which is Benito Juárez.	
1877	General Porfirio Díaz (who had fought in the side of Juárez and Republicans but then opposed them) starts his presidential period in what would become a dictatorship until 1910 – with the exception of 1880-1884 when a close ally held the presidency.	
1887		The National Museum starts publishing research in its periodical journal <i>Anales</i> [Annals]. A section of ethnography is created in the museum.
1909		The National Museum is divided into two: Museum of Natural History and National Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnography
1910	Commemoration of the centenary of the Independence (September). Mexican Revolution starts (November). Porfirio Díaz is forced to exile in France to never return.	
1917	Proclamation of the Mexican Constitution	
1922		Jesús Galindo y Villa publishes the first history of the National Museum <i>El Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía</i>

1924		Luis Castillo Ledón publishes another history of the museum (same title).
1929	The National Revolutionary Party [<i>Partido Nacional Revolucionario</i>] (which would later become the PRI) is formed	
1933		The first Law of monuments and a Department of Artistic, Archaeological and Historical monuments is created
1938	Opening of the Monument to the Revolution	
1939		<i>INAH</i> is created. Ordinance for the creation of the National Museum of History (<i>MNH</i>) in Chapultepec Castle. The collections of what had been so far the National Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnography will be split in the following years into different museums.
1944		Official opening of the <i>MNH</i> in its new and permanent location, Chapultepec castle.
1945		Official opening of the MNA in its old location
1947		ICOM Mexico is created
1960	From 1958 to 1959 different strikes and opposition rallies against the government take place (for example, that of railroad workers, electricians' and teachers' unions)	Construction of the Gallery of History Spiral Museum (<i>GHMC</i>)
1963		Starts construction of National Museum of Anthropology (<i>MNA</i>)
1964	Strikes and opposition rallies from doctors and nurses against the government	Official opening of the <i>MNA</i> in its new purposely-built building and of the Museum of Modern Art, also in a new purposely-built building
1965		Opening of the National Museum of Cultures in the building that had occupied the National Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnography
1968	Students' protest movement. Massacre of October 2 nd where dozens of students and citizens were killed by paramilitary forces. Olympic games take place a few days later.	
1981		Opening of the National Museum of Art
1982		Creation of the National Museum of Popular Cultures and of the National Museum of Interventions
1985	Violent earthquake in Mexico City.	The structure of the Monument to

	Destroys and damages many buildings and kills thousands of people	the Revolution is checked as a health and safety protocol after the earthquake. The original basement is rediscovered and the president decrees the creation of the <i>Museo Nacional de la Revolución</i>
1986		The “first” MNR opens – a temporary exhibition called 1910 in the Memory of Mexico, coordinated by Eugenia Meyer
1987		The “second” MNR opens (the permanent museum). Created by Meyer and team.
1988	Presidential elections take place and opposition to the PRI, led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, wins presidency. An electoral fraud is supported by the political structure of PRI, which installs its candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari in power. Several months of pacific protest by Cárdenas and followers start but Salinas remains in power	
1994	The City of Mexico acquires legal autonomy and runs election for governor for the first time. Left-wing candidate from the PRD (Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas) wins. A hard economic crisis hits with serious damage to and collapse of finances in the country. The first indigenous armed movement (EZLN) since the Revolution starts in the southern state of Chiapas. Several years of armed conflict start and remain up to present day.	Creation of the Museum “The feelings of the nation” [<i>Sentimientos de la nación</i>] in the Congress.
1999		GHMC closes for refurbishment
2000	The PRI loses presidential elections (it had lost majority in congress in 1997) after more than six decades in power. The right-wing opposition party PAN wins, with Vicente Fox as president.	Partial renovation of the MNR. The museum does not close during this process.
2001		Refurbished GHMC opens
2006	After a very closed competition and political questioning of the legality of the electoral procedures, PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, is installed as president. Several months of pacific upheaval from the left-wing candidate Andrés M. López Obrador (AMLO)	

	follow.	
2007		<i>68' Memorial</i> opens in the also then inaugurated Tlatelolco University Cultural Centre
2009		MNR closes for refurbishment
2010	Commemoration of the centenary of the Revolution and bicentenary of the Independence	New MNR opens as part of the commemorations of the centenary of the Revolution. In National Palace the temporary exhibition <i>Mexico 200 years. The patria in construction</i> is opened. Opening of the first private large-scale social history museum called <i>Memory and Tolerance</i> , partly funded by the Jewish community
2012	After 12 years of PAN in government PRI returns to power (both the presidency and majority in congress). The legality of the electoral procedure is once more questioned by left-wing opposition candidate AMLO. Partial questioning also comes from the right-wing opposition party, PAN.	

APPENDIX 6. GLOSSARY OF MEXICAN CONCEPTS AND CHARACTERS

MEXICAN CONCEPTS IN SPANISH WITHOUT TRANSLATION TO ENGLISH:

Adelita. Women who participated in the Revolution and who became popular icons.

Hacienda. Large holdings owned by wealthy landowners, where peasants worked and lived in harsh conditions, often bordering slavery.

Campesino. Peasant.

Caudillo. Military leader, generally meant to refer to men seeking for power through arms.

Mestizo. Refers to people, or sometimes things, that are the result of the mixing of people (or things) from different ethnic backgrounds. In Mexico, the concept of *mestizo* is key to national identity, as since the 19th century there has been an attempt to define the country as *mestizo* – neither indigenous nor Spanish but unique in its mix. *Mestizo* has a positive connotation of being a “successful synthesis” of the indigenous and Spanish roots.

Nopal. A type of cactus and of high significance in Mexico, as it is part of the national coat of arms, where an eagle is devouring a serpent standing on top of a *nopal*. This myth is originally Aztec and was integrated as a foundational story – a myth of origins – of Independent Mexico.

Porfiriato (the). Porfirio Díaz’s 30 years dictatorship

Priísmo. The period where PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) [Institutional Revolutionary Party] governed. *Priista* is an adjective to broadly qualify anything related to PRI. It can also be a pejorative adjective referring to how PRI governed the country, generally meaning authoritarian and corrupt.

Panista. Adjective referring to right-wing opposition party PAN [National Action Party]. For example, a *panista* version of Mexican history.

Patria. It refers to the fatherland; just as *patrie* in French. It has an important emotional connotation to refer to the country where one is born and to which one belongs. It is a feminine noun and often represented graphically as a woman.

Zapatista. All related to 1) Emiliano Zapata and his ideals during the 1910 Revolution, 2) The indigenous armed movement of 1994 – who was inspired by Emiliano Zapata.

MAIN CHARACTERS MENTIONED THROUGHOUT THE THESIS:

ALAMÁN, Lucas. 19th century historian and statesman. He wrote one of the first comprehensive histories of Mexico and also performed as Minister of the Interior and Foreign Affairs in the first independent republican government. He was also responsible for recommending the creation of the Mexican Museum in 1825.

ARNAIZ Y FREG, Arturo. Historian and curator of the contents of the GHMC in 1960.

CÁRDENAS, Lázaro. Former general that participated in the Revolution, who became president from 1934 to 1970. Known for implementing a socialist government that included redistribution of lands among peasant and indigenous communities. Was responsible for creating the INAH and the MNH.

DÍAZ, Porfirio. Ex-general of the Republican army and president of Mexico from about 1877 to 1910. His dictatorship is known as *Porfiriato*.

EL PÍPILA. National hero of the Independence. According to popular history, he was a miner who helped defeating the Spanish by tying a block of stone to his back. His existence has been highly questioned amongst historians.

JUÁREZ, Benito. Lawyer and President of Mexico in the mid 19th century, supporter of the Republican ideology. Participated in the defeat of the French Empire and of the proclamation of the *Reforma* Laws, which eliminated Church privileges. He is one of most cherished national figures and is often linked with his indigenous and poor origins.

HIDALGO Y COSTILLA, Miguel. National hero who started the Independence in 1810 by calling to uprising on September 15 with the “Cry of Dolores”.

MEYER, Eugenia. Historian and project manager of the MNR project in 1986 and 1987.

RAMÍREZ VÁZQUEZ, Pedro. Architect who worked closely with Torres Bodet in the creation of national museums in Mexico throughout the 2nd half of the 20th century. His first built museum was the GHMC in 1960.

TORRES BODET, Jaime. Director of UNESCO in the late 1940s. Minister of Education in the late 50s and 60s. Responsible for the implementation of the free textbooks, of the creation of national museums in the 1960s and of the GHMC in 1960. He was impacted by some of José Vasconcelos’ ideas.

VASCONCELOS, José. Intellectual and statesman active in the early 20th century. He was responsible for creating a wide encompassing programme of education and art, amongst which was *muralismo*, based on the idea of “civilising” citizens. He was also supporter of the idea of the *mestizo* as a new and powerful “race”, upon which the development of Mexico – and in general Latin America – should be based.

ZAPATA, Emiliano. National hero and *caudillo* of the Revolution. His struggle focused on agrarian rights (the right to land among peasants and indigenous communities), especially in southern Mexico state of Morelos.

ZAVALA, Silvio. Historian and director of the MNH between 1946 and 1954. As a historian, he was affiliated to a “positivist” or “empiricist” historiography, based on ideas objectivity and impartiality.

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