Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds. ***The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940.*** Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 396p.

Ana María Rodríguez-Vivaldi
Washington State University

The 20th century in Mexico began in the midst of turmoil, and this valuable anthology seeks to bring an understanding of the nation-building process that took place within a very specific time frame: from the 1920s right after the "first social revolution" (1) that the Mexican Revolution (1910) represented, to the late 1930s when President Lázaro Cárdenas reorganized the state political party, effectively institutionalizing an authoritarian, single-party political system with a modern, scientific, and reformist agenda. In particular, the essays explore the ways in which cultural notions of state, patriotism, and citizenship were reframed at a vertiginous pace in those twenty years. The essays pay special attention to the complexity of a process brought about by the Mexican Revolution that, contrary to other more ideologically focused civil conflicts, was marked by an "ideological inconsistency and political pragmatism" led by the need to "forge alliances between heterogeneous, and sometimes opposed, social movements and interest groups" (338), among other issues. Thus, the title portrays the ambivalent nature of Mexican national identity as oscillating between two symbols: the "Eagle" or top-down reforms proposed by the government's political and anti-clerical social agenda, opposed by the "Virgin" or popular masses' continued belief in Catholic and/or conservative traditions and icons that represented "local cultural practices that reformers openly disdained" (12). The entire anthology is an attempt at explaining and summarizing extremely well the conflicted forces at play that, no matter how contrary in nature, managed to coexist and blend into a notion of *Mexicanidad*. It could be argued that, though the editors have wisely focused on these pivotal decades, the impact of what is discussed in these essays encompasses the rest of the century, and certainly can be considered relevant to understand ongoing cultural hybridization processes still taking place within a broader, transnational, and global context.

The anthology is divided in four parts, framed by an excellent introduction by the editors and some "Final Reflections" by Claudio Lomnitz that serve as an outstanding coda to coalesce the diversity of topics covered in the collection. The first part, on the "Aesthetics of Nation Building," explores important concepts like *mestizaje* and nationalism through the arts, particularly that of the Muralist painters (Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros), and other iconic figures such as Frida Kahlo and María Izquierdo, who revolutionized traditional artistic and social orders in

several ways. These articles are supported by 20 color plates of paintings by these artists, among other visual aids, that help the reader envision many of the ideas brought forth. Another study, on popular arts and on the exhibitions of these crafts organized in the early '20s, argues effectively that the "Indianized" component that became an integral part of Mexican identity was a conscious promotional effort led by intellectuals linked to similar movements taking place in transnational contexts, much as Picasso's discovery of African masks or Asturias "rediscovery" and use of indigenous Mayan myths in literature. These efforts tied in not only with a notion of using these crafts as "raw material" for high art, thus dissolving the traditional divisions and reassessing the value of art, but were the result of a belief that they represented the "most unmediated, most authentic expression of…*Mexicanidad*" (40). An intriguing article on music provides a historical framework for the evolution of the genre in various configurations that became expressions of nationalism, again taking into account the diverse national and transnational forces that mixed, in a true hybridization process, to create a *mestizo* musical expression. It also shows how music from all sources came together—and brought together—people from all classes and ethnicities as the development of mass media (from radio to film) contributed to its dissemination and popularity without becoming homogenized in the process: "Musical nationalism did not destroy local and regional identity or dignity. It reconfigured them within new national subjectivities in a mobile world" (114). The final article of this first part explores the reframing of the city space through nomenclature, that is through the renaming of streets and other public spaces so as to reflect the need to accommodate the diversity of forces and origins coexisting in urban space. It is an interesting concept, and falls quite well within the critical assessment of "the city" taking place in contemporary cultural discussions.

The second part presents four articles concerned with the "Utopian Projects of the State," beginning with an exploration of relationships between popular and local religious expressions in the midst of a secular state formation promoted by the government. Two of the articles concentrate on the ways in which state-sponsored educational pursuits were carried over into rural areas in an attempt to promote a notion of modernity more in accord with what Mexico wanted to be, rather than what it was, including an attempt to address the so-called "Indian Problem" as national projects aimed to incorporate indigenous populations into a "single, unified nation" (176). One of them brings the discussion forward to consider the continuing struggle of many of these groups, particularly the "Zapatista Movement" in the Chiapas region, who are pushed to be part of the mainstream but, at the same time, want to preserve a certain autonomy. As the article states: "The challenge for the Mexican state today is to create a pluriethnic nation that ensures national

unity and respects indigenous cultures" (193). The final article touches on a seldom discussed topic, but extremely important if one considers its long-range impact: health-related propaganda. This article explores how educational programs devised to prevent the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, syphilis, and alcoholism had to consider cultural expectations on gender roles, personal responsibility, religion, morality, and so forth, many of them conflicting, indeed competing, with modern ideas on health. The conclusion was that the state, while successful in promoting individuals' expectations for higher hygiene standards in businesses and such, failed in their attempt to achieve a national consensus that personal hygiene was a patriotic and national duty or that the individual had to follow strict norms set by the state in their personal choices.

The third part on "Mass Communications and Nation Building" is extremely pertinent if we consider that these were the decades when mass communication and media, from the development of a road infrastructure to an increase in radio programming and the development of a solid film industry, were extremely influential in cultural production at all levels. For example, better roads brought easier access to the cities, particularly Mexico City, from rural areas that had been effectively segregated until then. This will be undeniably important as the century progresses and the depressed rural economies will force thousands to migrate to the city in search of a better life. This may not have been the original purpose of the project, which sought to extend the influence of the capitol city beyond its boundaries, promote material improvement, and enhance the knowledge of Mexicans about their own nation by promoting internal (as well as international) tourism, but the fact remains that they also facilitated the attraction of rural inhabitants to urban spaces where an accelerated industrialization was taking place, and eventually will ease the way up north to the United States. Radio and Film are also presented from the perspective of specific media that the government promoted intensively in the years before World War II, and shaped to become ideological tools in the process of building a nation. The fact that both media flourished in the '40s, which many critics recognize as the Golden Era in Mexican Film as well as the time when nationalist music genres were developed and promoted intensely beyond Mexican borders, is evidence of the government's success in positioning them to become not only competitive commercial ventures, but spaces for public debate, cultural reconciliation, and national identification.

The last part, "Social Constructions of Nations," presents the ways in which various groups with very specific needs and agendas—from Catholics, to women, to Union members—confronted identity issues as they sought to be part of the national discourse in an era where anticlericalism was the norm, feminism was in

its infancy as women struggled to open up spaces for their interests, and Cárdenas pro-union policies and stance had galvanized the labor movement but provoked a strong reaction from the industrial sector. All three groups will succeed in their goal to be an active part of the nation-building dialogue, even if only up to a point, with their greatest impact being their legacy: the possibility for future generations to participate in the discussion and negotiations involved in addressing the very acute internal diversities that do persist in Mexico.

The anthology as a whole brings the reader to a clear understanding of how, after a civil war that tore the nation apart, Mexico managed to promote a state of détente among opposing forces, "reconstruct" itself, and advance a notion of shared identity that would incorporate paradoxical, disparate, and hybrid elements into broad communal spaces of public dialogue, where the "Eagle" could converse with the "Virgin" and find ways for both to live on and endure without falling back into self-destructive strife. ❊