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American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy:

Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Anthropology

by

Jessica Julia McGill Peters

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy:

Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time

by

Jessica Julia McGill Peters

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Yunxiang Yan, Chair

This dissertation analyzes the complex relationship between U.S. diplomatic efforts overseas and cinematic representations, perceptions, and receptions—as well as the implications of this association for cross-cultural interactions—through the American Film Showcase (AFS), a diplomatic program jointly organized by the University of Southern California and the U.S. Department of State. Specifically, my study examined the showcase's implementation (i.e. the selection/approval and screening of films), the objectives of the AFS' organizers, and how the program was received in Monterrey, Mexico—in other words, how the AFS films and activities were interpreted. Following these implementation and reception analyses, I conducted in-depth ethnographic research focusing on program participants' ongoing responses to the AFS through their subsequent perceptions and work/activities. My results have helped to identify/clarify how

perceptions of power, imperialism, and U.S. society shape people's receptivity abroad to ideas about America and diplomatic interactions. They also illustrate ways in which current on-the-ground impressions of the U.S. shift—or why they persist—due to such outreach, and what this means for cultivating international relationships and transforming attitudes towards the U.S. by means of diplomatic efforts. These results thus offer insight into the benefits and drawbacks of cultural diplomacy, and may help to improve future diplomatic endeavors in regions significant to U.S. foreign relations.

The dissertation of Jessica Julia McGill Peters is approved.

Héctor Calderón

Kyeyoung Park

Mariko Tamanoi

Yunxiang Yan, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

DEDICATION

To My Amazing Parents

Thank you for believing in me even when I did not.

Thank you for reminding me that where there is a will, and where there is hope,

there is always a way.

Thank you for teaching me that the world is so much bigger and wondrous

than it appears at first glance.

You have my love and gratitude to infinity and beyond.

Don't Forget the Magic

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jessica Julia McGill Peters earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Cultural Anthropology from Humboldt State University (HSU) in 2010, graduating *Summa Cum Laude*. During her undergraduate career at HSU she received six Presidential Scholar Merit Awards, and upon her graduation the HSU Anthropology Department presented her with the Pat Wenger Outstanding Student in Cultural Anthropology Award. She joined the University of California, Los Angeles' (UCLA) doctoral program in Anthropology in 2011, and received her Master of Arts degree in Sociocultural Anthropology from UCLA in 2012.

Ms. Peters has been the recipient of multiple honors and awards, including a James D. Kline Fund for International Studies Grant from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB); a University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS) Small Grant for UC Graduate Students; a Carrie Hunter-Tate Award from the National Association of Student Anthropologists (NASA); as well as several Conference and Research Grants from the UCLA Anthropology Department and the UCLA Graduate Division. She was previously accorded an Honorable Mention by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program, and was recently selected as an Alternate for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program.

Ms. Peters' previous research has been published in *The Phoenix Papers* (an online journal), and has also been presented at both national and international conferences, including the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (as part of a Society for Visual Anthropology session) in San Francisco, California; the Annual Interdisciplinary Conference in the Humanities at the University of West Georgia; and the Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Mérida, México.

While pursuing her doctoral degree at UCLA, Ms. Peters worked as a Teaching Assistant for a range of anthropological courses, including “Human Evolution” and “Culture & Society”. In addition, she was the Reader for one of the UCLA Anthropology Department’s regional classes, entitled “Peoples of India: Constructing Personhood.” Ms. Peters has also worked as a Graduate Student Researcher for Dr. Sherry B. Ortner, as well as assisting the latter as Student Coordinator for the UCLA Anthropology Department’s Culture, Power, and Social Change (CPSC) interest group. Throughout her graduate career, Ms. Peters has remained an active member of various professional organizations, including the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and its Digital Anthropologies Interest Group; the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA); and the National Association of Student Anthropologists (NASA).

Ms. Peters’ dissertation, *American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy: Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time*, was supervised by Dr. Yunxiang Yan.

Introduction

U.S. cinema and foreign policy have long been entwined, from WWII screenings in Europe to Cold War film exchanges opposing the Soviets (Gardels & Medavoy 2009, MacCann 1969). Today, such uses of cinema are defined as cultural diplomatic outreach (rather than propaganda), seeking to enrich knowledge of the U.S. abroad. This historically-significant relationship between cinematic representation and U.S. diplomacy has grown increasingly important due to the rise in contentious international relations and distorted (often media-based) perceptions of nations and cultures worldwide (Sanders 2011).

The implications of this relationship for cross-cultural interaction are explored through the American Film Showcase (AFS), a recently-developed cultural diplomacy program stemming from the U.S. Department of State's (DOS) partnership with the University of Southern California (USC)[1]. The AFS sends films (both narrative and documentary) and their filmmakers around the world, conducting screenings and holding classes/workshops for international audiences in order to (1) enhance foreign understandings of U.S. society (broadly speaking); (2) increase awareness of (rather generalized) American views on current social issues (e.g. immigration, poverty, sexism, the environment); (3) foster dialogues about such issues to help generate solutions; and (4) disseminate information about U.S. filmmaking through classes/ workshops on distribution, digital technology, marketing, and the like.

Specifically, this dissertation is an ethnographic analysis of the AFS' implementation/ production and how it is received/perceived by its Mexican participants vis-à-vis the theoretical debates concerning how receptions and perceptions of media (e.g. films) are influenced by

[1] To be more specific, it is the DOS' Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and USC's School of Cinematic Arts which have joined forces to implement the AFS program. The International Documentary Association and Film Independent are also collaborators in this endeavor, though to a somewhat lesser extent.

particular 'mindsets' or 'cultural lenses', socio-historical contexts, and communicative presentations (Mackenzie & Wallace 2011, Li & Chitty 2009, Mattern 2005, Bennett 1998, Fisher 1997a[2], Brislin 1981). In other words, this study analyzes the implications of the enduring relationship between U.S. diplomacy and cinematic representation for cross-cultural communication/understanding by examining the AFS' implementation (i.e. selection processes, screenings, and organizers'—DOS officials, USC administrators, and AFS 'experts'—overall objectives) and its immediate receptions/ongoing responses (i.e. the conversations which were generated around the AFS' U.S.-based films and American-led classes/workshops, as well as the discussions and/or actions that were provoked). In particular, I recorded and analyzed ethnographically what occurred when AFS films and classes/workshops—which come from an American viewpoint—were placed into another context: that of Monterrey, Mexico.

Several theoretical and practical issues are integral to this study: (1) whether diplomatic efforts are—or should be seen as—soft or coercive forms of power (Nye Jr. 2008, Wilson 2008, Nye Jr. 1990a); (2) if their transmissions of information through media should be seen as cultural or media imperialism—or both—based on their intent vs. how they are received/perceived (Brooks 2006, Fraser 2003, Primo 1999); (3) how to communicate effectively and also foster two-way dialogues with foreign societies (Semati 2004, Cohen 1987); (4) why certain perceptions of the U.S. have arisen abroad, and their implications for international relations/ communications (Sanders 2011); and (5) if ethnographic, practice-based approaches can benefit media research/reception analyses (Couldry 2010). I have worked to address these through the study's design, as well as by answering the following research questions: (1) How is U.S. society —as presented by the AFS—perceived by the program's participants, and how do their views compare or contrast with the AFS coordinators'/filmmakers' intentions? (2) What has the AFS'

[2] The idea of 'cultural lenses' draws on the work of sociologist/applied anthropologist Glen Fisher (1997).

overseas reception been like in the past (positive, negative, or a combination of both), and what kinds of discussions has it previously elicited regarding the U.S.: ones of imperialism or Westernization (Rantanen 2005, Tomlinson 1991)? (3) To what extent is the AFS received as a confirmation or disruption of existing perceptions?

Such research is important anthropologically, as there exists "little rich ethnographic evidence [documenting] what lower-level officials actually do in the name of the state" (Gupta 1995:376). Furthermore, it is of potential importance not only in academia—where the project's ethnographic methods, interdisciplinary theories, and transnational scope lend it intellectual value in the fields of anthropology, media and film studies, cultural/public diplomacy, and international relations—but also has practical, on-the-ground value with regard to real-world foreign communications/interactions since it examines the multifaceted and historically-significant relationship which exists between U.S. diplomacy and cinematic representation, perception, and reception. More specifically, this dissertation contributes to the scholarly debates regarding audiences' perceptions and receptions of media, particularly film. As these disagreements are in fact influenced by scholarly discussions regarding international, cross-cultural, and intercultural communication (as well as representation), my work can also add to the debates/findings on communication and representation through media (like film).

The project's practical value follows directly from this: by demonstrating the importance of establishing "the objective reality of an international issue and the "reality" as perceived by the parties to the communication" (Fisher 1972:162)—including senders *and* receivers of diplomatic messages—it may help improve communication in terms of diplomatic outreach. In addition, by investigating this relationship through a 'thick' (Geertz 1972) analysis of the implementation and reception of the AFS, my work could enhance the program with respect to

its *participants'* desires and goals[3], thereby possibly helping to further U.S.-Mexico relations since the program itself is intended as a way of enhancing foreign perceptions of U.S. society and of fostering dialogues about common interests/issues.

Overall, examining the AFS' realization as well as people's reactions to it—such as in Monterrey, Mexico—can provide a more thorough understanding of diplomacy practices and of the U.S.' image abroad, one that recognizes structural asymmetries underlying such interactions/ impressions, thus helping improve these endeavors/relations (Vásquez & García y Griego 1983). Moreover, the study's socio-historically and culturally-contextualized analysis of participant reactions/interpretations exposes local beliefs/desires, revealing whether these are addressed and enabling more effective engagements by identifying cross-cultural obstacles[4]. This dissertation's findings regarding media-based diplomacy and cross-cultural reception, perception, interaction, and communication are emerging at a point in time when the world could benefit from such research: as nations become more interconnected and media-saturated, negative impressions can lead to grave political, economic, and social consequences. Furthermore, as media images/ information increasingly shape how people worldwide perceive one another, studying the uses, receptions, and implications of cinema as a form of diplomacy is not simply an intellectual pursuit: it is a practical necessity.

[3] This could likewise assist in generating more culturally-sensitive diplomacy endeavors.

[4] It is only the implementation of "concrete, contextualized analysis of particular situations [that] will enable us to understand what is happening and why it is happening" (Gledhill 2000:22).

CHAPTER 1

❖ Laying the Theoretical Groundwork

Due to the multiple research areas that are associated with this project, there are several theoretical frameworks into which the topic of cinema as diplomacy fits and to which my study is able to contribute: (1) notions of power; (2) debates over cultural and/or media imperialism; (3) conceptualizations of communication; (4) differing views on conducting audience/reception analyses; and (5) questions regarding the development/persistence of media-based perceptions of the U.S. abroad (particularly in Mexico). However, such contributions can only be understood by relating the present dissertation to an existing body of research and to a much broader historical context—addressed in the following sections and next few chapters—since the relationship between American cinema and U.S. foreign policy is not a recent occurrence (nor an unexamined one). It can be seen during WWII with 16 mm film screenings being held in European villages, developing significantly with the rise of the Soviet threat during the Cold War; Karl Rove even tried to enlist Hollywood's aid after 9/11 (Gardels & Medavoy 2009, Fein 1999, Tuch 1990, MacCann 1969).

Many scholars have traced the history of such entanglements, from early propaganda films to later ones that were used as a form of—what political theorists call—'soft' power, building favorable mindsets abroad through realistic yet alluring images of U.S. society (Hayden 2012, Glade 2009, Manheim 1994). The Committee on Public Information (CPI) from WWI illustrates the former, as it employed Hollywood films to propagandize the war both at home and abroad (Gardels & Medavoy 2009, Fraser 2003). Movie exchanges conducted during the Cold War exemplify the latter, portraying the U.S. as an attractively populist, free, and individualistic nation (Dizard 2004). My work in this dissertation—which looks at the previously unexamined

AFS—links the scholarly debates concerning the idea of 'soft' power to the literature on public diplomacy[5], a type of 'people-to-people' or 'government-to-people' outreach through art and education where the goal is to engage directly with foreign societies, potentially influencing their governments and policies (Nye Jr. 2008, Melissen 2005, Manheim 1994). Such diplomacy is an active approach to soft power and has been around for a long time, starting with such early versions as the CPI and the Office of War Information (OWI) in WWII, which "sent movies and Coca-Cola to woo liberated populations in France and Italy into the American camp" (Gardels & Medavoy 2009:44).

I. Issues of Power & Soft Power

i. *Power*

Unlike the more intangible theorizations of other social sciences, anthropology's interest in the concept of power is very much concerned with how theories on this subject can be applied in the examination of everyday life. While anthropologists have drawn on abstract theories of power from a variety of fields—including philosophy, sociology, and political science—they engage with these theories through their fieldwork and ethnographies, taking a more practical or 'on-the-ground' approach in comparison to other disciplines. This is especially true in terms of their ethnographic research, where the focus is on "informal aspects of power relations in which the way people understand the situations they face and the options open to them...[are] central to

[5] Public diplomacy as a term was coined by Edmund Gullion—an American, and the Dean of Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy—in the mid-20th century (Melissen 2005), purportedly in 1965 (Cull 2009c), specifically regarding "the process of international information and cultural relations" (Cull 2009b:17). The term was intended to replace 'propaganda' which had acquired negative connotations, and was used to refer to (1) how foreign affairs affect policy; (2) the cultivation of better intercultural communication; and (3) promoting transnational flows of images, ideas, and information (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association 2012[2000]). However, the first reported usage of the term 'public diplomacy' was in London in 1856, "merely as a synonym for civility in a piece criticizing the posturing of President Franklin Pierce" (Cull 2009c:19). Moreover, during WWI the term described various practices, from war policies to peace declarations, and "[by] the 1950s the usage of the term public diplomacy noticeably shifted towards the realm of international information and propaganda. It was not so much that the term was being used differently but rather that diplomacy was being practiced and understood differently" (Cull 2009c:21). This, then, was what Gullion sought to transform in his redefinition of the term 'public diplomacy.' The term was not adopted internationally until after the Cold War (though the various elements which make up public diplomacy, such as 'listening' and 'exchanges', are not recent at all), specifically during the 1990s when it became more commonly used overseas (Cull 2009c).

the analysis. Such studies enable anthropologists to challenge analyses and explanations offered by other disciplines in ways that are *politically* as well as intellectually significant" (Gledhill 2000:8, original emphasis). As a whole, the work of scholars both within and outside of the discipline has helped anthropologists to acknowledge "[that] understanding power relations in society involves more than an understanding of the formal institutions of the state...It is also necessary to recognize that power remains incompletely centralized even in Western societies" (Gledhill 2000:20). With regard to the present study, there are three specific theorists whose interpretations of power are of particular relevance: Michel de Certeau and his conceptualization of strategies vs. tactics, as well as Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams and their entwined conceptions of hegemony.

de Certeau's discussion of power separates it into that which is exerted through strategies and that which is exercised using tactics: according to de Certeau, where "a tactic is determined by the *absence of power*...a strategy is organized by the postulation of power" (de Certeau 1984:38, original emphasis). This is an important distinction to make when examining the relations of power that exist among individuals, groups, or nations, since the way in which control or authority is asserted differs significantly. Using strategies involves "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships...It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority*...can be managed" (de Certeau 1984:35,36, original emphasis). Conversely, using tactics entails "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus...it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (de Certeau 1984:37). Accordingly, the former—strategies—are primarily deployed by the powerful, while the latter—tactics—are employed by the weak.

With regard to Gramsci and Williams, both theorists developed their ideas of hegemony (or hegemonic power) from the theoretical foundations laid out by Karl Marx, and their articulations of these two concepts therefore have certain aspects in common. For Gramsci, hegemony is a process associated with social, cultural, political, and potentially economic authority where (subordinate) groups of people *voluntarily* consent to the rule of another (dominant) group, as opposed to rule by coercion or physical force. Although this entails the exertion of control by one group of people over others, it nevertheless involves compromise, taking into account "the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised" (Gramsci 1988:211). Consequently, such hegemony is a site of both control and possible resistance/contestation[6].

Williams' conception of hegemony differs somewhat from Gramsci's in that the former sees it as transcending culture, "relating the 'whole social process' to specific distributions of power and influence" (Williams 1977:108). In addition, while the two theorists both emphasize the importance of including subordination *and* dominance as part of hegemony, Williams contends that Gramsci's theorization does not recognize how hegemony is "in effect a saturation of the whole process of living – not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships" (Williams 1977:110). Nonetheless, he too sees hegemony as being a site of simultaneous repression and

[6] As Gupta has noted in his own work, the dichotomy between resistance against and collaboration with a (national or state) hegemony "is unhelpful...[hiding] from view the fact that there is no position *strictly* outside or inside the state because what is being contested is the terrain of the ideological field" (Gupta 1995:393, original emphasis). Likewise, anthropological studies of governmentality suggest that "[in] place of the familiar and often spatialized dichotomy, power here, resistance there...the ways in which subjects are differently formed and *positioned* in relation to governmental programs (as experts, as targets), with particular capacities for action and critique" (Li 2007:276, original emphasis) is where scholarly attention *should* be focused, just as the present study endeavors to do with regard to the AFS program's participants ('targets'), team members ('experts'), etc. One should therefore examine not only practices of intervention but also "informal practices of compromise and accommodation, everyday resistance or outright refusal. Since there is always a gap between a plan and its realization, an ethnographic study...[should] be attentive to the practices that form in, around, through or against the plan" (Li 2007:279). To wit, this study follows a line of inquiry designed to illustrate people's positions of dominance and/or resistance vis-à-vis the AFS. Specifically, it asks: "What are people connected with a governmental program as proponents, implementers or targets, actually doing? How are their practices interpreted by differently situated subjects?" (Li 2007:280).

confrontation: hegemonic power is enforced through traditions and institutions; resistance is exerted through alternative and counter-hegemonies which challenge the dominant hegemony and its ideological underpinnings. Williams thus concludes that "while by definition [hegemony] is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive" (Williams 1977:113).

However, theorists like James C. Scott assert that hegemony or ideological domination is problematic, as it "ignores the extent to which most [subordinates]...are able, on the basis of their daily material experience, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology" (Scott 1985:317). It also overlooks the hidden forms of resistance which those who have been subordinated can engage in, as well as "the necessity of routine and pragmatic submission" (Scott 1985:317). While people may resign themselves to dominant power relationships, this does not mean that they approve of or accept these as legitimate[7]; rather, they may *have* to comply as a form of 'pragmatic resignation' in order to secure their livelihoods and protect themselves from punishment (Scott 1990, Scott 1985). For instance, in terms of gift-giving, alms, and other (re)distributions in Sedaka, Malaysia, "[the] rich put the poor on notice that only those who conform closely to their standard of correct conduct are eligible for their largesse" (Scott 1985:175), something on which many of the subordinate villagers rely.

Consequently, domination and resistance must be understood as ambiguously entwined, since the former—including sanctions/commands and one-sided humiliations—may lead to resistive behavior, such as covert disrespect (e.g. rude nicknames) or compliance that is "conducted with a calculating eye to the structure of power and rewards" (Scott 1985:281). Scott's study of Sedaka illustrates this ambiguity: the domination of the affluent is illustrated through peasant 'performances' of conformity/compliance (e.g. false deference) which are staged

[7] For example, poorer villagers in Sedaka (the pseudonymous Malaysian village of Scott's research) rejected characterizations imposed on them by the wealthy, such as laziness or dishonesty, retaliating by condemning the latter's callousness (Scott 1985).

for fear of jeopardizing income/employment, losing ritual ties and the patronage of the rich, or other repercussions (Scott 1990). However, the dominant group's position and reputation may simultaneously be undermined as peasants engage in 'backstage'/private activities amongst themselves (their 'hidden transcript'[8]), including: (1) symbolic challenges, such as gossip, criticism of the wealthy's greediness/stinginess, and character assassination; and (2) material/ physical defiance, such as participating in sabotage (e.g. arson, killing livestock), stealing paddy, and boycotting feasts (Scott 1985).

Behavioral and ideological resistance may thus involve compliance with structures of domination that is self-interested and materially-based, where the objective is to manipulate the situation/misrepresent oneself, thereby enhancing personal survival. In India, for example, untouchables might use such tactics to obtain necessary goods like sugar or grain from caste Hindus (Scott 1990). Conformity is therefore "often a self-conscious strategy and resistance is a carefully hedged affair that avoids all-or-nothing confrontations" (Scott 1985:285). Like foot-dragging, gossip, feigned ignorance, theft, etc., conformity or compliance often exemplifies what Scott calls 'everyday' or 'routine' resistance, which is distinct from outright revolution as described by Marx. What this means is that resistance entails indirect confrontations related to immediate (material/experiential) concerns which take place through one's daily activities (Scott 1990, Scott 1985). Such resistance will have negligible effects with regard to changing the social order, since they employ (and hence reinforce) behaviors/appearances that the dominant group approves of and/or expects.

This is aptly demonstrated in Sedaka's "prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interests from them" (Scott

[8] The 'hidden transcript' involves *both* behavioral and ideological dissent (e.g. foot-dragging, revolutionary fantasies) concealed from the dominant elite through (apparently) obedient conduct and ritualistic/symbolic compliance (Scott 1985). The 'public transcript' involves overt dominant-subordinate interactions, including publically-endorsed ideologies (Scott 1985).

1985:xvi). While jokes, gossip, and mocking tales may negate the system of domination 'behind the scenes', such tactics do not affect the public inequalities (e.g. income and/or property disparities, titles like 'Haji') that generate the dominant-subordinate hierarchy in the first place. Accordingly, domination must also be seen as 'routine', given that it is enacted in ordinary practices, such as collecting tithes, increasing rents or land mortgages (which can serve as reprisals for insubordination), religious pilgrimages, and moneylending in Sedaka (Scott 1985). These activities constitute a 'performance' of domination—much like that of subordination mentioned above—enacted to maintain ongoing power relations; establish the (alleged) permanency of the existing system; and conceal the potentially offensive aspects of domination, including bribery or violence (Scott 1990). Moreover, dominators can use everyday tactics just as subordinates do, however they do not have to do so anonymously and they can employ these practices to *control* the latter's behaviors, such as by undermining their claims or redefining reality. For instance, wealthy Malays in Sedaka might say that it is not the rich who are stingy or greedy but the poor who are lazy and dissimulating (Scott 1985).

Thus to understand the complex dialectic between resistance and domination, one must analyze the hidden transcripts of subordinates—which are "[critiques] of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott 1990:xii)—and those of the dominant as well—which involve "practices and claims...that cannot be openly avowed" (Scott 1990:xii). It is important to do so, since "an assessment of power relations read directly off the public transcript between the powerful and the weak may portray a deference and consent that are possibly only a tactic" (Scott 1990:3), or it may depict domination as being (solely) benign. Public transcripts therefore reveal only a partial image of dominant-subordinate relations that exaggerates unanimity, portraying the dominant as they want to be seen and naturalizing their power. Furthermore, the

public transcript omits everyday resistance, neglecting "the infrapolitics of subordinate groups... [the] wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name" (Scott 1990:19) as part of the 'invisible' struggle between subordinate and dominant groups.

This infrapolitics includes reappropriations of the dominant (public) transcript for subordinates' benefit, such as how the "linguistic and social distance elites purposely put between themselves and their inferiors can be put to creative use by the latter" (Scott 1990:133). In the antebellum U.S., for example, slaves employed their owners' rhetoric of 'generously' feeding, clothing, and housing them to appeal for better food and treatment (Scott 1990). Domination, especially coercive domination, therefore generates resistance—veiled symbolic dissent as well as more overt/practical defiance—and such opposition (whether covert or open) stems "not simply from material appropriation but from the pattern of personal humiliations that characterize that exploitation" (Scott 1990:111,112). The aim of resistance is thus to renegotiate or call into question these existing power relations, yet "most protests and challenges...are made in the realistic expectation that the central features of the form of domination will remain intact" (Scott 1990:92). With regard to this dissertation in particular, the project as a whole is an examination of cultural processes within the context of the historical relationship of domination (and resistance) between the U.S. and Mexico.

As can be seen, the concept of power has been understood and defined in different ways, often depending on the specific context. Regarding the spread of American media overseas and the diplomatic use of cinema to circulate information—which are specifically examined in this study—power on the part of the U.S. has been variously depicted as coercive[9] (e.g. threats) or

[9] Within the field of anthropology, scholars like Pierre Clastres "[have] criticized political anthropology for universalizing the Weber-derived identification of political power with coercion, subordination and violence" (Gledhill 2000:11); this is similar to what I myself have tried to do in this study, examining the idea of soft power touted by political scientists in order to substantiate the idea that there is "something wrong with the assumption that all power is coercive" (Gledhill 2000:11).

what political theorists define as 'soft' (e.g. attraction), both of which fall under Max Weber's (1947) theorization of power as an individual or group's ability to achieve their will, even in the face of resistance. As scholars of foreign relations/policy likewise assert, "[in] international politics, having "power" is having the ability to influence another to act in ways in which that entity would not have acted otherwise" (Wilson 2008:114), where hard power is the ability to *coerce* them into doing so, and soft power is the ability to *persuade* them to do what is desired.

This means that there is a distinction that must be made "between the exercise of power as (to use an old-fashioned term) *indoctrination* and the exercise of power that leaves or renders those subject to it free...to live according to the dictates of their nature and judgment" (Lukes 2005:492, original emphasis). It is important to note that the perception of the U.S. government's power as coercive is commonly held by academics and government entities in countries that see American media as an invasive form of power (Primo 1999). The persuasion standpoint, on the other hand, is generally supported by international relations and diplomacy scholars (frequently Americans), who view media as a form of "non-coercive *influence*...that can facilitate foreign policy objectives" (Hayden 2012:28, original emphasis).

Power—or the ability to achieve one's goals (i.e. to create or resist change) based on such resources as technology, education, attractive ideas, military force, credibility or legitimacy, and economic expansion—is thus realized (and measured) through directly or indirectly changing the behaviors of others (Nye Jr. 1990a). Power must therefore be understood as a capacity or potentiality rather than an actuality since it is "*essentially contested*...[It] cannot be disconnected from what [scholars] commonly call the 'value assumptions' of the person making the judgment" (Lukes 2005:477, original emphasis) about what counts as being powerful, what is considered as having/exercising power, and what is deemed significant/important with regard to power. Due to

the fact that having the 'resources' or 'means' of power is not necessarily equivalent to being powerful, "major concerns in world politics tend to arise from inequalities of power, and particularly from major changes in the unequal distribution of power" (Nye Jr. 1990a:185).

Consequently, power may be intentional or unintentional; it may involve intervention or abstention; it can be used to attain desired outcomes or it may have unforeseen results; and one's power will vary in its significance compared to that of others based on "the extent to which and ways in which their power furthers their own interests and affects the interests of others" (Lukes 2005:481). Moreover, agents' power will vary because what constitutes these 'interests' will differ, from overt preferences (e.g. visible choices) and covert yearnings (e.g. aspirations or grievances that go unvoiced), to objective needs related to welfare and health, or features which actually comprise the content of living a 'worthwhile' or 'valuable' life—whatever this may mean to the individual (Lukes 2005).

Thus in studying power—particularly governmental/political power—as this dissertation does, the key is not to begin with "the apparently obvious historical or sociological questions: what happened and why. It is to start by asking what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques" (Rose 1999:20). This is precisely the line of questioning I pursued in my analysis of the organizers and DOS officials in charge of implementing the AFS program.

ii. *Soft Power*

As defined by Joseph Nye Jr. (the political scientist who coined the term), 'soft' power is a country's—or, more accurately, its national government's—ability to "obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because [others]...admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness—want to follow it" (Nye Jr. 2004:5). According to Nye, this

type of power blends attraction, influence, and persuasion, drawing on certain cultural aspects, political ideas or values, and specific actions/policies in order to induce other people to pursue 'shared' objectives (Hayden 2012, Rugh 2009, Snow 2009). Consequently, it is also temporally and contextually constrained, since both current and historical relations or tensions with other national groups and social entities may affect projections of soft power, as well as how the latter are potentially perceived/received (van Elteren 2006).

Some anthropologists have made a similar claim, arguing that "government is the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means...[it] operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs...Persuasion might be applied" (Li 2007:275), akin to the manner in which 'soft' power is thought to be employed by political scientists. This concept of 'soft' power also emphasizes a belief prevalent in the fields of international communications and foreign relations: that power in general has been losing its traditional emphasis on military conquest and the use of force[10] as success in the information age becomes more reliant on the ability to produce and/or manipulate knowledge, as well as what 'story'—rather than what army—prevails (Nye Jr. 2010, Armstrong 2009, Wyne 2009, Wilson 2008). Thus the supposed power and materiality of the nation-state "resides much less in institutions [such as the military-industrial complex] than in the reworking of processes and relations of power so as to create new spaces for the deployment of power" (Trouillot 2001:127).

Consequently, power is now thought to be demonstrated more "in the ability to change the behavior of states" (Nye Jr. 1990b:155)—that is to say, national governments—or their preferences, as well as to 'set the agenda' with regard to international affairs through persuasion/

[10] For instance, military interventions now tend to be less effective due to economic and other international entanglements: thus "[in] the age of globalization, state practices, functions, and effects increasingly obtain in sites other than the national but never entirely bypass the national order. The challenge for anthropologists is to study these practices, functions, and effects without prejudice about sites or forms of encounters" (Trouillot 2001:131), just as the present study attempts to do.

attraction, thereby obtaining desired outcomes (Nye Jr. 1990a). Moreover, scholars from many fields (including anthropology) have now demonstrated that the processes involved with globalization—such as increased communication—have led not only to further interactions among different societies, but also to growing interdependence between their nations[11]. This entails relationships where the balance of power must increasingly be understood in terms of the specific context(s) as well as the various resources—technology, information, media, etc.—that may or may not be available to those involved (i.e. 'global polarization') and through which power can potentially be enacted (Rugh 2009, Wilson 2008, Nye Jr. 2004, Trouillot 2001, Nye Jr. 1990a). Accordingly, soft power is notoriously difficult to implement, as it must be employed somewhat indirectly and can require substantial amounts of time to achieve the desired result(s).

There are three specific elements through which political scientists assert that soft power may be deployed: 'culture', political values, and foreign policies. Such power thus "transforms the calculus of international influence by describing how relative "attractiveness" of an actor's culture, policies, or actions can be leveraged to achieve" (Hayden 2012:2) their particular goals. However, for these elements to be effective the first (culture) must be desirable to or respected/ admired by people worldwide; the second (political values) must be positively received and also lived up to, both at home and abroad; and the third (foreign policies) must be viewed as not only legitimate but morally authoritative as well (Rugh 2009, Schneider 2003): any semblance of indifference, arrogance, or hypocrisy in relation to international opinions would diminish their worth vis-à-vis the generation/implementation of soft power.

As Nye asserts, although different societies "cooperate out of self-interest...cooperation is a matter of degree, and that degree is affected by attraction or repulsion" (Nye Jr. 2004:29), both of which are based on people's reactions and attitudes towards the messages/images a national

[11] Though some literature suggests the opposite, that globalization leads to disconnect in certain parts of the world.

group conveys through its governmental policies as well as its popular and/or 'high' culture. These may also be "interpreted with different effects by different receivers in different settings. Soft power is not a constant, but something that varies by time and place" (Nye Jr. 2004:44). For instance, popular American movies and television programs depicting sex, violence, and materialism may be offensive to some, while the individualism and 'freedom' expressed in American music or art may be incredibly appealing (e.g. American jazz in the Soviet Union during the Cold War).

Thus the concept of the 'public' is an important consideration with regard to soft power—and in terms of public diplomacy efforts, as discussed in the next section—since the latter's deployment is ultimately about communicating with other people (foreign 'audiences'), drawing them "toward wanting the same objectives and viewing the scene of international politics in roughly the same normative frame" (Hayden 2012:5). Implicit within this objective is the idea that such publics have some degree of influence over their particular governments (Gilboa 1998)—whether or not this is in fact the case. Consequently, gaining the trust of these foreign 'audiences' and establishing a sense of credibility or identification with them is a significant focus in the pursuit of attractiveness and the cultivation of soft power. The intent is to shape perceptions in specific ways through the careful packaging (e.g. 'framing') and/or dissemination of information (e.g. 'agenda-setting').

The limitations of these assumptions concerning the receptiveness of the 'public' and the expected influence of both disseminated messages and of 'audience' members themselves on their governmental institutions have been questioned by some theorists (this is a particularly contentious area in media studies). Such queries arise due to the fact that there is little evidence demonstrating either that (1) policy decisions are made because one state's government 'likes'

another national governing body, or that (2) soft power can effectively impact foreign policy by influencing public opinion, as it is not the general society but rather government leaders and decision-makers who create/implement such policies; moreover, data shows that public opinions/ attitudes tend to be temporary and variable (Layne 2010). As a result, some scholars contend that since "in the realm of foreign policy the state controls public opinion rather than being controlled by it...[this] undermines the causal logic of soft power" (Layne 2010:57); thus self-interest, inducements, or coercion are seen as accounting for soft power's supposed effects.

Nevertheless, *who* is being 'targeted' (e.g. individuals sharing a specific national background), *how* they are perceived (e.g. as discerning participants or as dupes), and the overarching goals of those trying to implement soft power (e.g. to convince or to motivate) all affect how the latter is deployed in different situations—hence the diversity of public diplomacy programs in existence—since messages and methods must be 'translated' in such a way that they are appropriate to distinct contexts (Hayden 2012). Thus there is a strong focus on the agendas and preferences of recipients—typically with respect to their particular national, cultural, or social 'groups'—which the employers of soft power are trying to co-opt in favorable/tolerant ways regarding their own "culture, ideology, and institutions...the resources that support soft power" (Hayden 2012:41). For instance, the U.S. military has incorporated soft power into its information campaigns, conveying messages to specifically-targeted societies in order to sway their perceptions and enhance the probability of achieving whatever the desired goal is at the time (Taverner 2010). Problematically, "the well-intentioned communication of 'soft power' in the military sphere frequently ends up as miscommunication to the very audience it is intended to influence" (Taverner 2010:138).

‘Hard’ power, or what is often described by political theorists as the opposite of soft power, entails military or economic threats and inducements (rather than attraction), yet *both* involve the desire to influence others, whether by means of coercion or voluntary acquiescence. Understandings of power enactments are therefore both contextually and socially determined, as power (and thus people’s conceptions of it) can vary from command—or more ‘hard’ forms—to co-option—or more ‘soft’ forms (Nye Jr. 2004). For instance, power rarely fits into just one category (like soft) to the exclusion of all others (such as hard, ‘sticky’, ‘smart’, etc.), revealing that “power is...a quality of social relations *within* and *among* nation-states” (Hayden 2012:32, original emphasis), which in practice is constantly revised/tested. Disagreements over diplomacy arise as a result, especially regarding where such endeavors should be located along the ‘power spectrum’ and why (e.g. are they manipulative propaganda, do they foster dialogues, or do they combine a variety of aspects and fall somewhere in the middle). Through its examination of both the U.S. Department of State’s use of cinema to manage foreign relations and international audiences’ interpretations/receptions of the AFS, my study suggests that power relations involved in diplomatic projects are perceived based on one’s position as a transmitter or a receiver. Moreover, given the varied understandings potentially associated with these dissimilar positions, such efforts cannot be assigned only one type of power, and their effectiveness will likely be influenced by this hybridity (e.g. appealing elements may also be resented as coercive).

Some scholars have even contested the notion of soft power itself, arguing that it is problematically defined and conceived; that it should perhaps be seen as coercive (like hard power); and that the concept of attraction on which it is based must be: (1) better theorized/ understood, (2) recognized as subjective, and (3) problematized rather than assumed as natural—in other words, as being an essential condition, where certain aspects (e.g. democracy, peace) are

‘universally’ attractive—or as being easily created through persuasive argument. In terms of the concept’s definition, scholars like Steven Lukes (2005) contend that there needs to be separation between the different forms of co-option, attraction, and enticement (i.e. between persuasion and ‘preference shaping’). Specifically, two distinctions need to be made, first “between changing the incentive structures of agents whose (subjective) interests are taken as given, on the one hand, and influencing or shaping those very interests, on the other. And second...between the conditions under which and mechanisms by which such shaping and influencing occurs” (Lukes 2005:491).

Others, such as Zahran & Ramos (2010), have asserted that Nye’s soft power should incorporate a more Gramscian notion of hegemony. To begin with, they contend that the concept “creates the illusion of an aspect of power that could exist on its own only through consent, ignoring the social reality populated by intrinsic mechanisms of coercion” (Zahran & Ramos 2010:24). Next, they argue that it ignores how “ideas are always relative, they originate in a given society or culture, they are not absolute and usually mean different things for different people” (Zahran & Ramos 2010:24); that is to say, there are no ‘universal values’ which serve as sources of soft power. Finally, they assert that it “misinterprets the spheres of political and civil society, and therefore the relation between coercion and consent” (Zahran & Ramos 2010:25), which are not truly separate/independent from each other.

With regard to the idea of attraction as ‘natural’, the problem is that one cannot assume that something is predetermined for a collective group (e.g. that there is already a disposition *towards* the ‘in-group’ and repulsion *away from* the ‘out-group’). Moreover, “if attraction were natural, one would not need to cultivate soft power in the first place. It would simply be there” (Mattern 2005:593). One alternative framework which has been proposed is “to model attraction

as a relationship that is constructed through *representational force*—a nonphysical but nevertheless coercive form of power that is exercised through language" (Mattern 2005:583, original emphasis).

Taking the constructivist perspective that reality is socially established through the legitimization of specific collectively-communicated interpretations, this model puts forth the argument that attractiveness is "a sociolinguistically constructed 'truth' about the appeal of some idea" (Mattern 2005:585). Because people do not share the same ideas of what 'evidence' is, such ideas cannot be made attractive to others through evidence-based reasoning (i.e. persuasion) but rather through verbal fighting characterized by 'representational force', where a speaker's narrative—and/or the structure of their narrative—"threatens the audience with unthinkable harm unless it submits, in word and in deed, to the terms of the speaker's viewpoint" (Mattern 2005:586).

Consequently, soft power is argued to be rooted directly in hard power, and as a result, the former's communicative efforts to generate attraction cannot be seen as persuasion because of the involvement of representational force (and hence coercion). However, the argument for verbal fighting and representational force runs into difficulty as well, given the fact that it "leaves the audience *no* room to refuse...[seeking] to boldly defeat alternatives without hesitation, engagement, discussion, or playful antics" (Mattern 2005:602, original emphasis). According to detractors, this 'bullying' of the audience is distinct from how soft power is used today (such as in public diplomacy efforts), where interaction and two-way discussion are the main objectives/techniques. As Nye himself asserts, insensitivity to the perceptions of foreign societies—the 'eyes of the beholders'—detracts from soft power, while listening and dialogues/ consultation are crucial to its generation, since "[perceived] images of nations can be identified

as the pictures of other nations in the minds of people...tied up with the attributes of the object and those of its beholders" (Li & Chitty 2009:1).

Such arguments—both for and against soft power, or even for 'smart' power (the combination of hard and soft power)—illustrate the complexity (and ambiguity) of the contemporary power 'spectrum', where "it is possible for command power behaviour [*sic*] to utilize intangible soft power resources, in the same sense that co-optive power behaviour [*sic*] can make use of tangible hard power resources" (Zahran & Ramos 2010:17,18) to achieve their respective ends. What some scholars have therefore sought instead is to build on the notion of soft power by advancing a 'strategic conception of power', one which focuses "on the relational qualities of power...within broader social structures...[encouraging] a profound concern for the role of the subject of power within power relations" (Lock 2010:33) in addition to the role of the 'agents' deploying soft power.

In other words, these scholars attempt to recognize both relational and structural forms of power as making up the overall soft power concept, thereby including both agents and subjects—and their interdependence—while avoiding an oversimplification wherein power and social structures are viewed as resources to be possessed rather than as elements of relationships or as intersubjective societal properties (e.g. norms, rules), respectively (Lock 2010). This perspective follows a more Foucauldian understanding of power, where the latter's very existence implies a potentially resistant subject. Accordingly, the focus is on soft power in terms of "the relationship between the strategies of multiple actors" (Lock 2010:42), where 'agents' seek to exert power over 'subjects' by changing their own behavior in order to fit what they believe the latter interpret as attractive. Others have also proposed that the advocates of soft and hard power should integrate their positions into one theoretical framework, that of smart power, since their

debate/the dichotomy between the two power concepts does not serve national (or international) interests, whereas they may be more effective if combined (Wilson 2008).

The postulated benefits of such integration would be: (1) increased consideration of the target audience (e.g. their attributes, beliefs, desires); (2) greater knowledge and understanding of the acting group's own capabilities (its strengths/limitations) and goals; (3) recognition of the broader context in which the action(s) will take place (i.e. the local, national, regional, and global levels); and (4) precise determination of what tools will be employed, when, how, and in what combinations (Wilson 2008). However, the problem with combining these two forms of power is "that hard and soft power constitute not simply neutral "instruments" to be wielded neutrally... they themselves constitute *separate and distinct institutions and institutional cultures* that exert their own normative influences over their members, each with its own attitudes, incentives" (Wilson 2008:116, original emphasis), and manners of exercising power. This therefore poses obstacles to cooperation, despite the potential benefit of integrating them in order to implement a 'smarter' foreign policy framework.

There is also the issue of soft power generated by civil society in conjunction with that generated by the state, since sports, popular culture, corporations, etc. can all produce soft power in their own right, but can also "strengthen or weaken the soft power of different state and non-state agents whose images are related to these groups" (Zahran & Ramos 2010:20), including government institutions. For the U.S. in particular, ambiguity towards American soft power efforts—both commercial and governmental—has been a commonly observed reaction (Chiozza 2007) on the part of audiences abroad as well as the American public at home, the latter of which indicates "a historical trend of ambivalence toward the necessity of persuasion – the need to elaborate the attractiveness of U.S. political culture, institutions, and values" (Hayden 2012:227).

With regard to the former, studies have shown that American "[soft] power incites awe and envy, but also provokes resentment and hostility" (Fraser 2003:11), often because it is seen as 'Americanization' or U.S. (cultural) imperialism through the (inescapable/hegemonic) spread of 'seductive' images, products, and messages. Though some scholars take such international ambivalence as a negative sign, others contend that this simply means there is room to improve, in other words, to increase the ratio of positive reactions to negative ones (Nye Jr. 2004). This could be accomplished through the following approaches: (1) reducing or eliminating disparities between proclaimed values and actions/policies which convey an image of hypocrisy and thereby diminish credibility/tarnish a nation's reputation; (2) 'fine-tuning' interactions with different societies based on their specific perceptions and themes relevant to them; and (3) 'showing' rather than 'telling' (particularly via foreign policies) in order to demonstrate credibility, honesty, and upstanding character through deeds and actions rather than just words (Taylor 2009, Lynch 2007).

Thus by analyzing the AFS as a strategic means of generating and employing soft power, my research addresses a key debate over the utility of this concept: as previously discussed, some scholars argue that soft power is problematic because its cultural elements provoke ambiguous reactions—like simultaneous resentment and attraction towards the U.S. (Fraser 2003)—while others contend that it is reactions to American *policies* which are volatile (Seib 2009). The former assert that soft power is not effective, while the latter affirm that with less hypocritical/ more credible policies it could be wielded in a productive manner (Hocking 2005). My own analysis will help establish both the beneficial and detrimental aspects of soft power as implemented by U.S. diplomatic programs like the AFS, thereby potentially enhancing cross-cultural interaction as a result.

II. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy—or the process of reaching out to everyday people ('publics') in other countries—is not a simple affair of being 'liked' more internationally; rather, it is a way of trying to lessen security risks which arise due to hostility (e.g. terrorism) and of potentially bettering international relations (not just politically, but also economically and socially). Of course, "[any] governmental intervention risks producing effects that are contradictory, even perverse. For this reason, reflexivity and calculation of risk are intrinsic to government" (Li 2007:277). It is in fact this "reflexivity as a practice that can be investigated ethnographically. Who reflects? What weight do the outcomes of previous interventions carry in their reflections? What are the risks of concern to the variously situated subjects, and how do they figure in their calculations?" (Li 2007:277). (This is precisely what the present study attempts to understand through an analysis of the people involved in the AFS, including its participants, organizers, and DOS officials.)

Accordingly, a national government—such as that of the U.S.—"must define itself through deeds and words in ways that build global friendships or at least diminish enmity and so limit the scope and intensity of anti-Americanism" (Seib 2009:vii), or other similar sentiments. Long associated with the manipulative image of propaganda (Manheim 1994, Tuch 1990), public diplomacy is somewhat similar "in that it tries to persuade people what to think, but it is fundamentally different from [propaganda] in the sense that public diplomacy also listens to what people have to say" (Melissen 2005:18). Yet because in the past public diplomacy has sometimes involved the use of propagandistic techniques or was itself employed propagandistically, it must be seen as including "shades of a vast spectrum of activities under one label" (Kelley 2009:82), from those that lean towards propaganda to those that do not[12].

[12] For of course, such "programs of intervention are pulled together from an existing repertoire, a matter of habit, accretion and bricolage" (Li 2007:276), and where propaganda once existed it may do so again.

In addition, since the mid-1990s public diplomacy has become associated with the idea of 'nation branding'[13], where national governments try to redefine their country's identity or 'brand'—giving it a component (often an emotional one) with which people worldwide can potentially identify—in order to increase their economic and political viability internationally (Anholt & Hildreth 2010, Hocking 2005, van Ham 2001). More specifically, nation branding can be thought of as changing how the outside world views a particular nation-state (van Ham 2001); it is "the strategic self-presentation of a country with the aim of creating reputational capital through economic, political and social interest promotion at home and abroad" (Szondi 2008:5). This differs from public diplomacy in that nation branding—which has also been called 'competitive identity'—specifically focuses on "how the nation **as a whole** behaves towards, interacts with, and presents and represents itself to other nations, whereas...public diplomacy concentrates exclusively on the presentation of government policy to foreign publics" (Anholt 2008:41, original emphasis).

In other words, nation branding focuses on enhancing one's image/reputation in order to increase and/or maintain international competitiveness (van Ham 2001), while public diplomacy concentrates on influencing people's opinions abroad "to create a receptive environment for foreign policy goals and promote national interests" (Szondi 2008:7). Primarily, this entails focusing on long-term outcomes with regard to international relations and working to enhance/ further soft power, though this last element is often not overt (Tuch 1990). Consequently, the audiences for nation branding and public diplomacy differ as well: the former is aimed more at

[13] One could describe such branding as the reformulation of governmental discourses on national identity (Billig 1995), a process which has arisen in response to—and as a means of asserting some semblance of control over—the international circulation of people, products, and ideas. National territories are said to 'compete' with one another for dominance in this new 'transnational marketplace' (Harvey 2005), specifically by distinguishing themselves from others via their own distinct 'brand' which promotes particular images—often attractive or unique—of the different nation-states (Kaneva 2012, Heller 2011). In essence, nations are marketed or sold to the rest of the world through the creation of a seemingly valuable and desirable 'national identity' which is then attributed to the nation itself (Nakassis 2012).

general societies made up of 'consumers' (both foreign *and* domestic), while the latter targets more well-defined (international) groups interested/involved in foreign affairs (Szondi 2008).

Significantly, branding has not been proven to effectively alter national images: "images of places appear to be remarkably stable, and highly resilient in the face of any kind of deliberate manipulation" (Anholt 2008:34). Nation branding is thus problematic, since when "the task is to persuade people to change their minds about a country, advertising becomes propaganda, which most people instinctively recognise [*sic*] and resist" (Anholt 2008:34). This link to branding—in addition to its propagandistic history (which will be discussed in more detail later on)—has meant that while public diplomacy has and continues to play an important role in U.S. foreign policy, its function/utility remains in question. Some still see it as manipulative publicity, others contest the need for persuasion through attraction at all, and many contend that its 'revelatory' function (i.e. exposing foreign societies to values, motives, and/or policies shared with the U.S.) is not effective, as people around the globe are by now quite familiar with the U.S.—even if Americans are not familiar with them—particularly as a result of the nation's widely-disseminated media (Amin 2009, Schneider 2009, Taylor 2009, Hudson 2007, van Ham 2005).

Academic debates thus typically hinge on the following: should American public diplomacy projects continue to focus on making foreign audiences aware of life in the U.S., like the United States Information Agency (USIA)[14] tried to do during the Cold War through films, television broadcasts, and exchange programs (Rugh 2009, Dizard 2004, Tuch 1990, MacCann 1969)? Or should they abandon such an 'outdated' practice, directing their energy instead towards building international relationships via two-way communication with foreign peoples, such as through Virtual Presence Posts or U.S. Digital Outreach Teams (Hayden 2012, Amin 2009, Seib 2009, Melissen 2005)?

[14] Created in 1953 (Glade 2009).

Proponents of the latter have argued that public diplomacy should no longer be built on 'winning arguments' or the 'one-size-fits-all' broadcasting of information, and should rather "[invest] more in face to face contacts, education and exchanges that involve civil society" (Nye Jr. 2010:10)—in other words, investing in engagements/interactions designed to try and better understand targeted groups in "countries which are most relevant to [American] interests – not those which are easiest to influence" (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002:7). Moreover, such advocates contend that today "[global] publics will not allow themselves just to be talked to, but are demanding fuller participation in dialogue and feedback" (Snow 2009:8).

These differing perspectives derive from the two primary views of communication which influence public diplomacy efforts: (1) communication as a way to transmit information, such as to persuade or manipulate; and (2) as a type of social process for building relationships and promoting harmony. The first—transmission—emphasizes "selecting, structuring, and presenting the information to achieve a desired effect" (Zaharna 2009:88). In this case the focus is on control over a one-way flow of information, how this information is delivered, and how it is received (since the audience is seen as being made up of passive recipients).

The second—social connection—concentrates on reciprocity, the creation of trust, and relationship building/maintenance with an active audience, "[seeking] to find commonalities or mutual interests between publics and then ways to link those publics via some form of direct interpersonal communication" (Zaharna 2009:91). My dissertation responds to this scholarly disagreement by analyzing how American public diplomacy—in the form of media-oriented (specifically film-based) cross-cultural 'dialogues' via the AFS—is received abroad; such as, for example, by inspiring hostility towards U.S. policies or skepticism of the American government's motives. In particular, my research supports the argument that "instead of either/or

communication battles that seek to define public diplomacy, public diplomacy needs to redefine its vision...to include *both* information transfer *and* relationship building" (Zaharna 2009:97, original emphasis).

Public diplomacy is in fact a strategic 'tool' or 'instrument' of soft power (Scott-Smith 2009, Melissen 2005): it "(forms) a subset of diplomacy, which is itself a subset of government activities, which is just one element of...soft power" (McDowell 2008:14). Where the traditional form of diplomacy was 'G2G' (government to government), public diplomacy has instead involved 'G2P' (government to people/global publics) communication, and "[more] recently... the way in which both government *and* private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions (P2P)" (Snow 2009:6, original emphasis). In its contemporary form, the purpose of U.S. public diplomacy is "to achieve understanding of America – its values, traditions, and institutions – as a psychological foundation for [the] second objective – achieving understanding of specific foreign policies" (Tuch 1990:8). In order to do so, such diplomatic efforts take an active approach to the creation of attraction, often through outreach programs like educational, scientific, or arts exchanges (Cull 2009b).

As described by political theorists, the relationship between soft power and public diplomacy is made evident in the fact that "the resources [which] produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or [national government] expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. Public diplomacy is an instrument...[used] to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments" (Nye Jr. 2008:95). Such diplomacy is important, since a favorable image may

influence foreign peoples' opinions—as well as (potentially) those of their governments—and because leaders may be limited by their own constituents' negative impressions of other nations (Gilboa 1998, Cornelius 1983[1982], Vásquez & García y Griego 1983, Fisher 1972).

Ironically, public diplomacy's credibility—and, hence, its effectiveness—often relies on such efforts having the appearance of distance from governmental involvement, despite the fact that as a form of diplomacy, the government *must* be involved in some capacity or role. The reason for this is that many societies—like China or many of those in the Middle East, for example—remain skeptical of the motivations underlying American public diplomacy (Amin 2009; Cull 2009b; Kelley 2009; Scott-Smith 2009; Seib 2009; Shen 2009; McDowell 2008; Melissen 2005; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002; Tuch 1990).

One criticism which has been leveled about the soft power/public diplomacy relationship —specifically in terms of the U.S.—is that it is somewhat passive, since "[the] soft power approach towards "winning hearts and minds" amounts to a neutered beauty contest...in the naïve hope that increased knowledge and understanding [will] breed love for the United States" (Armstrong 2009:64). Those arguing this particular point take a similar perspective to the aforementioned critique of soft power as in fact being hard, contending that such diplomacy must involve not only persuasion but also coercion, rewards, and deterrence: it must "influence the will of an actor through both anticipating and appropriately affecting the psychological responses of that actor to an event, image, or message. Today's requirement is not better story telling or controlling the narrative, but mastering the discourse" (Armstrong 2009:65).

However this argument is not entirely valid, since public diplomacy is actually quite an active process and—at least in its most recent form—one which eschews the tactics of so-called 'hard' power. To begin with, there are five primary components that make up public diplomacy:

(1) listening, or "collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas" (Cull 2009b:18) in order to adjust one's approach to diplomacy and/or policy accordingly; (2) cultural diplomacy—discussed in the following section—or the attempt to make "cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or [facilitate] cultural transmission abroad" (Cull 2009b:19); (3) advocacy, or "undertaking an international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy, idea or...general interests" (Cull 2009b:18); (4) international broadcasting, or "using the technologies of radio, television and Internet to engage with foreign publics" (Cull 2009b:21); and (5) reciprocally trading citizens for a period of academic study, engagement in the arts, or participation in another type of exchange program. Consequently, public diplomacy is concerned with disseminating specific messages, information, and ideas (i.e. 'memes'), as well as facilitating relationships across national and/or cultural borders. Typically, this means that governments are engaging with foreign societies in an attempt to 'manage' international affairs to their advantage (Kelley 2009, Manheim 1994).

Today, however, this may also involve non-traditional players (like NGOs), and the spread of new technologies prevents the separation of domestic from international spheres with regard to who receives what ideas/messages/information (Cull 2009b, Melissen 2005)[15]. Some of the main reasons for this include "the rise in user-friendly communications technologies that have increased public participation in talking about foreign affairs and the subsequent involvement of public opinion in foreign policy making. Another development is the increase in people-to-people exchanges, both virtual and personal, across national borders" (Snow 2009:6). As a result, public diplomacy can have a suite of possible outcomes: increasing other societies'

[15] For instance, "efforts by states to establish their superior spatial claims to authority do not go uncontested...at a time when new forms of transnational connection are increasingly enabling "local" actors to challenge" (Ferguson & Gupta 2002:988) them, such as through (supposedly) non-state organizations like NGOs as well as other "transnational alliances forged by activists and grassroots organizations and the proliferation of voluntary organizations supported by complex networks of international and transnational funding and personnel" (Ferguson & Gupta 2002:990).

(1) familiarity with, (2) appreciation of, and (3) engagement with a specific national group or groups—as well as possibly influencing them. None of these can be achieved, however, without reinforcement through relationship-building activities or events that foster credibility and involve the participating parties' mutual recognition of and respect for one another's values, beliefs, and potential assets (Ellis & Maoz 2012; Mackenzie & Wallace 2011; Amin 2009; Armstrong 2009; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002).

There are also three essential 'layers' with regard to how public diplomacy is employed that must be taken into consideration, as their utility—i.e. which will be the best way to engage foreign societies and build credibility/trust—varies depending on the particular context (e.g. the local environment, international events, and the people who are involved). These three layers are monologue, dialogue, and collaboration, where the first involves one-way communication which is intended "to convey an idea, a vision, or a perspective and to present it eloquently and clearly" (Cowan & Arsenault 2008:13). A speech, for instance, may be incredibly impressive/impactful in certain diplomatic situations, however such monologues—or unidirectional transmissions—do not allow for feedback, may not acknowledge dissenting voices, and are thus often viewed suspiciously (Hocking 2005): "information, no matter how artfully crafted, has a limited ability to influence individuals to discard their preconceptions or stereotypes." (Cowan & Arsenault 2008:20).

On the other hand, dialogue—referring to instances of reciprocal/bilateral communication or exchanges of information/ideas—allows each participant's perspective to be accounted for, and it emphasizes mutual learning about (and from) their unique experiences or views, facilitating the establishment of connections which can surmount preexisting stereotypes/ boundaries through a better understanding of others (Armstrong 2009, Cowan & Arsenault 2008,

Fisher 1972). As compared to the two aforementioned 'layers', collaboration can often be even more effective: this is because through participation in a cross-national partnership, people can learn directly from and about one another, thus combatting prejudices based on misinformation and finding common ground (Ellis & Maoz 2012)—social, cultural, political, religious, etc.—thereby becoming "bound by their common experience and/or achievement" (Cowan & Arsenault 2008:21).

It is important to note that public diplomacy has existed for a long time—particularly if one thinks of it simply as the attempt to 'cultivate influence'—but its starting point in terms of '*image* cultivation' is much more recent (particularly if one associates this with nation branding), dating back to the rise of nation-states and—most especially—to WWI (Armstrong 2009, Szondi 2008, Melissen 2005). Moreover, public diplomacy is not limited to one country or one form: it varies from place to place, often influenced by the particular historical period as well as existing international relations/events (Snow 2009). In WWI, for example, the CPI and OWI were both engaged in (frequently propagandistic) public diplomacy efforts, "incorporating news, film, and public address" (Hayden 2012:229) to sway domestic and overseas opinion. Similarly, during the Cold War the Fulbright-Hays Act promoted educational/cultural exchanges, such as sending jazz musicians to the Soviet Union; other public diplomacy efforts (through the USIA) have included intellectual, artistic, and 'cultural' exhibitions/conferences on topics like scientific innovations, dance, theater, and 'American life' (e.g. the 1955 Atoms for Peace worldwide exhibits).

It is significant that Americans gave very "little consideration...to the idea of U.S. government support for these activities abroad before World War II. This indifference changed as Washington officials began to see how effective the performing arts could be in advancing ideological strategy" (Dizard Jr. 2004:192). As a result, government sponsorship/backing for

such diplomacy efforts increased during—and following—the Cold War, with the USIA expanding its outreach to include international publications as well as broadcasting outlets like the Voice of America and Radio Free Liberty (Grincheva 2010, Szondi 2008, MacCann 1969). Yet a theoretical division arose during the Cold War—one which persists today—between public diplomacy scholars who favor "the slow media...art, books, exchanges—which [have] a "trickle down effect," and those who [favor] the fast information media of radio, movies, and newsreels, which [promise] more immediate and visible "bang for the buck"" (Nye Jr. 2008:98).

Despite their differences, all of these public diplomacy efforts were based on the idea that "[audiences] did not need to be *convinced* so much as they needed to be *aware* of democracy and the United States" (Hayden 2012:232, original emphasis). As mentioned above, this notion of a 'revelatory' public diplomacy—one which 'illuminates' shared political/social features—has been and continues to be debated among public diplomacy scholars, leading to the rise in the early 2000s of the concept of 'forging relationships' where "diplomatic practices that aid, facilitate and connect" (Hayden 2012:236) became the new focus, such as through Virtual Presence Posts in regions lacking the physical presence of an American Embassy or Consulate.

Vacillation between these forms of public diplomacy is ongoing—as illustrated by the U.S. government's 'Shared Values' campaign after 9/11, which reverted to expository declamation (Armstrong 2009)—predominantly because measuring and evaluating their effects is extremely difficult and highly contested (Vinter & Knox 2008). The three central difficulties are that (1) public diplomacy has long-range goals (taking significant time to achieve or to demonstrate results); (2) the concepts involved which require measuring—like trust—may be both intangible and variable (making their assessment challenging); and (3) it is difficult to attribute observed changes in attitude/behavior directly to public diplomacy rather than to

something else, such as environmental variations, new policies, or *other* diplomatic efforts (Glade 2009, McDowell 2008, Vinter & Knox 2008).

Assessing a variable like success, for instance, "would entail measuring access to, and gauging the disposition of, the target group" (McDowell 2008:15). Or, as another example, if a national government staged a public diplomacy affair such as a film festival, it "can quantify the publicity received and the audience in attendance, but the effect of such events is cumulative and "payoffs" are long-term" (McDowell 2008:15). Techniques that have been used previously to overcome this particular obstacle include opinion polls, media analyses, and surveys with those participating in diplomatic projects, the latter of which often account for both foreign participants and staff members (Glade 2009).

One proposed method for better analyzing such impacts is to combine the following: examining how media coverage of public diplomacy endeavors fluctuates over time; conducting interviews related to local opinions over the course of several years; and taking environmental changes into account (Vinter & Knox 2008). My own research follows this approach in its analysis over an approximately three-year period (2012-2015) of the AFS' production in the U.S., as well as its implementation and subsequent reception—both immediate and ongoing—in Monterrey, Mexico: all of these are important factors to take into account, since not only the results of such efforts but also "much of what steers the public diplomacy process depends on the situational aspects surrounding it" (Kelley 2009:72).

Just as reactions to American soft power have been ambivalent, the U.S. government's public diplomacy likewise has a less-than-unanimously-positive reputation, particularly due to its associations with propaganda, nation-branding, and forcible communication interventions by the American government. The current move towards 'engagement'—building 'relationships' or

two-way dialogues as well as mutual understanding (Cull 2009a, Kelley 2009, Scott-Smith 2009, Shen 2009, Snow 2009)—with foreign audiences indicates an attempt to change this image, not only through improved demonstrations of credibility but also through a reconceptualization of audiences as empowered/active citizens (Hocking 2005, Hagen & Wasko 2000). In other words, as actors who "possess the power to judge and act within networks that have impact on the power of the United States" (Hayden 2012:227): both *how* and *what* is communicated are now being taken into account.

In particular, public diplomacy efforts through exchanges, strategic communications, events, and the like must be aware of the disparity between rhetoric that works 'at home' and that which will be appreciated abroad, such as George W. Bush's problematic 'axis of evil' language (Amin 2009, Hocking 2005). Contextualized public diplomacy is important, because "what is smart in one place or time may not be smart in another. It also requires awareness of the target audience, the global context, and the right tools" (Rugh 2009:16). Moreover, no matter how much those behind such efforts strive to improve a country's image/enhance its attractiveness, they cannot 'sell' bad governmental policies or influence non-government actors—like Hollywood—which may be considered offensive (Cull 2009b; Gardels & Medavoy 2009; Glade 2009; McDowell 2008; Nye Jr. 2008; Hocking 2005; Schneider 2003; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002).

Informed cultural relations—networks of inter-cultural relationships built on shared interests/common challenges and developed through knowledgeable engagement/exchange with others (in other words, through listening and the mutual benefits derived from interacting)—are therefore important for public diplomacy, helping to lay the necessary foundation of trust, credibility, and an overall sense of interconnection which can facilitate future diplomatic efforts

(Ellis & Maoz 2012, Gass & Seiter 2009, Kelley 2009, Rugh 2009, Scott-Smith 2009, Snow 2009, Davidson 2008, Tuch 1990). Unlike traditional methods of trying to 'win over' foreign societies, this type of approach does not resemble propaganda, particularly in its focus on transparency (Cull 2009a, Kelley 2009), and it is also more open to alternative perspectives: "[effective] cultural relations creates the opportunity for genuine exchange across cultural and political barriers, which in turn generates insight, dialogue and, over time, trust" (Davidson 2008:79). Moreover, such diplomacy is different in that it deals "primarily with non-governmental individuals and organizations...[Its] activities often present many differing views as represented by private American individuals and organizations in addition to official U.S. Government views" (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association 2012[2000], under "Public diplomacy and traditional diplomacy").

Thus distinct from propaganda, this type of U.S. diplomatic effort is all "about building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating [American] points of view; correcting misperceptions; looking for areas where [people] can find common cause" (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002:8). Nevertheless, the use of films specifically as part of public diplomacy efforts has been problematic, due to a long history of propagandistic intentions (MacCann 1969). In the early 1940s, for instance, Disney films were used to enhance the U.S.' Good Neighbor Policy: films such as *Saludos Amigos* and *El Gaucho Goofy* "were propaganda movies intended to promote American values in Latin America" (Fraser 2003:77). The aforementioned CPI from WWI was likewise conceived to fulfill propaganda purposes: "to sell the war at home and spread the "Gospel of Americanism" abroad by promoting American culture and values via motion pictures" (Fraser 2003:40); a 'Foreign Film Service' was also created at this time to promote the exhibition of U.S. films in local cinemas worldwide.

The objective of using movies in these various ways was to convey positive images of the U.S. and 'American values'; films that did not fit this mandate were not allowed to be exported. Media was similarly used by the USIA during the Cold War, as illustrated by the numerous films, television programs, and newsreels which the agency generated and distributed abroad, though these were *not* labeled as 'informational' or as propaganda. (However, some critics of the program—like playwright Arthur Miller—asserted that such exports were manipulated in order to be so after all.) The USIA's mission was, in effect, "to project a multilayered, pluralistic society, continually debating its shape and purpose" (Dizard Jr. 2004:177); it did so by offsetting the 'flashy' U.S. society of Hollywood depictions with (supposedly) more balanced images.

The Al Hurra television station—which is circulated in the Arab world by the U.S.—is a more recent example. This media project was intended to convey a positive image of the nation, yet it is not seen as being credible—rather, it is seen as propaganda—since it avoids both "allowing critics of American policy to speak and reporting news that might not be completely positive about America" (Amin 2009:123). Consequently, an unsettling challenge with which the U.S. is faced today regarding public diplomacy is: "if US hard *and* soft power create resentment, how can the [government] ever be successful in winning the 'hearts and minds' of its foes and rivals and keep the allegiance of its allies?" (van Ham 2005:56, original emphasis).

III. Cultural Diplomacy

Today, cinema is frequently used as a form of 'cultural diplomacy', a variation of public diplomacy with somewhat mixed objectives. Through cultural initiatives and various modes of creative expression, the goal of cultural diplomacy is to enhance a country's image and promote cross-cultural communication/understanding by sharing knowledge about both the nation and its views on globally-relevant topics (e.g. immigration), as well as by forging direct relationships

with the peoples of other countries based on mutual interests, beliefs, and the like (Grincheva 2010, Rugh 2009, Schneider 2005, Macnamara 2004). Unlike public diplomacy, the concept of cultural diplomacy "is less closely aligned with policy (or promoting the acceptance of policies), and operates best as a two-way street" (Schneider 2009:261).

While such diplomacy may be funded by the government, it requires a *much* closer connection with its cultural source (e.g. the art world) in order to convincingly distance itself from policy makers and boost its credibility with foreign societies. This is due in large part to the fact that credibility and self-criticism have become significant aspects of international politics in the current age of easily accessible (mis)information: as with public diplomacy, that which resembles propaganda could be highly counterproductive vis-à-vis a country's reputation/image (Cull 2009a, Nye Jr. 2008). The AFS exemplifies this, as the teams which are sent abroad include renowned academics, cinema experts, and filmmakers, while its workshops/classes focus on discussing certain films or the film industry itself rather than U.S. policies.

Cultural diplomacy is thus both a 'tool' of public diplomacy (and, hence, of soft power) as well as its own increasingly important—and effective—form of diplomatic outreach (i.e. 'people-to-people') which specifically "consists of [national groups] sharing forms of their creative expression" (Schneider 2005:147). In particular, this includes such culturally-related forms as the arts (e.g. literature, music, film, dance) and the sciences, as well as exchanges of the artists, scientists, and other professionals who are directly connected with these (Grincheva 2010, Cull 2009a). This type of diplomatic effort is generally founded on a thorough understanding of, and deep respect for, the 'target' of the specific outreach project/undertaking (Ellis & Maoz 2012, Mackenzie & Wallace 2011, Schneider 2009), since "[it] is vital to take into account local perceptions in order to avoid undermining" (Scott-Smith 2009:52) such endeavors. Even those

that took place during the Cold War—which were somewhat propagandistic and occasionally less than accurate in their portrayals of the U.S.—were very well-adapted to their Soviet audiences in order to better communicate with them and potentially create allies.

This form of diplomacy therefore follows a clear set of practices in order to enhance its chances of success: (1) it is flexible/creative in its attempts to cater to the specific interests of a particular society, while simultaneously conveying somewhat-generalized American values, beliefs, or practices (e.g. free speech, individuality); (2) it focuses on opening doors to communication/interaction, as well as on forging long-term relationships by "[offering] pleasure, information or expertise in the spirit of exchange and mutual respect" (Schneider 2003:3); and (3) it presents an alternative to the U.S. government's 'official' presence in a particular locale.

Accordingly, it is necessary to understand both the current *and* historical local, national, regional, or even global environment(s) to decide what will 'resonate' or be most effective in a particular context (Schneider 2003). For instance, if relations between the U.S. government and that of a particular country have historically been good, emphasizing these could increase the chance of success. Even if this is not the case, highlighting local traditions in a respectful way; reminding foreign audiences of what elements they like about/share with Americans; or involving local artists/participants in the cultural diplomatic events themselves—as the AFS classes/workshops try to do—can all help to "[bring] the cultural connections alive" (Schneider 2003:8). Such actions/activities are able to animate these links because they reiterate shared qualities or characteristics, demonstrating an understanding of local interests/practices and exhibiting a willingness to accept and/or incorporate these.

As mentioned above, one of the primary features of cultural diplomacy is a strong sense of separation from governmental influence and/or political issues; in particular, such efforts must

"be credibly connected to the source of culture rather than policy and [are] helped by distance from the makers of foreign policy" (Cull 2009a:24). With exchanges, for example, these "are best kept independent from any sense of direct political interference and obligation in order to maintain the integrity of the participants and the credibility of the programmes themselves" (Scott-Smith 2009:51).

Such 'independence' can be seen in the U.S. from the 1950s through the mid-1970s when American writers, artists, and musicians—such as Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie—were sent abroad (especially to the Soviet Union) under the covert auspices of the U.S. government as a way of indirectly "[showcasing] the values of a democratic society in juxtaposition to a totalitarian system" (Schneider 2003:2). Yet despite this need for separation, following the incorporation of the USIA by the DOS in the late 1990s there emerged a new "guiding rule of cultural diplomacy...namely that it should be linked to increasing understanding and support for US policies" (Schneider 2005:157).

Nevertheless, there have been many successful cultural programs which have helped to inspire continued foreign cooperation and to maintain international appreciation for American educational, artistic, and 'cultural' contributions by allowing for honest/open interactions. These include American Corners, the Culture Connect program, Fulbright exchanges, the International Visitors Leadership Program, and the Ambassador's Fund (Snow 2009, Schneider 2005). Moreover, cultural diplomacy endeavors still retain a sense of independence/separation from policies, policymakers, and the like. This is clearly illustrated by (pre-AFS) Embassy screenings of films that are often highly critical of America and/or the U.S. government for local audiences worldwide: as an example, the American Embassy in Mexico City has previously shown movies concerning the U.S.' problematic farm policies. Such screenings tend to inspire more amicable

and/or candid discussions with foreign participants about international issues, ones which avoid devolving into the typical 'finger pointing' (Schneider 2003).

For the U.S., the origin of American cultural diplomacy—as it is currently understood—is relatively recent. Beginning in 1936 with the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, cultural diplomacy became a permanent function of the DOS in the late 1930s, rising in importance from the 1940s through the 1960s and declining somewhat thereafter, although it seems to be experiencing a revival post-9/11 (Grincheva 2010, Glade 2009, MacCann 1969). It was after WWII that cultural diplomacy slowly began to take on its present form, as its "political objective was seen to be more indirect: to build a more favorable general mind set, i.e., a certain degree of willingness to listen to what public affairs officers were explaining about US policy" (Glade 2009:242), or to at least gain the benefit of the doubt among foreign societies. Such post-war efforts included sending writers, artists, and scientists abroad, conducting English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, as well as creating libraries and cultural centers overseas. The Cold War in particular spurred on U.S. cultural diplomacy, as it led to an increase in scholarly exchanges; in binational centers[16], concerts, and books being opened, conducted, or sent abroad; as well as in educational exchanges/visitor programs (like those for students).

Unfortunately, these cultural diplomacy efforts have often been hindered by the broadcast media of the private sector—such as Hollywood's films and television programs—due to the former's inability to counteract the adverse fallout from media content that promotes violence, vulgarity, sex, etc. and which leads to antipathy towards the U.S., such as in the Islamic world and elsewhere (Grincheva 2010, Glade 2009, Schneider 2003). For instance, "[movies] are ambassadors whether they mean to be or not–and few dramas fit diplomatic needs" (MacCann

[16] These used to be U.S. libraries abroad; now, as binational centers, they teach English and conduct programs in conjunction with U.S. Embassies and Consulates (such as the AFS film screenings).

1969:28), thus the U.S. government has consistently tried to counter big-box-office cinema with films specifically for public relations purposes, as seen under the Kennedy administration.

An even greater problem is that commercial endeavors, like Hollywood cinematic products, are much more influential in "[shaping] perceptions for good and bad...as [they reach] millions around the globe" (Schneider 2009:264). Similarly, in today's globalized world the various transnational flows of people, products, and media are also highly influential, affecting foreign publics' perceptions of programs like the AFS and of the films/activities they offer. As Akhil Gupta has asserted, any analysis of state activities and/or components "requires [scholars] to conceptualize a space that is constituted by the intersection of local, regional, national, and transnational phenomena" (Gupta 1995:392)[17].

Such external influences range from the information that people receive from their relatives or friends who have migrated to the U.S. (i.e. social remittances) to—as mentioned above—the Hollywood movies that they see: "[folk], regional, and national ideologies compete for hegemony with each other and with *transnational* flows of information, tastes, and styles embodied in commodities marketed by multinational capital" (Gupta 1995:377, original emphasis). For instance, one of my interlocutors in Monterrey described to me how films like *The Godfather* (1972) had been a major influence on several people he knew in terms of their eventual descent into gang life.

It is possible that better strategies and greater coordination with regard to cultural engagements could offset these commercial/private influences, such as through the strategic

[17] "[The] state thus appears as an open field with multiple boundaries...which is to say that it needs to be conceptualized at more than one level...linked to a number of apparatuses not all of which may be governmental" (Trouillot 2001:127). For example, these may include state agencies (e.g. the DOS) or NGOs (e.g. Nacidos para Triunfar, one of the primary subjects of this study), among others, which are often involved in (national and/or transnational) conflict management: "[understanding] governmental interventions as assemblages helps to break down the image of government as the preserve of a monolithic state operating as a singular source of power and enables us to recognize the range of parties involved in attempts to regulate the conditions under which lives are lived" (Li 2007:276).

placement of media programming in different countries (Schneider 2003). However, a lack of interagency cooperation and deficient funding for contemporary cultural diplomacy makes such efforts difficult to initiate; moreover, the dearth of coordination/funding, which is "symptomatic of a general marginalization of arts, culture, and media by policymakers...limits the potential of existing programs" (Schneider 2009:260,261) as well.

Consequently, cultural diplomacy through media and creative expression—"which involves experimentation, collaboration, taking risks, and challenging the status quo—[promoting] the critical thinking and questioning characteristic of dynamic societies and economies" (Schneider 2009:262)—has great potential for building connections and overcoming social/cultural/historical/political barriers, yet it must cope with marginalization and insufficient funds. Furthermore, one of the primary obstacles it faces today is domestic disinterest/doubt, not just on the part of policymakers but also that of the general American public (Grincheva 2010). For instance, the cultural insights and 'on-the-ground' information about foreign nations/groups highlighted through cultural exchanges often remain underutilized or are not used at all: as one Gallup survey showed, there exists a persistent lack of understanding of Muslims by non-Muslim peoples in the 'West', and many in the U.S. possess little or no information about them in order to rectify this problem (Schneider 2009).

Though rising international anti-Americanism has been leading to renewed interest in cultural (particularly 'arts') diplomacy, debate persists regarding the extent to which the U.S. government should be involved; the effectiveness of such efforts; as well as their ability "to embrace a broad audience, different from elite circles, and to reach the majority of the population for maximizing the effects" (Grincheva 2010:173). In other words, cultural diplomacy—especially when it employs the 'high arts' such as theater and dance—often requires considerable

funding, a long time period, and substantial man-power; moreover it frequently targets the so-called societal 'elite' (Gilboa 1998). In addition, as with public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy faces the problem of evaluation, or of measuring its impacts quantitatively: this makes the necessity—and effectiveness—of such diplomatic endeavors questionable to many policymakers and scholars (Grincheva 2010, Schneider 2009).

Analyzing press coverage; identifying changes in attitudes/behaviors; collecting audience testimonials; and conducting personal interviews are all qualitative ways of gathering evidence in support of cultural diplomacy's effects, such as the incorporation of American jazz and rock music—and their philosophies of individuality/freedom—into Soviet cultural and social life during the Cold War (Grincheva 2010). However, because "the effect of cultural programs and exchanges is often subjectively internalized, measurement of their impact remains elusive" (Schneider 2009:265). It is also important to note that cultural diplomacy is strongly affected by cultural and/or regional differences, therefore requiring such efforts to be flexible/adaptable and contextualized accordingly (Schneider 2009, Scott-Smith 2009). This is particularly important for exchange programs like the AFS or the Rhythm Road program (which sends musicians to perform/teach abroad) that are also used "to build on and strengthen already-existing positive sentiments among selected participants, with the goal of thereby strengthening a potential or actual (political) ally for the future" (Scott-Smith 2009:55).

Despite the problems and setbacks faced by cultural diplomacy efforts, such endeavors are increasingly important with regard to contemporary international relations, since often "people-to-people diplomacy can thrive when government-to-government relations are strained" (Schneider 2009:269). This is aptly demonstrated by the historic 2009 trips of U.S. filmmakers/ industry professionals to Iran and of Iranian filmmakers/industry professionals to the U.S., which

had the "potential to profoundly impact the relationship between the Iranian and American peoples because the impression that both the American and Iranian filmmakers take away from this experience will filter into their films and thus impact a much wider public" (Schneider 2009:69). Overall, those scholars and practitioners who support cultural diplomacy endeavors believe that through shared/collaborative experiences or events, such efforts have the potential "to increase understanding, shatter stereotypes, and change the way people view each other, which ultimately can lead to changes in the way governments interact" (Schneider 2009:276).

CHAPTER 2

❖ Issues of Americanization & Cultural or Media Imperialism

Concerns over power and diplomacy are also tied to notions of cultural imperialism. As an example, for societies marked by a history of colonialism, a "sense of being violated, denigrated, and unfairly disadvantaged has become part of a complex psychological predisposition that has assumed an almost overriding importance in the way the international issues are viewed" (Fisher 1997a:75). With regard to the U.S., the notion of cultural imperialism involves the hegemonic spread of American practices, interests, and values—as well as the one-way flow of national commodities—which are perceived as threatening other societies' cultural, economic, and political uniqueness (Hudson 2007; van Elteren 2006; Maltby 2004b; Semati 2004; Fraser 2003; Schneider 2003; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002; Rogers & Hart 2002; Kang 1999; Primo 1999; Golding & Harris 1997; Tomlinson 1991; Ang 1985). For instance, despite foreign demand for American films after WWII, the increasingly global exportation of the U.S.' cultural products was nevertheless met with a great deal of ambivalence (Glade 2009).

Yet since both resistance to and acceptance of American projects and products occur—such as how people abroad "may adopt aspects of American culture while resisting global policies emanating from Washington" (Hocking 2005:34)—debate exists over whether these processes should really be called cultural (or, possibly, media) imperialism. Scholars disputing the label contend that what is occurring, particularly with media-based American diplomacy efforts, is simply the encouragement of particular perceptions and interpretations of the U.S. abroad: foreign audiences are assumed to be active agents who may be swayed, but who will in the end judge the nation on their own terms (Hayden 2012, Hocking 2005, Primo 1999). In contrast, it has been observed that those arguing on behalf of the imperialism label are often less

agent-centered, as well as more nationalistic/self-protective culturally and economically (Hudson 2007, Primo 1999): they consider American media and/or diplomacy to be aggressive impositions on foreign publics, and they view the 'dialogues' which are fostered as unequal or one-sided (van Elteren 2006). This debate also raises the issue of whether diplomatic efforts overseas should be considered propaganda, since those favoring the cultural and/or media imperialism perspective tend to see both as forms of manipulation and deceit, while those opposed contend that although the two processes try to influence what others think, diplomacy "listens to what people have to say" (Melissen 2005:18).

Thought to have first emerged in the 1960s, 'cultural imperialism' is a theoretical concept which endures today, albeit with a variety of different definitions. In essence, however, it refers to domination over cultural lifeways through the spread of a particular group's values, practices, and products (Kamalipour 1999, Primo 1999, Tomlinson 1991). Though *media* imperialism—referring specifically to such media as radio, television, film, advertisements, newspapers, etc.—is similar to and often conflated with cultural imperialism (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997), it is in fact "a particular way of discussing cultural imperialism...It involves all the complex political issues – and indeed, the political commitments – entailed in the notion of cultural domination" (Tomlinson 1991:22), but with a specific focus on media as one mechanism through which the process of cultural imperialism is articulated.

However, researchers have asserted that although media products may be seen as 'carriers' of a cultural or national hegemony (e.g. American dissemination of Disney comics in the Third World during the 1940s), their extensive presence alone—such as the global pervasiveness of the television program *Dallas*—does not equate with cultural imperialism (Liebes & Katz 1990). These media products (or texts) must be 'read' in order to be significant

or have meaning (Anderson 1996, Livingstone 1993), and "in the very nature of interpretation there is always room for disagreement" (Tomlinson 1991:42) among audiences, analysts, and the producers of such media texts themselves (Michelle 2007, Livingstone 1998b, Hietala 1996). With *Dallas*, for instance, not only are there discrepancies which exist among the readings of theorists, but interpretations by the show's audience members are also variable, both amongst themselves and in comparison to those of academics (Moores 1993): accordingly, "[such] programs may beam a homogeneous message to the global village, but...there is pluralism in the decoding" (Liebes & Katz 1990:151,152). Scholars thus "have few grounds on which to presume transparency" (Hobart 2010:59) of media texts; moreover, "[it] remains unproven that...the frames of reference of an academic researcher, a film editor and a working class housewife watching television – far less media producers and viewers in other parts of the world – are likely to be similar" (Hobart 2010:60).

Consequently, simple exposure to media or other cultural products and their messages does not automatically mean there will be some sort of ideological effect, and even if there is, it will not necessarily be the one intended (Kunczik 1997, Hietala 1996). To assume this is to "underestimate the audience's active engagement with the text and the critical sophistication of the ordinary viewer/reader" (Tomlinson 1991:47). Nevertheless, with regard to national image formation some studies have lent support to the 'cultivation theory', which "emphasizes the exposure to recurring patterns of stories, images, themes, and messages through media" (Harris & Karafa 1999:4). Specifically, this theoretical perspective "assumes an active role of the media consumer, whose interaction with the media comes to *cultivate* a world view or set of attitudes. In other words, what people see frequently...is what they come to believe" (Harris & Karafa 1999:4, original emphasis). In fact, findings have shown that the influence of television and film

can be fairly significant with regard to the creation of national impressions/perceptions, especially by people who have never been to a particular country (Harris & Karafa 1999).

Two other issues further problematize cultural/media imperialism theories: (1) people's socio-historical contexts, interactions with others (e.g. family, friends), and personal experiences will affect their interpretations/engagements (e.g. the varied international receptions of *Dallas*); and (2) national/cultural groups are neither homogeneous nor static to begin with, thus the idea that a fixed collective identity (often labeled 'authentic') is being threatened is not supported, nor is the idea that the intrusive cultural/national presence (considered 'inauthentic') can impose a uniform hegemony, since in both cases the reality is much more complex (Clua 2003, Kang 1999, Stock 1999, Golding & Harris 1997, Tomlinson 1991, Ang 1985). In a similar vein, cultural and media imperialism theorists have been criticized for ignoring the 'cultural' aspects of economic and military imperialism—including the establishment and long-lasting impact of institutionalized values, languages, and lifeways—and for thereby reducing the concept of 'culture' itself to only those commodities produced by the various culture industries. Rather, such initial "imperialism was in itself a multi-faceted cultural process...[laying] the ground for the ready acceptance and adoption of mediated cultural products which came much, much later" (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997:51).

It is also important to note that the idea of 'Americanization' developed in large part as a reaction to the success which Hollywood motion pictures achieved overseas. People involved in the production of such films' foreign counterparts "constructed an argument that served competitive commercial purposes by invoking higher cultural objectives. The process of 'Americanisation' [*sic*] was one of alienation of cultural patrimony, and...defenders of 'traditional' national cultures exaggerated the influence and transformative power of 'American

culture' in order to demonstrate how threatening it was" (Maltby 2004a:5). Many European governments, for instance, have viewed 'cultural (i.e. commercial) protectionism' efforts to prevent Americanization—such as quota systems for Hollywood films—as a means of 'protecting' local cultures (van Elteren 2006, Fraser 2003). It has also been theorized that such anxieties regarding U.S. influence are symptomatic of larger concerns about national and/or cultural identity as being unstable or fragile (Tomlinson 1991), and therefore as being increasingly threatened "by undesirable, if not morally deplorable foreign elements that lead to a weakening of national bonds and a waning of national health" (van Elteren 2006:108).

From its inception, this notion of a unidirectional, homogenizing process "in which commercial hegemony leads to ideological dominance" (Maltby 2004a:7) has grown in popularity—both among the public and among scholars—and it persists today in theories concerning cultural and media imperialism. However, the process of 'Americanization' has followed a very different trajectory from that which is conventionally maintained, since what is exported from the U.S. "is not a full-blown mythology but rather its icons, its random fragments, which – as non-Americans interpret them – may take on meanings only tangentially related to those recognised [*sic*] at its point of origin" (Maltby 2004a:2). Moreover, local adaptations of imported media content demonstrate active attempts at transformation rather than passive acceptance of homogenization (Anholt & Hildreth 2010), and many Hollywood movies—rather than compelling a specific (ideological) reception—have deliberately been crafted to allow for such localization. These films adopt "strategies of semantic indeterminacy and ambiguity...out of their very nature as themselves consumer products in search of the largest, least differentiated audience and thus the largest profit" (Maltby 2004a:12).

One issue in particular—which scholars opposed to the imperialism label have highlighted—is that proponents of the American cultural/media imperialism perspective fail to distinguish between the notion of *imperialism* and that of *globalization* (Semati 2004, Fraser 2003, Tomlinson 1991). The first involves "a deliberate project of a center extending its influence and control over a periphery. The second describes the infinitely subtler and more complex interplay among many interconnecting cultures and economies" (Fraser 2003:29). Accordingly, when one looks at what is occurring worldwide, it becomes apparent that American cultural products are not accepted unquestioningly: rather, there arise such processes as appropriation; localization, or the 'local' modification of 'global' elements; hybridization, or the synthesis of 'local' and 'foreign' features; and indigenous revitalization (Anholt & Hildreth 2010, Pieterse 2009, Hudson 2007, Morris 2005, Maltby 2004b, Peterson 2003, Berger 2002, Yan 2002, Kang 1999, Kroes 1999, Stock 1999, Golding & Harris 1997, Appadurai 1996).

As an illustration of these processes, one example can clearly be seen in how a post-WWII cultural campaign organized by the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP)—which focused on the dissemination and exhibition of U.S. films in Japan—was not simply an act of compulsory or unmediated Americanization. Rather, such exported "Hollywood cinema encountered various local intermediaries, including local studio employees, film critics, publicists, fan representatives and exhibitors who consumed, reinvented and promoted the meanings of American cinema at the 'ground level'" (Maltby 2004b:100,101).

Likewise, while cowboy movies have had some influence on dress/style, language use, and behaviors in Rhodesia, these effects were not passively accepted but rather actively appropriated, both as guides to participating in urban life and as ways of critiquing the constraining colonial order (Ambler 2004). The latter is made evident in how African audiences

"used material from films to make judgments about the outside world, the nature of imperialism and the character of European culture...[Footage] of healthy cattle in Southern Rhodesia, for example, inspired commentary from Northern Rhodesian moviegoers in the 1950s on racial segregation and the inferiority of the diet of Africans in comparison to whites" (Ambler 2004:145). Such discussions refute a problematic assumption of Americanization and cultural/ media imperialism theories, which is that "'Third World' peoples or audiences...lack the sophistication to resist popular media images or to engage them critically" (Ambler 2004:148). As illustrated in the previous description of the Rhodesian situation, this type of assumption is clearly unfounded—and also quite Eurocentric—since the "highly politicised [*sic*] informal audience commentaries on film depictions of life in African colonies [demonstrates] a keen appreciation on the part of African moviegoers of the manipulative power of film" (Ambler 2004:148).

Furthermore, with regard to Americanization—as well as cultural/media imperialism—scholars must not ignore the effects of non-Western countries on each other and on the West itself (Pieterse 2009, van Elteren 2006), especially given the fact that there exist progressively more "cultural movements with a global outreach originating outside the Western world and indeed impacting on the latter" (Berger 2002:12). In addition, as demonstrated by globalization theorists (and as mentioned above), "cultures are informed by numerous internal pressures and influences, ensuring that they are neither static nor stable. They are also shaped by external forces and hence are not homogenous, discrete and bounded entities" (Hopper 2007:40). Accordingly, such 'collective identities' are precarious, since they may be changed as people travel, encounter new places/societies, and engage in diverse experiences (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997, Appadurai 1996, Morley & Robins 1995).

Although assertions of Americanization or media/cultural imperialism leading to homogenization are thus somewhat tenuous and exaggerated—as exemplified by local adaptations of media (e.g. the television program *The Office*, various *Idol* talent shows) and by the continued existence of cross-cultural dissimilarities—they nevertheless persist (Hopper 2007, Hudson 2007, Maltby 2004a, Kroes 1999). One of the primary reasons for this persistence is that contemporary diplomacy efforts and exertions of power *do* in fact exhibit—whether intentionally or not—certain imperialist aspects (van Elteren 2006): "who speaks of whom, who is empowered to tell what kind of stories about which Others, and who is spoken of, but silent—find close parallels...in contemporary structures of control over flows of information and entertainment" (Morley & Robins 1995:7).

Scholars of cultural/media imperialism and Americanization must therefore avoid focusing excessively on 'imperialist' schemes or intentions at the expense of audience members' freedom to reinterpret the messages that they receive; however, they should also not ignore the reality that the former can—and do—exist (Kroes 1999, Golding & Harris 1997, Morley 1996, Moores 1993). As illustrated in studies of the television show *Dallas*, people's readings of this particular media text may differ, but the range of such interpretations is not infinite: "decodings...vary, but within the limits of the text" (Liebes & Katz 1990:13).

Overall—as previously noted—"the forces and impacts of cultural globalization, as well as local responses to them, can be observed at both the micro-individual level and the macro-institutional level" (Hsiao 2002:50). Accordingly, my own research examines the AFS' implementation and reception/perception at both the individual (e.g. Mexican participants) and institutional (e.g. DOS, USC) levels. More specifically, I consider whether the diplomatic use of films to disseminate information—by means of the AFS program—raises fears of cultural/media

imperialism for audiences abroad (and if so why); how this affects the intended/hoped-for reception of such diplomatic endeavors; and finally, if the latter's primary objective (to enrich international understandings of the U.S.) should thus be considered imperialistic and its very implementation a cultural imposition.

I. The Role of Perception & Culture in Foreign Relations

The influence of media—like that of the AFS' films, for example—vis-à-vis cultural diplomacy is a much-disputed topic. Some scholars argue that since "[pictures] speak louder than words, and they do so instantaneously and with lasting effect" (Melissen 2005:7), displaying what U.S. society/the American people are like and what the U.S. government does through these images can directly affect attitudes, correct misperceptions, and convey desired messages (Tuch 1990). Others contend that such messages are interpreted differently—often negatively—due to the 'products' (e.g. policies or ideals) which are being 'sold', as well as their specific contexts: consequently, the effects of diplomatic endeavors via media may not be those intended, unless such efforts are tailored—in terms of relevancy, desire, and appropriateness—to the target audiences of particular milieus (Anholt & Hildreth 2010, Rugh 2009, Brooks 2006, van Ham 2005, Nye Jr. 2004).

The present study's findings support an increasingly prevalent position in this debate, which holds that perceptions of and attitudes towards the U.S.—particularly those based on media like television and films—are complex and contradictory, reflecting a combination of desire/admiration for the nation's freedoms and opportunities; disappointment with (some of) its government's policies, as well as with the former's recurring inability to live up to expectations; envy of the country's apparent wealth; and fear of its militaristic behavior (Sanders 2011, Hudson 2007). Such an ambivalent image of the U.S. actually has quite a long history, both in

Western and non-Western nations, since the spread of American commodities/products, ideas, etc. worldwide has been embraced and concurrently seen as a cultural-imperialist threat (Rampal 2007, Brooks 2006, Fraser 2003, Kamalipour 1999, Primo 1999, Ang 1985).

In Bulgaria, for instance, anti-American sentiments regarding the nation's foreign policies have been offset by the desire for U.S. imports: "[the] flair of "forbidden fruit" that made American products so attractive in the past is no longer a factor, but their popularity has not diminished" (Iordanova 1999:73). One example of such mixed receptions specific to DOS-sponsored outreach projects is the U.S.' aforementioned 'Shared Values' advertising campaign, which began after the events of 9/11 to show international audiences American Muslims' ostensibly 'happy lives' in the U.S. While one study showed *positive* changes in people's attitudes as a result of this campaign initiative by the American government, the latter's concomitant use of the Patriot Act to detain many Muslims (including U.S. citizens)—as well the employment of terms such as 'axis of evil' by the American government—also *angered* numerous international audiences (Kendrick & Fullerton 2004).

It is thus important to recognize the role that cross-cultural perceptions play in foreign relations and diplomatic efforts, whether or not the latter are media-based (Armstrong 2009, Li & Chitty 2009, Shen 2009, Schneider 2005, Stephan & Stephan 2002, Tuch 1990). For instance, both the "Afghan and Kosovo conflicts saw powerful military coalitions risk defeat, not in the field but in the media battleground for public opinion" (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002:3). Specifically, it has been argued that greater attention needs to be paid not only to perceptions, but also to "cognition, or less technically, the reasoning process. In other words, we need to know what and how people perceive, and then what they do with that perception—how they process it in order to respond to it" (Fisher 1972:21).

The significance of such mental processes is particularly salient in today's globally-interconnected society, as "many more people now have to communicate ideas internationally, interpret international events, judge intentions, work around suspicions and resentments, or cut through misperceptions" (Fisher 1997a:1). Moreover, any discrepancies between a government or society's proclaimed values and its on-the-ground actions can negatively affect foreign publics' perceptions, reducing their trust and possibly even losing the benefit of the doubt (Armstrong 2009, Cull 2009b). For cultural and public diplomacy, the role of perception/ cognition is often most significant with regard to international/cross-cultural exchanges of people, "where an engagement with the personality and psychology of the participants is central" (Scott-Smith 2009:50) for effectively communicating and building relationships.

In fact, with the growing importance of perception for international relations, some scholars have asserted that a new type of power—in addition to political, economic, military, and soft forms—should now be recognized, one which "appreciates world opinion's influence ...perceptual power. Perceptions are based not only on information, but also on falsehoods, distortions, [people's] own biases, and herd behavior" (Wyne 2009:47). Accordingly, in order to harness this power, 'strategic diplomacy' efforts need to be deployed using "sophisticated knowledge of such attributes of human behavior as attitude and preference structures, cultural tendencies, and media-use patterns...to shape and target messages so as to maximize their desired impact while minimizing undesired collateral effects" (Manheim 1994:7). Diplomacy endeavors must therefore understand not just what other people's perceptions are now, but also how these perceptions came to be—how they were formed or shaped by traditions, cultural backgrounds, psychology, historical experiences, etc.—and what this means for current foreign relations (Ellis & Maoz 2012; de Mooij 2008; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002; Kunczik 1997; Tuch 1990).

For instance, will a particular society's expectations, fears, and/or motivations lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings?

One way in which scholars have approached the concept of 'perception' is through the notion of mindsets; that is to say, suites of mental attitudes/predispositions shaped by education, experiences, material conditions, prejudices, and forms of social/cultural conditioning like media exposure—one could even describe such mindsets as the product of an individual's *habitus*, in accordance with Pierre Bourdieu (Ting-Toomey 1999, Fisher 1997a). Thus with regard to international relations/interactions and the implementation of cultural or public diplomacy, it is not enough to know the socio-historical context of events or issues. Instead, "*knowing how that history is remembered* may be more to the point...than the actual events because the remembered history will be the *operative* history" (Fisher 1997a:4, original emphasis).

Consequently, people's reactions and receptions will not necessarily be based on facts but rather on their own images of/beliefs about what occurred, reflecting (1) collectively-held biases/ perceptions, or more 'public' frames (which are often media-derived); (2) individually-oriented attitudes/experiences, or more 'private' frames; or (3) a combination of both (Anholt & Hildreth 2010, Li & Chitty 2009, Brooks 2006, Mody & Lee 2002, Stephan & Stephan 2002, Kamalipour 1999, de Orellana 1996, Tuch 1990). While such impressions/perspectives could be damaging in terms of cross-cultural communication and understanding, being aware of this interplay between reality and (mis)perception can help diplomatic endeavors better address the diverse audiences with whom they may be deployed.

However, some scholars have argued that this means any attempts to sway public opinion after the fact—such as through cultural/public diplomacy—are 'too little too late' (Fisher 1972), and that it would be better to focus on "choosing policies and programs in the first place which

can be expected to gain their objectives because consideration was given in advance to factors of public perception and reaction" (Fisher 1997a:13). Nevertheless, most concede that diplomatic efforts can and do have significant impacts abroad, but they assert that if the former are to be most effective/credible they must develop better understandings of differing foreign mindsets, perspectives, and opinions, despite a general lack of both funding for such research and recognition of its importance (Ellis & Maoz 2012, Nye Jr. 2008, Macnamara 2004, Ting-Toomey 1999, Tuch 1990).

These efforts therefore need to account for multiple factors, from varying national experiences to a society's "traditional assumptions, religion, folk philosophy, values, [and] perceptual systems" (Fisher 1997a:18); in other words, forms of what might be called 'preprogramming' that establish frames of reference which people employ to selectively perceive and deal with new situations. Accordingly, individuals' perceptions are strongly affected by their particular sociocultural contexts (de Mooij 2008, Macnamara 2004, Barnett & Lee 2002, Stephan & Stephan 2002), and this influence subsequently "extends to the way one society perceives another" (Fisher 1997a:26).

In addition, scholars contend that "people view international issues and events through a *cultural lens*" (Fisher 1997a:42, original emphasis). This is dissimilar from a mindset in that it is comprised primarily of basic—often emotional—values, which are not necessarily the ethical prescriptions and/or positive goals of a society, but rather its central themes, assumptions, or philosophies. A specific cultural lens functions as the basis for a particular mindset, which itself is "a more narrowly focused or discrete way of thinking or perceiving that will reflect cultural conditioning but might also reflect other sources of mental programming" (Fisher 1997a:42), like internationally-disseminated media images or information. Culturally-based definitions of

affluence, respect, and authority, for instance, as well as any other socially-derived categorizations or differentiations between 'in-group' and 'out-group' members, help shape people's mindsets—thus affecting their perceptions, receptions, and communicative practices—by establishing certain deeply-rooted societal 'givens' such as biases/stereotypes, expectations, or patterns of thought and behavior (Mackenzie & Wallace 2011, Li & Chitty 2009, Gudykunst & Lee 2002, Stephan & Stephan 2002, Bennett 1998, Fisher 1997a, Kunczik 1997, de Orellana 1996, Brislin 1981).

Despite the overarching importance of *habitus* and socio-historical context, cross-cultural perceptions are also influenced by how issues, events, and policies are presented (Mattern 2005, Bennett 1998). This might include the directness/indirectness of the messages being conveyed, or it may involve their perceived motivations, what specific expectations they encourage, as well as their presentations' "intensity, strength, duration, and repetition, and...the way they are tuned to fit into the needs and interests of the perceiver" (Fisher 1997a:29). For example, although the credibility of American diplomatic efforts is largely bestowed by their audiences, this does not mean that the former have no control or influence over the latter's perception of their integrity: "[audiences'] impressions are affected by the statements and actions of a source" (Gass & Seiter 2009:156), such as the public assertions of a particular diplomatic project's goals by organizers which may be specifically adapted to a target audience. Similarly, foreign publics' perceptions of a national government's "motivations as imperial or self-interested can damage [its] chances of success" (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002:3).

As a result the situation/cultural context must still be accounted for, since credibility will not be perceived in the same way in different settings. However, so long as one is seen as having "the right message and the right positioning on a topic" (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002:48), it

can be managed/engineered to some extent (Gass & Seiter 2009, Kunczik 1997). With regard to media, for instance, the diplomatic use of film and television may be seen as the prepackaging of credible "information...ready to be drawn upon in order to establish perceptions of self, of others, and of what we do, and of what they do" (Fisher 1997a:74). Likewise, if media outlets and their sponsoring societies/national or cultural groups are viewed suspiciously or are associated with propaganda, manipulation, and dishonesty—rather than being seen as coming from a position of mutual interest, respect, or benefit—then their presentation of issues, information, events, policies, and projects may incite hostility as opposed to cultivating a positive image and amicable relations (Ellis & Maoz 2012; Mackenzie & Wallace 2011; Chiozza 2009; Kelley 2009; Hudson 2007; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002; Fisher 1972). A 'hard-hitting' propaganda approach, for example, will sit "uncomfortably with the motion picture audience. Film is at its best when it reaches deeper levels of thought and emotion" (MacCann 1969:26), working through intellectual and affective persuasion.

Furthermore, people possess a *variety* of predispositions or 'lenses' (rather than just one) which they may bring to bear in filtering information/images and subsequently forming their perceptions about a particular situation or experience; these are also frequently influenced by individual emotions or personal experiences (Li & Chitty 2009; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002; Stephan & Stephan 2002; Kunczik 1997; Zaller 1992). Consequently, the ways in which an event, message, image, etc. is received—and perceived—will not necessarily be the same from person to person (Peterson 2003, Gudykunst & Lee 2002, Singer 1987, Ang 1985, Brislin 1981). Instead, their selective predispositions will entail that they only take in certain elements while leaving others out (Kunczik 1997).

Similarly, although how people imagine and understand their shared social existence (i.e. the social imaginary) entails a self-construction wherein they see themselves as part of a broader society and thus develop a sense of collective life, this does not mean that the individual should be ignored (Taylor 2004). Rather, the societal 'whole' is made up of many individuals, and research on contemporary international relations, cross-cultural communication, and how these are perceived/received must account for the simultaneous disembedding of individuals *from* society and their reembedding *within* this matrix (Taylor 2004).

Accordingly, people's perceptions will be swayed by "the particular complex of interests and concerns which characterizes their individual mental set of the moment" (Fisher 1972:24). Thus in terms of cultural and public diplomacy efforts—as well as foreign relations in general—it is important to establish "the objective reality of an international issue and the "reality" as perceived by the parties to the communication or negotiation" (Fisher 1972:162), including the 'senders' *and* the 'receivers' of diplomatic messages. Moreover, in studying the projection/ transmission and reception/perception of images of the national 'self'—like those disseminated by the AFS—scholars need to recognize *both* "individual and social constructions of the image, and [question] implicitly the efficacy of state-constructed images projected toward other countries" (Li & Chitty 2009:1). Cross-cultural receptions must therefore be seen as dynamic interpretations which are informed by multiple frames of reference/cognitive schemata, ones that can be concurrently social/public and individual/private as well as conscious and unconscious (Li & Chitty 2009, Dell'Orto et al. 2004, Zaller 1992).

Most of the literature concludes that in today's interconnected, media-saturated world, negative images of the U.S. can have dangerous political, economic, and social consequences. In consequence, this situation requires a diplomatic approach which is more audience-centered and

flexible, one that is willing to adapt in different ways in order to succeed in diverse regions worldwide (Gass & Seiter 2009). For this reason, culturally-respectful and knowledgeable diplomacy projects—especially ones through media—are needed, though what exactly these will look like and how they will be implemented remains disputed. This is where my own study can contribute, since its examination of the AFS' strategies, objectives, and ongoing reception(s) may facilitate the development of methods for improving and alternative techniques for realizing not only the AFS but other diplomatic projects as well.

II. The American Film Showcase

Due to the American Film Showcase's (AFS) recent development—its predecessor, the American Documentary Showcase (ADS)[18], ran from 2009 until 2011, while the AFS only just began in 2012—there is no scholarly literature or prior studies available which examine this particular program (or the ADS). Information is primarily available on the AFS' official website; in virtual "Media Notes" dispatched by the Department of State (DOS); and in brief online exposés, such as those posted by the Public Diplomacy Council and International Documentary Association (see White 2013, for example).

The AFS arose approximately four years ago—though the program's activities/events did not truly launch until three years ago—as a result of a partnership between the DOS' Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the University of Southern California's (USC) School of Cinematic Arts. These two organizations officially announced their collaboration in October 2011, stating that the program's purpose is "to engage international audiences through American film...this people-to-people exchange will send American filmmakers and film experts overseas

[18] The ADS, however, was sponsored by the University Film and Video Association.

to present independent documentaries, feature films, and animated shorts" (Office of the Spokesperson 2011:¶1).

Specifically, the AFS is described as a diplomatic endeavor which develops the idea of 'smart power diplomacy' by embracing the use of film in order "to bring people together and foster greater understanding" (Office of the Spokesperson 2011:¶2). Building on the success of its predecessor (the ADS, a previously-implemented three-year project), the AFS sends films—both narrative/fiction and documentary/nonfiction—and their filmmakers abroad, holding screenings and workshops/classes at various U.S. posts (i.e. Embassies, Consulates) and American Corners; local community centers, schools, and theaters; as well as other publically-accessible venues worldwide. It does so in order to accomplish the following: (1) enhance foreign understanding of U.S. society (broadly speaking) and awareness of (rather generalized) American viewpoints on current social issues (e.g. poverty, sexism); (2) foster dialogues about such issues to help generate solutions; and (3) share information about U.S. filmmaking as well as American cinematic innovations through workshops on marketing, distribution, digital technology, and the like.

These screenings and workshops/classes are intended to "open dialogues and encourage insights into American life and culture while exploring issues affecting communities worldwide" (Office of the Spokesperson 2011:¶3). The 2012 showcase, for instance, selected twenty-nine films—including *Food, Inc.* (2008), *GasLand* (2010), and *Real Women Have Curves* (2002)—that were deemed to be of high quality; representative of contemporary culture/society in the U.S., whether positively or negatively (many are strong critiques of American policies and/or practices); and illustrative of the array of viewpoints which exist throughout the nation (Office of the Spokesperson 2012). As stated by the Division Chief of the Cultural Programs Office in the

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the AFS program "is a dynamic way to share the vision, artistry and diverse viewpoints of American filmmakers" (Ames 2012:¶1).

The film selection process begins in late summer/early fall, about a year prior to when the actual showcase will take place. Leading academics, cinema experts[19], and movie creators (such as directors or producers)—especially ones from USC who help to organize the AFS showcase—recommend a range of motion pictures offering "diverse views of American society and culture as seen by independent filmmakers" (Ames 2012:¶2). After this initial selection, the combined list of films (known as the AFS 'short list') is sent to the DOS where it undergoes review in late fall and early winter: each feature will either be confirmed—thereby granting it a place in the showcase—or denied approval. If the former, participating sites (e.g. U.S. Embassies) can subsequently choose which of the films they would like to exhibit, and the latter's respective filmmakers then travel to the different nations for roughly seven to ten days—having been notified of possible 'cultural sensitivities' beforehand as part of their orientation—leading classes/workshops on filmmaking as well on the freedom of artistic expression. Consequently, these individuals "not only share technical expertise, but also encourage understanding of the role of filmmaking as a catalyst for dialogue about important contemporary issues" (Ames 2012:¶5), including the environment and women's empowerment.

On the whole, when examining cultural diplomacy projects it is important to note that "[even] the most politically neutral of exchanges...have either political intent behind their creation or are promoted for the purpose of developing cross-border relations that can subsequently lead to political outcomes, such as a reduction in conflict" (Scott-Smith 2009:50). This statement is clearly true vis-à-vis the overtly-neutral AFS program, as demonstrated by the underlying implications of its implementation abroad. Thus researchers must be cautious in

[19] Specifically, these experts include distinguished professors, filmmakers, and film industry professionals from across the nation.

attributing either complete 'objectivity' or inherent 'bias' to these types of diplomatic efforts, since "[political] outcomes...can represent a mix of national and general interests, such that it becomes difficult to disentangle strategic communication from "mutual understanding"" (Scott-Smith 2009:50)—the former involves targeting particular audiences with information that is tailored to them for the purpose of achieving a specific policy goal, while the latter entails sharing information for the purpose of improving cross-cultural communication/understanding.

❖ Communicating Across Boundaries

I. Cross-Cultural, International, & Intercultural Communication

With regard to communicating across national/cultural borders—as in foreign-relations endeavors—such efforts are often "characterized by misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and miscommunications. People commonly misconstrue or misconceive the behaviors of individuals from other cultures because they view these behaviors within the framework of the values, beliefs, and norms of their own cultures" (Stephan & Stephan 2002:127). In today's world, "where increased interdependency, interconnectivity, proximity, and international/intercultural contact have become the order of the day" (Semati 2004:1), being able to communicate with other cultures/nations effectively is essential. Accordingly, since "diplomatic communication is bound, almost by definition, to seek cross-cultural comprehensibility" (Cohen 1987:2), and given that soft power and public/cultural diplomacy are increasingly used as tools for communication —cross-cultural, international, and/or intercultural—it is important to consider (and respond to) key theoretical issues and debates that exist among the various sub-fields within communication studies (Hayden 2012, Melissen 2005, Tuch 1990).

One such area—which this dissertation addresses—involves problematic assumptions that are frequently made regarding the notion of the 'individual' and that of the 'collective',

particularly in terms of the supposed ‘dichotomy’ between the two. For instance, a significant problem for research on international relations and on perceptions by foreign ‘audiences’ has been the fact that the majority of scholars tend to either focus exclusively on individual actors’ reactions separate from their social context(s), or to overemphasize the societal groups/social environments of such individuals as being the ultimate cause of their impressions.

Many of the assumptions which have been—and continue to be—made regarding the ‘individual’ and the ‘collective’ are based on early theorizations in the social sciences concerning the ‘orientations’ that shape people’s (inter)actions and relationships. In particular, the works of Florence Kluckhohn (1953), Ruth Benedict (1934, 1946), Condon & Yousef (1975), and Gerard Hofstede (1980) have been influential with regard to these individual-collective assumptions. For instance, the five value orientations or culturally-influenced beliefs discussed by Kluckhohn[20]—such as being future-oriented as opposed to past-oriented—find expression in the current notion that a national or cultural group can and should be categorized according to a collectively-held ‘tendency’ or ‘disposition’.

Such an idea is problematic, as cultural/national assemblages are dynamic, variable, and heterogeneous, something which Kluckhohn herself ultimately realized. Despite believing that value orientations could be used to explain behavioral patterns and profile communities, she nevertheless recognized people’s predispositions as potentially mutable, their behaviors blending *both* ‘dominant’ and ‘variant’ orientations (Kluckhohn 1953). Moreover, such classifications of cultural/national groups are subject to ethnocentrism, meaning that they are not only limited in scope but also possibly biased. Kluckhohn’s framework became the basis for additional models which have influenced the field of communications as well, including that of Condon & Yousef

[20] Along with F. Strodtbeck, in a different work than that which is cited here.

(1975) which more explicitly dichotomized (ostensibly) individualistic/independent societies vs. collectivistic/interdependent ones.

These various models also resemble the 'cultural patterns' examined by Benedict (1934, 1946); that is to say, "the motives and emotions and values that are institutionalized in [a particular] culture" (Benedict 1934:49) and which lead to consistency in societal behaviors/ cognition. Using this idea of patterns, Benedict analyzed the Zuni and the Kwakiutl, asserting that the former exhibit 'Apollonian' characteristics such as modesty and self-control, while the latter display more 'Dionysian' traits like excess/gaudiness (Benedict 1934). This cultural patterns concept is thus similar to that of national tendencies: akin to the problems previously discussed regarding the latter, the former is a totalizing framework which ignores counter-examples or exceptions, as well as the complexity/variation among individuals within cultural groups. In fact, Benedict actually *observed* contradictions to cultural patterns in her study of the Japanese, whom she described as being "both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways" (Benedict 1946:3).

Furthermore, using such 'ideal' types to interpret reality is extremely problematic, as simplistic characterizations cannot explain the diversity of opinions, behaviors, and receptions among individuals, even those who share the same socio-historical/cultural context. Reality is much more complicated; accordingly, cultures or nations cannot be clearly separated into distinct types. Like Kluckhohn's model, the cultural pattern or 'national character' approach runs the risk of subjectivity, as well as of possibly promoting one-dimensional stereotypes which could be demeaning: Benedict, for instance, labeled the Dobu of New Guinea as 'mean-spirited'. Despite

these numerous issues, many communications studies/efforts—especially for cross-cultural, international, and intercultural communications—persist in assuming that the 'personality' of an individual is analogous to a society's 'culture' (Benedict 1934). Hence, such studies/efforts assume that scholars can identify collective patterns/characters and use them to analyze audience members' individual receptions, responses, and/or reactions, even though employing these cultural patterns/national characters does *not* in fact account for the individual.

Notably, Kluckhohn's framework (as well as Condon and Yousef's model) influenced the work of Hofstede (1980), whose research introduced the individual-collective dichotomy to communications. To be more specific, Hofstede proposed that four dimensions—'power distance', 'masculinity-femininity', 'uncertainty avoidance', and 'individualism-collectivism'—be used in understanding the differences and similarities between 'national cultures'. This approach led to several questionable assumptions in communications studies/efforts, of which the primary ones are as follows: (1) that researchers could either focus solely on individual factors or entirely on collective elements, emphasizing one area while ignoring the other; and (2) that audience members' receptions of communicative messages/images should be seen as collectively-shared or homogenous since they belong to a common social milieu.

In order to address such oversimplifications, some communication scholars—and the present study as well—highlight the dual influence of collective and individual factors, such as how stereotypes of nations and receptions of images/messages concerning them are influenced by *both* people's social identities and their personal motivations (Li & Chitty 2009, Mody & Lee 2002, Bennett 1998). Consequently, while "perceptions of intergroup relations and their corresponding images are generated within broader contexts, they are held by *individuals* within

a given society, be they political elites or members of a population" (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005:33, original emphasis).

As previously noted with regard to perception—and as will later be seen with regard to spectatorship/audience reception—abstract or totalizing concepts such as 'public', 'audience', and even 'population' ignore critical personal/individual aspects which influence the reception of communicative outreach (e.g. that of diplomatic programs like the AFS). Thus the 'audiences' being examined in international, cross-cultural, or intercultural communication studies—whether made up of media spectators or the recipients of diplomacy efforts—must not be homogenized, as a number of scholarly analyses have consistently done (Allor 1996).

However, while such audiences should not be seen as being made up of completely socially-bound entities, neither should they be viewed as being made up of entirely isolated or autonomous 'agents', as has also often been the case. Rather than being assumed as wholly one or the other, members of communication audiences/publics should be considered amalgams of *both* concepts of the individual: they are distinct interpreters of, and responders to, the messages/ images/communications that they receive, albeit within—and affected or constrained by—their particular social conditions and specific environment (Michelle 2007, Clua 2003, Mody & Lee 2002, Stephan & Stephan 2002, Ting-Toomey 1999, Anderson 1996, Morley & Robins 1995, Zaller 1992, Singer 1987). For example, although people are immersed to some extent in 'the collective' of a society, they actually function only as "partial representative[s] of societal memberships...whose actions are improvisations on cultural themes" (Anderson 1996:78).

Foreign publics/audiences must therefore be seen as encompassing a variety of traits or 'levels', including "the interpretive competencies of individuals; the co-presence of individuals in a reception situation; an active social relation of collective interpretation; the "market" for a

particular cultural commodity; the "imaginary" constructions of cultural creators; the "public" of a particular genre; and the totality of potential receivers" (Allor 1996:213). Perceptions of and reactions to cross-cultural communication efforts—like public/cultural diplomacy endeavors or foreign policy initiatives—must therefore be examined according to not only the individual differences which exist among audience members (i.e. those on the receiving end), but also the beliefs and images created/promoted—and thus shared—at the level of their broader societies or social groups (Li & Chitty 2009, Taylor 2004, Mody & Lee 2002, Ting-Toomey 1999, Kunczik 1997, Anderson 1996, Singer 1987, Fisher 1972). There can thus be no *one* object of research/ analysis in such studies; it is the social relations—as well as the diverse aspects and contexts of these—that constitute various reception 'fields' (following Bourdieu) which should instead be explored (Allor 1996).

Furthermore, discussion of the 'audience' or 'public' in communication studies is often hindered by problems with regard to differentiating among intercultural, international, and cross-cultural communication (Barnett & Lee 2002, Rogers & Hart 2002). For example, intercultural communication is typically defined as people from one cultural group communicating with those of another (discrete) cultural group; international communication[21] as the communication which occurs between nation-states (often through the mass media); and cross-cultural communication as "the comparison of cultural groups and the implications of these differences for the process of communication" (Barnett & Lee 2002:275). Despite the distinctions among these communicative forms, all three involve "interaction between culturally unalike (heterophilous) people...[relating]

[21] Some scholars contend that "international communication is no longer about communication among states, or some states propagating ideas on the populations of other states, but is about citizen groups from different countries working together" (McDowell 2002:303) on such issues as environmental protection. The AFS' emphasis on addressing social issues in a 'people-to-people' method could potentially be considered an example of this.

to important social problems of the world and...[dealing] with implications for social action and social change" (Rogers & Hart 2002:14).

As is quickly apparent following the earlier 'individual vs. collective' debate, such definitions entail a view of communication as occurring between well-defined and significantly different cultural or national groups (Barnett & Lee 2002, Bennett 1998). However, "[while] dialogue between cultures is an admirable goal, it begins with dialogue between individuals, whether they are representatives of governments or private citizens" (Cowan & Arsenault 2008:17). Moreover, such definitions do not reflect the reality of an increasingly interconnected/ globalized world (Kim & Hubbard 2007, Morley & Robins 1995). Today, cultures constantly "overlap and draw from other traditions" (Hopper 2007:40), and cultural 'components'—such as opinions, images, values, and ideologies—diffuse ever more rapidly across societal boundaries, to be variously received and perceived/understood—engendering rejection, curiosity, contempt, etc.—by 'audiences' that are not homogenous entities, despite their (potentially) shared ethnolinguistic environments (Barnett & Lee 2002, Stock 1999, de Orellana 1996, Cohen 1987).

In addition, many researchers believe that in studying communication between cultural or national groups—i.e. international, intercultural, or cross-cultural communication—rather than accounting for individual behavior/beliefs as part of broader milieus, they must instead: (1) make comparisons which employ predetermined characteristics to predict similarities and differences (e.g. egalitarianism vs. non-egalitarianism); or (2) make generalizations informed by what they perceive to be the central 'preferences', 'tendencies', or 'perceptions/patterns of reasoning' for these purportedly identifiable groups, such as individualism or collectivism (Kim & Hubbard 2007, Gudykunst & Lee 2002, Bennett 1998, Gudykunst 1997, Fisher 1972). Other dimensions of cultural variability—besides individualism-collectivism—thought to influence communication

between different societies/groups include: power distance, or the degree to which less powerful societal members accept unequal distributions of power; uncertainty avoidance, or the extent to which people attempt to avoid uncertainty; and masculinity-femininity, or the social/cultural distribution of gender roles (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, Gudykunst 1997).

A significant problem posed by this methodological practice is that while *specific* differences between cultural/national groups may provide some indication as to possible communication scenarios, assigning supposedly distinct 'cultural' or 'national' tendencies—like socio- and egocentrism (Bennett 1998)—ignores that such tendencies do not exist in isolation from one another. Rather, one tendency or 'character' will generally *predominate* over the others; moreover, such dimensions will not be expressed identically by every society in which they appear (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, Gudykunst 1997). People may, for instance, exhibit sociocentric behaviors while maintaining strongly individualistic self-perceptions, thus these 'independent' individuals *do* in fact demonstrate aspects of 'interdependence' (Kim & Hubbard 2007, Mattern 2005). Data derived from interviews conducted among Americans and the Toraja illustrate this: such studies have shown that there are in fact varying degrees of egocentrism and sociocentrism which exist in different contexts within both Western and non-Western societies (Hollan 1992).

Furthermore, while the Western *conception* of the self may be one of independence and autonomy, the ways in which the self is subjectively *experienced* can in fact lean in the opposite direction, as demonstrated by how people identify or empathize with others (Hollan 1992). Labeling groups according to certain tendencies or characteristics—including such dichotomous classifications as individualistic vs. collectivistic—is therefore an inappropriate choice for cross-cultural, international, and intercultural communication research (Kim & Hubbard 2007). Doing

so can only lead to an oversimplified or partial (and hence inaccurate) understanding of how communication behaviors are performed and received, since people may act as *both* social beings and autonomous agents.

Accordingly, scholars should not presuppose that there inevitably exists "a close correspondence between ideal cultural conceptions of the self—which are often simplified and idealized—and subjective experience" (Hollan 1992:294). Likewise, 'general trends' or 'characters' cannot and should not be assumed to apply to all individuals within a particular national or cultural group, as such assumptions falsely presume that 'shared identities' lead to identical beliefs or behaviors (Kim & Hubbard 2007, Morley & Robins 1995, Fisher 1972). An unfortunate result of doing so is that these have frequently—and often inappropriately—been applied across multiple settings, thereby overlooking the diverse contexts and individual personalities which affect immediate behaviors/responses.

Consequently, researchers need to examine an array of factors with regard to communicative efforts, particularly those which fall into the following categories: "history or background; the individuals who are involved; groups; situations" (Brislin 1981:10); previous or ongoing contact/communication; pre-contact attitudes/beliefs; overarching or respective goals; and issues of status or power. With regard to background/history, these refer to participants' *habitus* or socialization—i.e. 'social', 'cultural', or 'shared' aspects; individuals involved refers to personal opinions, feelings, and motives; the notion of groups entails participants' involvement in or adherence to in-group relationships/norms; and situations denote external/ environmental factors that people encounter and with which they must cope (Brislin 1981).

Communication participants must therefore also be understood in terms of "individual-level factors that mediate the influence of cultural-level dimensions of cultural variability on

communication" (Gudykunst 1997:336). In other words, they need to be understood in terms of their individual opinions or interests; self-conceptions (e.g. independent, interdependent); personalities (e.g. idiocentric, allocentric); knowledge; motives and intentions; prejudices or emotional reactions; as well as how different situations (i.e. environmental features) affect their behavior in combination with these individual variables (Li & Chitty 2009; Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005; Mody & Lee 2002; Stephan & Stephan 2002; Zaller 1992; Singer 1987; Brislin 1981; Fisher 1972).

Scholars who take an 'identity negotiation perspective' specifically emphasize eight facets of an individual's identity which influence their communication behaviors/receptions: four of these have lifelong or ongoing impacts—the cultural, gender, ethnic, and personal facets—while four vary depending on the situation—the relational, facework, role, and symbolic interaction facets (Ting-Toomey 1999). Problematically, some associate these personal/ individual elements more with one 'cultural dimension' rather than another, thereby continuing to adhere to the notion of isolated/discrete categorizations.

Thus audiences' receptions/responses will depend not just on their particular cultural or national frameworks—which themselves are influenced by engagements/interconnections with various transnational flows—but also on individual experiences and/or attitudes which may be conditioned—but are not wholly determined—by specific socio-historical contexts (Li & Chitty 2009; Hopper 2007; Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005; Gudykunst & Lee 2002; Ting-Toomey 1999; Gudykunst 1997; Morley & Robins 1995; Zaller 1992). That is to say, "a combination of individual and situational factors determines people's behavior. Different people behave in different ways when faced with similar situations" (Brislin 1981:139). As a result, their receptions of/responses to international communications and foreign relations endeavors will

invariably be affected by personal elements (e.g. opinions or interests), since perception is the way in "which an individual selects, evaluates, and organizes stimuli from the external environment" (Singer 1987:9).

Yet personal elements, and hence individual perceptions, are strongly influenced by "the *learned* factors involved in the reception, organization, and processing of sensory data" (Singer 1987:15, original emphasis). In other words, an individual's socialization provides them with certain evaluative frameworks for receiving/perceiving communicative efforts, and whether they employ these frameworks verbatim or modify them according to their own goals leads to varying responses, despite a shared group environment (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, Ting-Toomey 1999, Gudykunst 1997, Singer 1987). It is thus important to recognize the role of individual-level phenomena, since *both* communication recipients' externally-/societally- influenced dispositions —based on cultural standards, their social milieu, etc.—as well as their own unique characteristics—shaped by personal modes of information processing—will affect their responses, perceptions, and/or interpretations (Brooks 2006, Macnamara 2004, Mody & Lee 2002, Stephan & Stephan 2002, Ting-Toomey 1999, Kunczik 1997).

Accordingly, ethnographic methods can be a useful way of studying communication between different national or cultural groups (such as through the AFS), since ethnography "acknowledges the significance of the individual actor. Audiences can function as groups...but they are made up of individuals, each of whom carries a unique perspective, history, and set of expectations" (Evans 2004:209). Moreover, for a study like this dissertation which examines the reception *and* 'production' of communicative messages through film—i.e. the DOS officials' and AFS experts' selections and objectives—ethnography is also a valuable tool: this is because akin to their audiences, the "[producers] of mediated messages operate in similar fashion. By

working with individuals among audiences or producers, ethnographers can create a mosaic that strives to represent social realities accurately" (Evans 2004:209).

Achieving this type of 'mosaic' was precisely the goal of my own research, as demonstrated through the study's ethnographic analyses of both the assembly and reception/ perception of the AFS. Such an approach allows one to account for the interplay between the individual and the collective by acknowledging the situated nature of reception *and* production, since the creation and interpretation of communication events *both* necessarily involve producers' and audiences' societally-related circumstances/contexts and values, as well as their personal moods and experiences (Macnamara 2004, Ting-Toomey 1999, Singer 1987).

Another significant concern in communication studies is the growing difficulty in separating communications intended for domestic audiences from those aimed overseas, due to the interconnectedness of global relations through media (Hocking 2005, Semati 2004). With the concepts of 'war on terror' and 'axis of evil', for instance, the U.S.' ex-President Bush "ignored the problem of multiple audiences. What appealed at home, failed abroad" (Nye Jr. 2010:5). Diplomatic communications with international audiences must therefore be strategically "rooted in a detailed, context-specific understanding of...those with whom [one] want[s] to engage" (de Mooij 2008:102). However, this leads to two obstacles: (1) how to clearly explain the purpose(s) of such communicative/outreach endeavors in order to overcome any latent anxieties (Lock 2010); and (2) how to convince others to accept such projects, or to persuade people "from widely divergent cultural backgrounds to develop a consistency of view that supports an over-riding desired...outcome" (Taverner 2010:145).

Accurate and inoffensive communication with people from other nations/societies—even if the message is intended for those living in one's own country—is thus increasingly significant,

particularly since "relationships with publics may...act as a buffer if and when future crises occur" (Snow 2009:10). Yet how to do so continues to be an area of contention, as cultural/ media imperialism remains an enduring theoretical issue. Despite widespread critiques, the argument nevertheless persists that communications through "dominant Western media spread Western cultural values and norms" (Semati 2004:9), threatening other societies' sovereignty and homogenizing their national/cultural identities (van Elteren 2006, Rogers & Hart 2002, Tomlinson 1991). For instance, "a popular notion among the developing countries, and even among the industrialized nations, including France and Canada, is that the U.S., through its media conglomerates and media contents exports, has attempted to dilute their traditional or indigenous cultures" (Kamalipour 1999:xxvi).

Such persistence indicates the need to address structural asymmetries in international communications and to find ways of promoting cross-cultural dialogues which do not reaffirm them (Semati 2004). This was my objective in analyzing the potential discrepancies that exist between the AFS coordinators' intentions and how the program is received in Mexico (e.g. as imperialistic and/or 'Westernizing'), as well as in examining what the program's immediate and ongoing reception(s) mean for U.S. foreign relations/the nation's image abroad, since "effective communication emerges from mindfully managing uncertainty and anxiety" (Gudykunst & Lee 2002:43). Moreover, while diplomatic communications—like those of the AFS—tend to seek cross-cultural transparency, research has shown that having somewhat ambiguous messages can actually be beneficial, as they help those involved avoid committing to specific positions which could potentially trigger hostilities if they are not the positions preferred by 'receivers' (Cohen 1987). However, such ambiguity can also be interpreted as evasion or deception on the part of

the ‘sender’, provoking ongoing feelings of unease/doubt as well as a sense of inequality/ imbalance in terms of power and information in cross-cultural dialogues.

Consequently, “[both] cultural-level and individual-level phenomena need to be...taken into consideration when conducting cross-cultural research” (Gudykunst & Lee 2002:45) in order to appropriately—and successfully—communicate across national, cultural, or even power-related boundaries, thus avoiding situations of conflict based on difference or misunderstanding (as have historically transpired). Such a methodological/theoretical approach is necessary since foreign relations—as communicative processes—are not likely to improve in a climate fraught with anxiety/insecurity, injustice/inequality, and lack of respect/recognition (Ellis & Maoz 2012, Mackenzie & Wallace 2011, Kamalipour 1999, Bennett 1998, Singer 1987). Being ‘mindful’ or aware of/sensitive to cultural, national, and individual differences; conflicting goals; as well as possible misinterpretations—and preparing for them in advance by finding common ground/similarities—is one prospective solution (Ting-Toomey 1999, Brislin 1981).

II. Communication & Representation Through Media

In terms of cross-cultural/international communication and representing one’s own or foreign societies—and, hence, perceiving others—it is important to examine one of the primary mechanisms through which such activities occur: the media (e.g. film, television, newspapers, radio, social media, etc.). During WWI and WWII, the field of communication studies was mainly absorbed with propaganda and psychological warfare (Mody & Lee 2002); however, when the Cold War arose—and as it continued—such research began to increasingly focus on “public opinion in different countries...to develop the tools and technologies to ensure that Western values triumphed” (McDowell 2002:297). Specifically, the goal was to harness media as a way of attracting Western bloc nations away from the Soviets, thus shifting the discipline’s

focus towards a "rhetoric of modernization to save developing countries from communism" (Mody & Lee 2002:384).

While such an imperialistic/hegemonic emphasis has waned, the theories, concepts, and methods developed during this time period continue to influence the communications field. Moreover, "[the] consideration of comparative cases of media systems and media policy...has remained resilient over several decades" (McDowell 2002:299): researchers are still concerned with the potential impacts and uses of mass media with regard to political communication and the possibility of influencing other societies' perceptions and/or actions—despite the fact that many studies have shown such media effects to be fairly limited (Shrum 2009).

Today, communication and representation through the media—particularly if they are related to political objectives—typically involve three processes: framing, priming, and agenda-setting. While some scholars have attempted to combine these into a single framework, others have taken them as different approaches to the study of media effects which contrast in their specific "assumptions and premises. At the same time, they derive distinctively different theoretical statements and hypotheses from these premises" (Scheufele 2000:298). Priming—which is an individual psychological process—involves people developing 'memory traces', where certain concepts or information become more accessible in their memory: for instance, people are 'primed' to respond in certain ways in distinct contexts, or to use certain criteria in their evaluations of events (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier 2009; Shrum 2009; Scheufele 2000).

Agenda-setting is somewhat similar, in that it involves "[influencing] the salience of certain issues as perceived by the audience; that is, the ease with which these issues can be retrieved from memory" (Scheufele 2000:300), and the specific attitudes that people will exhibit

regarding them. Accordingly, if certain political issues or events are made more salient through substantial media communication/transmission—such as via their presence on radio, television, in the news, etc.—and if they are represented or communicated in a particular way, this can influence receivers' perceptions of and reactions to such politically-related activities as public or cultural diplomacy efforts. Agenda-setting must therefore be examined both *macroscopically*—what 'agenda' is being put forth in the media—and *microscopically*—what the audiences' own 'agendas' are (though these are dependent to some extent on the media agenda); in other words, what issues are in fact most salient to them and what the implications of this might be (Shrum 2009, McCombs 2004, Mody & Lee 2002, Scheufele 2000). Thus through coverage which makes some issues more salient than the rest, the media increase public concern regarding a certain topic (like foreign relations), and over time—having built/set the agenda for their audiences—the media may in fact 'prime' or influence how the latter evaluate different phenomena (such as diplomatic endeavors).

Akin to agenda-setting, framing comprises both media and audience frames: the former are central ideas/stories which suggest or provide meaning for what is being depicted, and the latter are the mental 'idea clusters' that an individual has which guide their information processing (Dell'Orto et al. 2004, Scheufele 2000, Kamalipour 1999). The process of framing involves the 'building' of media frames, or the actual production/selection of media (e.g. news, films); the employment of these frames to influence audience frames (though such influence generally depends on the issue at hand); and finally, how publics actually process and respond to the framed information based on their specific audience frames. Unlike agenda-setting, framing does not work "by making aspects of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information" (Scheufele 2000:309). In

other words, how situations, events, actions, or policies are described—including, for example, the phrasing or syntax used—is thought to affect how audiences will interpret them (Dell'Orto et al. 2004).

However, as previously noted with regard to the significance of perception for foreign relations, audience members have certain existing (or pre-exposure) orientations/dispositions that influence their reception and processing of information communicated/represented by the media, including: (1) individual interests or biases, and whether these are strong or weak; (2) everyday experiences; (3) active or passive engagement with the media—or dependence of any kind on the media for news/information; (4) discussions with others; and (5) interpersonal issues (Li & Chitty 2009; Petty, Briñol, & Priester 2009; Dell'Orto et al. 2004; Peterson 2003; Mody & Lee 2002; Scheufele 2000). In addition, the social dimensions of people's environments "not only may serve as interpretive filters, but may also serve as constraints" (Peterson 2003:113) for what is actually communicated/represented through the media, particularly for international diplomatic projects like the AFS. Thus, overall, "[meaning] can never be reduced entirely to producer intentionality or to audience autonomy but must recognize the place of the text as the site of an interpretive struggle" (Peterson 2003:119).

Lastly, one must take note of the fact that "[mediated] representations of groups of people —who they are, how they live, their values and aspirations—are of necessity problematic" (Slater 1990:327). This is due first of all to the (un)reliability of the information which is communicated/represented via the media—film, television, etc.—and secondly to the fact that the media present only a limited number of circumstances, individuals, and interpretations (Spence & Navarro 2011, Li & Chitty 2009, Brooks 2006, McCombs 2004). Not only does this affect credibility—such as that of images presented by diplomatic efforts like the AFS—it also

means that anything which is labeled as ‘representative’ by the media—including the AFS’ cinematic representations of ‘U.S. society’ and ‘American’ opinions/values/practices—is not necessarily so (Hobart 2005). Overall, it is necessary to address “the power and ideological issues within which frames are processed, accepted or refused” (Dell’Orto et al. 2004:295), and what this means for priming and agenda-setting with regard to the audiences of cultural/public diplomacy endeavors.

CHAPTER 3

❖ Perceptions of the U.S. Abroad

I. Attitude & Opinion Formation

With regard to the formation of attitudes and opinions—particularly those related to political issues—variation will arise due to people's exposure to relevant arguments (such as through the media), their attention to/interest in this information, and their particular historical/ sociocultural context. In general, these attitudes/opinions are not fixed, rather people create them spontaneously as they confront new events, issues, etc., "[making] greatest use of ideas that are, for one reason or another, most immediately salient to them" (Zaller 1992:1), such as due to media-based agenda setting. As observed above vis-à-vis perception, media representation/ transmission, and forms of communication, both individual and collective elements are involved in generating specific attitudes/opinions. They are "a marriage of information and predisposition: information to form a mental picture of the given issue, and predisposition to motivate some conclusion about it" (Zaller 1992:6).

Socially-derived information involves collective stereotypes, cognitive schemas, and frames—often disseminated through the media—which influence how people think about and interpret this information; what aspects they focus on as 'important' (i.e. what is most salient to them); and their ensuing beliefs/behaviors based on the associations or conclusions that they draw (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier 2009; Shrum 2009; McCombs 2004; Zaller 1992). For instance, "[societal] attitudes may be discerned by examining repeated motifs in motion pictures, as the films reflect popular ideas, beliefs and desires" (Wilt 1991:394). Whatever the medium through which such information is obtained, people will generally be guided to concentrate on only a few issues—to convey a stronger, more focused message—in

forming their public opinions. However what these issues actually are may vary due to the differing agendas in play within a particular sociocultural context and time period: "[at] any moment there are dozens of issues contending for public attention. But no society and its institutions can attend to more than a few issues at a time" (McCombs 2004:38), therefore some will necessarily be privileged over others.

Nevertheless—as was previously observed—the 'audiences' of such communicative endeavors are not simply passive recipients: "[they] possess a variety of interests, values, and experiences that may greatly affect their willingness to accept – or alternatively, their resolve to resist – persuasive influences" (Zaller 1992:22) at the individual level. They are thus influenced by both their external environments and by their internal 'pseudo-environments', the latter of which being "the world that exists in [a person's] mind – a view that is always incomplete vis-à-vis reality and frequently inaccurate" (McCombs 2004:21). Consequently, one's historical/ political/economic/social context, personal/idiosyncratic tendencies, and cultural predispositions function in concert, thereby engendering multiple opinions/attitudes towards particular issues facing society, rather than just one (Petty, Briñol, & Priester 2009; Wilt 1991). In other words, "people possess numerous, frequently inconsistent "considerations" relating to each issue" (Zaller 1992:54).

In addition, opinion/attitude studies show that it can take as little as a few weeks for significant numbers of the viewing public to absorb salient topics (i.e. for the agenda to be 'set'), while the decay effect—when these topics drop off the audience agenda—can take up to several months or more (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier 2009; McCombs 2004). Accordingly, those constructs or images used in making judgments tend to be ones which are readily available or easily retrieved in people's memory, frequently comprising only a subset of

the information originally received (Shrum 2009). Moreover, as was observed earlier, (media) framing is a key aspect of the formation of such perceptions/impressions, not simply because it involves focusing on or the selection of certain issues, but also due to the fact that "particular attributes of an issue may be compelling arguments for certain social groups. [That is to say], a particular way of framing a topic...may result in highly stratified consequences among the public" (McCombs 2004:95). Exposure, accessibility, *and* content are thus significant with regard to the formation of people's images and/or perceptions of various issues, and hence their attitudes towards/opinions of these (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier 2009; Shrum 2009; McCombs 2004).

As such, looking at this combination of individual and social factors can provide scholars with at least some indication of audience 'receptions', including how foreign societies may be (pre)disposed to receive a program like the AFS. This is important, because with cultural/public diplomacy endeavors which are similar to the AFS—ones that strive to sway foreign opinions and attitudes regarding the U.S.—such desired change involves the "*reception* of new ideas and *acceptance* of some as new considerations, thereby altering the balance of considerations in people's minds" (Zaller 1992:119, original emphasis). What this means is that foreign audiences must be aware of, understand, and accept the messages being promoted in order for their attitudes/opinions to be influenced. Not only is the amount of time they are exposed to such messages significant, how much they already know about the issue at hand—and the extent to which they care—is also critical, since "[the] greater their concern and initial knowledge, the more likely they are to notice and comprehend additional information that comes their way" (Zaller 1992:152).

However, such persuasion will not be as effective if individuals already possess opposing beliefs/ideas which will influence their specific reactions to and interpretations or receptions of external stimuli (e.g. cross-cultural communication efforts). People's attitudes are less likely to be swayed if they are able to "[draw] upon prior experience and knowledge in order to carefully scrutinize all of the information relevant to determining the central merits of the position advocated" (Petty, Briñol, & Priester 2009:132, original emphasis) by an outside source; accordingly, they can deny or ignore information that clashes with their preexisting cognitive biases (Kunczik 1997). Furthermore, the credibility/trustworthiness of received information; its personal relevance to 'audiences'; the context (socio-historical, cultural, etc.); and beliefs about the source can all affect how such information is processed and interpreted, and hence the attitudes/opinions which are formed (Petty, Briñol, & Priester 2009; Kunczik 1997).

The overall success of opinion/attitude 'campaigns'—including diplomatic efforts—therefore depends primarily on "(a) whether the transmitted communications are effective in changing the attitudes of the recipients in the desired direction, and (b) whether these modified attitudes in turn influence people's behaviors" (Petty, Briñol, & Priester 2009:125), like the practices of former/current AFS participants in the present study. Finally, it is important to note that while the notion of 'world opinion' is influential vis-à-vis contemporary international politics—such as in affecting how cross-cultural communication projects/efforts are structured—whether this type of opinion even exists—especially given the lack of evidence for the concept of the 'global village'—remains controversial (Kunczik 1997).

II. The U.S.' Image Abroad

Reception analyses, like this study's examination of the AFS, are closely linked to issues of perception, such as the variety of impressions of the U.S. which exist abroad. Some scholars

have asserted that publically-held images of the U.S.—based in reality or not—can actually be more important than the truth vis-à-vis political affairs, as they may engender significant problems of communication/interpretation (Anholt & Hildreth 2010, Brooks 2006). These academics posit that exposure to recurrent media images, stories, and messages—whether accurate or specious—fosters specific attitudes or beliefs about American society and the U.S. government (Sanders 2011, Gardels & Medavoy 2009, Harris & Karafa 1999). However, others contend that the 'cultural filters' which sift such information—generated by people's own social, economic, and political contexts—have more effect on foreign perceptions of the U.S. (Iwabuchi 2007, Staiger 2005).

My dissertation attempts to reframe this established binary scheme by proposing that it is actually a *combination* of 'cultivation' and 'filtering' which shapes images of the U.S. abroad, especially with projects like the AFS where coordinators promote specific understandings of the country and its society while foreign participants simultaneously interpret the program through their own cultural frameworks. Accordingly, for the purpose of this study's analysis of cultural/ diplomatic outreach (e.g. the AFS), it is necessary to begin by examining the diverse images of the U.S. which circulate abroad; in other words, the international judgments and stereotypes that exist regarding the U.S., particularly those related to the government's foreign policies/relations. Such "images are organized in a systematic way, comprised of cognitions and beliefs regarding the target nation's motives, leadership, and primary characteristics. Understanding these images requires understanding the context of intergroup relations from which these beliefs and stereotypes directly derive" (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005:28).

There are three features of intergroup or international relations which lead to different impressions of others: "(1) goal compatibility, (2) relative power/capability, and (3) relative

cultural status, or sophistication. These three dimensions determine threat or opportunity appraisals of the other nation" (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005:29), thereby influencing images or perceptions of—and behaviors toward—the latter. For instance, societies with similar goals are more likely to view each other as allies; if one sees itself as superior—such as in terms of status—its image of others may be that of dependents; and when competition exists between groups of comparable power, they may perceive each other as self-interested and untrustworthy enemies (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005).

Thus one of the primary reasons for determining how the U.S. is seen by others is that such "[images], or stereotypes...serve to justify [one national government's] desired reaction or treatment toward another" (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005:28). By doing so in my own study, I was better able to understand the AFS' reception in Monterrey, Mexico. Moreover, public opinion—the target of this type of diplomatic effort—is formed to a great extent based on media images (e.g. the Abu Ghraib photos), and as a result, much of "what Americans know about the world, and what the world knows about America, they know from the screen" (Gardels & Medavoy 2009:4), including films, television, and the internet.

One of the problems with how American society is envisioned abroad is that any general image/perception which is held by foreign publics will in fact be "an imperfect reflection of reality and of people's hopes, dreams, and fears. It [will be] a complex, evanescent, contradictory collection of ideas" (Sanders 2011:3). The reason why such an image/perception would involve contradictions is that people's ideas about the U.S. are multifaceted, comprising not only the country's history but also its present (e.g. specific actions taken or not taken); various notions regarding the nation's citizens (e.g. 'those pushy Americans'); complicated emotions concerning

the U.S. economic and/or political systems; as well as American society's symbolism (for many) of a better life.

Furthermore, people's impressions of the U.S. may not be based on first-hand experience (Lynch 2007, Brooks 2006, Harris & Karafa 1999, Kunczik 1997), but rather "on what others tell them: accounts of travelers, parents, friends, journalists, novelists, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, or others" (Sanders 2011:7). These can be manipulated or become distorted and inaccurate as they are passed from one person to the next, leading to a variety of distinct interpretations. Lastly, the particular images/messages that people *choose* to believe—out of those available to them—will be those which directly inform their individual perspectives and opinions regarding the U.S., such as resentment, fear, nationalism, or desire (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005).

What surveys and studies have shown is that while the U.S.' political reputation has declined of late, in terms of the nation's overall image abroad 'opportunity' is still one of the most universally-accepted concepts. Both 'liberty' and 'freedom' have also remained prominent, as can be seen in the 1940s through the 1960s for people living in nations emerging from fascism (Saunders 2011, Anholt & Hildreth 2010). One explanation for this ongoing consistency is that "America's image is based not only on who [Americans] are and what [they] do, but on how [they] present [themselves] to the world through [their] globally pervasive mass culture – Hollywood films, popular music, YouTube videos, and TV" (Gardels & Medavoy 2009:13), for which people worldwide have demonstrated a strong and enduring appetite.

However, prolific ticket and compact disc sales are not necessarily the same as 'pro-Americanism': despite the persistence of positive feelings, the U.S. nevertheless retains a somewhat negative international image (Sanders 2011, Gardels & Medavoy 2009). One of the

primary reasons for this is that the American government frequently make public commitments to enact worldwide changes, which it is then not always able/willing to fulfill—particularly if these do not fit within its national interests (Shen 2009; Johnston & Stockman 2007; Lynch 2007; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002; Iordanova 1999). For example, "[the] U.S. record of double standards on human rights has been deeply entrenched in the Chinese psyche" (Shen 2009:101)—as has the U.S. administration's rather hypocritical approach to the 'war on terror' and to promoting democracy abroad—leading to negative perceptions of the nation in China, specifically vis-à-vis American policies and actions or the lack thereof (Johnston & Stockman 2007, Lynch 2007, Wesley 2007).

Vows made by the U.S. government to uphold certain ideals, principles, and promises are therefore "taken more seriously than when such commitments are made by others, because the United States is thought to have the power to make them come true. The charges of hypocrisy by enemies and the feelings of disappointment among its friends are hard to avoid" (Sanders 2011:42) when the country's administration subsequently does not or cannot live up to expectations. Moreover, the nation's ongoing association with globalization and modernization —which are frequently denounced as part of cultural imperialism and Americanization arguments—often makes U.S. society seem responsible for both the good *and* the bad aspects of these processes—like the material benefits of economic development as well as the (supposed) concurrent loss of tradition, respectively—whether or not this is actually true (Chiozza 2009, Hudson 2007, Morris 2005).

Images of unreliability, inconsistency, and insincerity thus exist alongside more positive sentiments regarding American actions, policies, and motives. As a result, global perceptions of the U.S. are ambivalent—and somewhat volatile—reflecting different responses towards the

national government's foreign policies and international actions as compared to American society's other, more 'cultural' aspects (Amin 2009, Chiozza 2007, Wesley 2007, Brooks 2006). For instance, disagreement with certain principles endorsed by U.S. society, feelings of vulnerability with regard to the American government's unilateral military propensities (e.g. 'pre-emptive' strikes), and anxiety concerning the threat of cultural imperialism, all appear to be "more than matched by the image of a life free of want and oppression, of free expression, and of individual fulfillment" (Sanders 2011:60), even if not everyone in the U.S. actually has these.

As was noted earlier, the media—especially television and film—can be used to enhance these types of attractive perceptions; however, they may simultaneously contribute to the nation's image as superficial, materialistic, and misleading since they frequently distort reality, at least to a certain extent (Kamalipour 1999). Consequently, this can lead to miscommunication and problems with regard to foreign relations, since people may "have images in their heads that never happened and never existed—the product of fiction and of mistaken impressions; of propaganda, rumor, and other false reporting; and of error, exaggeration, and pure imagination" (Sanders 2011:81).

Furthermore—as the previous chapter's sections on cross-border communication and perception demonstrated—images or impressions of the U.S. do *not* necessarily determine foreign societies' opinions, but they *do* help support such perceptions of or attitudes toward the nation, which are primarily shaped by the confluence of current/historical events, social/cultural predispositions, and variable personal/individual factors (Sanders 2011; Li & Chitty 2009; Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005; Kamalipour 1999). Accordingly, it is difficult to anticipate international images/perceptions of the U.S. at any given time. For example, anti-American sentiment may be due to dislike of the U.S. government's policies based on enduring cultural

norms, or it may be more transitory, arising as a result of a specific, one-time incident and then dissipating once the general outcry has waned.

In general, surveys—such as the 2011 Pew Global Attitudes assessment—tend to indicate a degree of unpopularity vis-à-vis the U.S., but they also reflect predominantly *pro*-American attitudes worldwide: it is when other people's desires or expectations go unfulfilled and they become disenchanted with the U.S. that their disappointment and/or envy may stimulate the reverse (Sanders 2011, Chiozza 2009, Chiozza 2007, Katzenstein & Keohane 2007, Iordanova 1999). In Bulgaria, for example, there are two significant sources of such disillusionment: the first is how "contrary to expectations, the U.S. did not get involved with implementing political and economic change in Bulgaria, or at least it did not provide the expected support needed for the changes to take hold" (Iordanova 1999:76). The second involves a more nationalistic fear of the American government's supposed "commitment to promoting (hostile) Turkish interests at Bulgaria's expense" (Iordanova 1999:76). This particular source and the sentiments it raises are reminiscent of similar feelings in China regarding U.S. policies vis-à-vis Taiwan, as well those in the Arab world related to American support of Israel (Johnston & Stockman 2007, Lynch 2007).

To lessen and/or prevent such attitudes, many scholars have suggested that the U.S. government should attempt the following: (1) level the international playing field—politically—and reduce global—economic—inequality; (2) remain aware of foreign expectations and try to live up to these; (3) be open minded/compassionate; (4) promote truthful yet positive narratives and images—about itself—while reinforcing these through actions, behaviors, and/or policies; and (5) honor the nation's commitments to others as well as its espoused ideals, particularly with regard to human rights and democratic principles (Sanders 2011; Gardels & Medavoy 2009; Anholt 2008; Katzenstein & Keohane 2007; Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005).

Nation branding has also been touted by some academics as a way of (re)building the U.S.' reputation abroad; they contend that "[the] truth, however truthful, never sells itself: it has to be *sold*" (Anholt & Hildreth 2010:59, original emphasis). While the espoused goal of public/ cultural diplomacy programs—like the AFS—is to build up relationships, thereby facilitating international interactions/communication (i.e. 'earning' one's national reputation), such scholars argue that nation branding is not antithetical to this objective: it is simply another way to 'look after' a society's reputation as opposed to a 'quick fix' for changing a country's image, which in fact takes a very long time (Anholt & Hildreth 2010, Anholt 2008, van Ham 2001). Nevertheless, branding runs into a significant problem, one that was addressed earlier: "[the] higher you raise people's expectations with a brand, and the more you invest in making big public promises, the greater the disappointment when you fail to keep them" (Anholt & Hildreth 2010:78).

Overall, the U.S. currently faces what might be called an 'image problem'—particularly in terms of the gap between American society's ideals and the reality of its governmental actions/policies—as well as a credibility crisis following the country's activities in Iraq and Afghanistan (Amin 2009; Gass & Seiter 2009; Shen 2009; Katzenstein & Keohane 2007; Lynch 2007; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002). In order to remedy this situation, it is necessary to recognize the 'dark corners' which exist in both the U.S.' history and its present, as well as to thoroughly understand the specific contexts (social/cultural, political, etc.) of foreign audiences so that the meanings of cross-cultural images, messages, and programs may be understood, interpreted, or perceived—as much as possible—as originally intended (Lynch 2007, Brooks 2006, Kamalipour 1999). As previously observed, "it is hard to separate reality from perception ...It therefore makes perfect sense for governments to take the perceptual implications of their

policies very seriously indeed. The question "How is this going to look?" shows more than vanity – it shows an understanding of human nature" (Anholt & Hildreth 2010:61).

III. The U.S. as Perceived in Mexico

Since this study specifically examines how the AFS program is received by its foreign participants in Mexico, it is important to have a general understanding of how the U.S. is perceived by its southern neighbor, particularly with regard to this type of public/cultural diplomatic outreach. As outlined in the preceding sections, such images/perceptions of the U.S. will—to some extent—influence local receptions of the former's diplomatic/communicative endeavors, and hence the current (and future) state of the two nations' relationship with one another. The questions that must be addressed in such an investigation thus include the following: (1) how Mexicans—generally-speaking—and the AFS participants—in particular—tend to view the U.S.; (2) whether these images/perceptions are currently changing, and how they have changed or why they have not changed over time; (3) how such images and perceptions have previously affected relations with the U.S.; and finally, (4) how these images and perceptions—as well as any changes to them—might affect the future relationship between the two countries.

Corroborating this study's earlier discussion regarding perception and foreign relations, prior examinations have revealed that "there is no one, singular "Mexican" perception of anything (much less the U.S.). Instead a plurality of images or discourses on the U.S. coexist and compete to forge broader social meanings. The images are complex, multidimensional, and contextualized, shaped by and reflected within a variety of social and spatial settings" (Morris 2005:4). Moreover—as can be seen throughout Latin America—such images and perceptions are variable, not static, fluctuating based on current events, social discourses, historical incidents/

interventions, and individual propensities (McPherson 2007). While at this particular juncture the question of 'why'—or the reasons behind such images/perceptions—will not be addressed, that is only because it is being reserved for my interviews with AFS participants and ethnographic analysis of their specific experiences as part of the program.

It is notable that what is considered to be 'Mexican identity' has frequently been defined in opposition to that of the U.S.; in other words, based on traits which are seen as different from those associated with American society (de la Garza 2006, Morris 2005, Mraz 1996, Tuñón 1996, Wilt 1991). Despite this differentiation, political and social links between the two nations have grown since the 1980s—such as through the proliferation of NGOs—while governmental rhetoric/policy has increasingly emphasized greater collaboration and cooperation; nationalism has also been downplayed by the Mexican government in favor of development and economic integration with the U.S. However, the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. today is much different than it was in the past. During the Mexican Revolution, for instance, the American government's intervention—supporting Huerta, occupying Veracruz, etc.—inspired a great deal of nationalism in Mexico, and regimes following the Revolution were strongly anti-American (Morris 2005). The situation then changed during WWII—the 'era of good feelings'—with trade agreements occurring between the two countries, and changed again in conjunction with the Cold War as policies were implemented which created more 'distance' between them (Morris 2005).

Such ebbs and flows have been and continue to be a characteristic feature of the U.S.-Mexico relationship, particularly as a result of the asymmetries—vis-à-vis military power, economic development, and political independence—which exist between the two societies (Vásquez & García y Griego 1983). As a result, there is a particular question that must be posed: "if closer contact in the past did not...alter Mexican perceptions of the U.S., why should it do so

today?" (Morris 2005:24). My research on/analysis of the AFS was conducted in an effort to find a response to this question, since the answer could help improve communication/relations between American and Mexican societies—specifically by enhancing the former's understanding or appreciation of the latter's socio-historical and political context, as well as how these affect Mexico's relationship with the U.S.

Each country's government has and continues to play an important role with regard to the political, economic, and social endeavors of the other—including immigration policies, the war on drugs/weapons trafficking, etc. Thus analyzing how AFS participants in Mexico perceive the U.S.—following the latter's recurring historical interventions, territorial conquests, and humiliations of the former—could prove beneficial for improving communication, interactions, and overall understanding between these societies as well as potentially reducing anti-American sentiment—especially between future 'senders' and 'receivers' of the program itself (Morris 2005). For instance, the presence of American cinema—particularly Hollywood fare—in Mexico has repeatedly been blamed for encouraging idleness, alcoholism, and economic gain over moral attitudes, as well as other behaviors deemed 'unacceptable' for Mexicans (Tuñón 1996). It has also been accused of "promoting promiscuity, altering demand by encouraging the desire for luxury commodities, and threatening the national economic order" (Morris 2005:190).

This link between films, perceptions of others, and self-representation(s) is one which has been illustrated through studies of Mexican cinema, such as those examining the four dominant stereotypes of the U.S. and the American people that appear in such movies and against which the 'Mexican cultural identity' is constructed: these stereotypes are the 'tourist', 'blonde female tourist', 'exploitative', and 'racist' (Wilt 1991). The first—the basic foundation for the other three—is generally a male, inappropriately dressed cigar-smoker, who is unable to speak or

understand Spanish and exhibits disrespect/a sense of superiority towards Mexico: such characters "[tienen] la función de destacar el ingenio y la agilidad de los mexicanos" (Tuñón 1996:111); they are therefore mocked as sexually and/or linguistically incompetent, morally decadent/personally weak, cuckolded or henpecked, and crude/pushy (Morris 2005). In short, this stereotype "[demonstrates] that the United States' way of life, while materially rich, is morally decadent...[reinforcing] the self-esteem of Mexicans by contrasting their self-image with the Tourist" (Wilt 1991:225,226) and providing them with "an area in which they are superior to the United States, countering what they perceive as years of intervention and exploitation in which Mexico has generally been the loser" (Wilt 1991:226).

The second stereotype (which lacks a pre-film equivalent) is a dangerous, independent, (sexually) aggressive or 'loose' woman who is attracted to Mexican men because U.S. men are presented as being inferior (Morris 2005, Wilt 1991). Generally, this 'blonde female tourist' is rejected in favor of the 'ideal' Mexican woman—a stereotype itself, which changed from chaste/ passive to more independent and assertive in the late 20th century; nevertheless, blonde female tourists remained the amoral 'other' women who were contrasted with 'our' Mexican women. The third stereotype involves callous, miserly, and power-hungry characters who see Mexicans as being inferior; accordingly, they generally do not speak Spanish and exploit the latter ruthlessly. Moreover, they view "[themselves] and particularly the U.S., U.S. capitalism, and U.S. culture as the keys to Mexico's progress and development" (Morris 2005:198).

From the 1930s onward this American 'exploiter' has appeared increasingly in Mexican cinema, however it was also a pre-film theme in literature, especially with regard to the working conditions, treatment, and immigration policies affecting Mexican laborers in the U.S. The final stereotype—the 'racist'—is the most negative, appearing more in movies from the 1970s

onwards that are specifically set in the United States and which focus primarily on 'white vs. black' racism. Such characters are generally unstable/dangerous extremists, helping to portray Mexico as the opposite/as nonracist and enhancing its national self-image (Morris 2005, Wilt 1991). These last two stereotypes are more strongly affected by current/historical events—particularly political incidents—than either the male or female 'tourist'. For instance, while Mexicans may see bracero programs and the like as demonstrating the U.S.' need for laborers from Mexico, "working in the United States is also seen as degrading and dangerous, due to the exploitation and discrimination Mexicans face there" (Wilt 1991:325).

These images/perceptions of American society—and its citizens—were in fact developed to some extent *before* the onset of film in Mexico, such as how "attributes of the Tourist may be clearly discerned in literary and folkloric portrayals of U.S. characters prior to the 1930s" (Wilt 1991:170). In addition, both during and after the Mexican Revolution various Mexican authors and playwrights incorporated American characters as well as the U.S. government—particularly the latter's economic exploitation of Mexico—into their works due to the ongoing conflict between these two countries. Accordingly—as seen in this study's previous sections on perception, communication, and media representation—the Mexican public's impressions of the U.S. are based not only on Hollywood cinema and American cultural exports, but also on "other factors, including the historical record, the pre-film images of U.S. citizens, and personal interaction with tourists. Mexicans--like most film audiences--selectively perceive films and use them to reinforce their beliefs, in this case opinions about the United States" (Wilt 1991:194).

Thus the four stereotypes/variations on the concept of "the *gringo* [are] used in Mexican movies as a way to highlight, construct, and praise the values of Mexico and the Mexican" (Morris 2005:200, original emphasis); in other words, their morality, respect for tradition(s), and

loyalty/solidarity, all of which U.S. society is seen as having lost (Mraz 1996, Tuñón 1996). Such American characters therefore represent the antithesis of the idealized visions of Mexican men and women, as well as the dangers which the U.S. poses to the nation (Mraz 1996). This has contributed to an 'us vs. them' perception: "si ellos son individualistas, nosotros solidarios; si ellos fríos, nosotros cálidos y hasta volcánicos; si ellos están solos, nosotros tenemos una institución familiar amplia y sólida; si ellos son ricos, nosotros pobres y a mucha honra" (Tuñón 1996:128).

Consequently, these stereotypes "demonstrate the value of the national culture over the foreign culture" (Morris 2005:202), and reveal an image of U.S.-Mexico relations grounded in a perception of incompatibility between the two societies. Moreover, such stereotypes also provide a way for the government "to channel criticism and opposition: to redirect blame for societal ills" (Morris 2005:206) onto its northern neighbor, shaping a 'unified' national image set against that of the U.S.—or at least that which is projected onto the U.S. (Wilt 1991). American society is therefore employed as a convenient (and often actually blameworthy) scapegoat—a phenomenon that is found in other countries as well (Kunczik 1997)—one which can be "used to deflect criticism of the Mexican government, and to encourage nationalist sentiment" (Wilt 1991:356), by distracting the general public from internal problems with images of external danger.

Opinion polls/surveys and focus groups have previously been used in order to understand the Mexican public's attitudes towards and perceptions of the United States. These have shown that the positive traits associated with Mexico focus more on cultural or spiritual features, while the positive traits correlated with the U.S. are more political/economic—despite lingering doubts as well as some distrust/resentment regarding its historical and contemporary[22] treatment of

[22] Similarly, a 2013 AFS envoy to Laos noted the Lao government's distrust of Americans due to "[having] been bombed by the US—a "secret war" hidden by the CIA, and several presidents and cloaked by more obvious events during the Vietnam War"

Mexico (Morris 2005, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]). In addition, although the effects of direct contact on foreign opinion are highly contested, studies show *both* some maintenance of and a bit of reduction in stereotypical images as a result of such interactions (Morris 2005, Wilt 1991). This may mean that cultural and public diplomacy programs like the AFS have the potential to affect images of the U.S.—and, hence, cross-cultural communication/foreign relations—though it is also possible that they may end up reinforcing existing impressions. Yet on the whole, as noted earlier vis-à-vis perception, "Mexicans seem to have a more complex and complicated view of the U.S. and the nation than many might have expected" (Morris 2005:270).

IV. Consequences of the U.S.' Image: Anti-Americanism(s)

Perceptions and impressions of the U.S. abroad are variable and multifaceted, thus an analysis of the reception of the American government's cultural/public diplomacy efforts (like the AFS) must endeavor to assess these within their particular socio-historical contexts. Anti-Americanism—a negative view of/attitude towards the U.S.—is one such 'image' of or reaction towards U.S. society (e.g. its values and policies) which exemplifies this need for contextualization: it may involve historical experiences of imperialism, resentment of past and current U.S. interventions, economic and power disparities, among other experiences (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007, Keohane & Katzenstein 2007, McPherson 2007, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]).

Anti-Americanism is also a subject that has been fiercely debated among scholars, particularly with regard to how and why such sentiments have arisen, as well as what precisely should be considered 'anti-Americanism' or if such a thing even exists (O'Connor 2007, Orr

(Neudel 2013:18,19). Moreover, he himself observed "the danger Lao villagers still face every day by what the US bombers left behind decades ago" (Neudel 2013:19). Yet while the people he met were reluctant to discuss—or were somewhat curt with regard to—this war, "they said that they don't hate the US at all" (Neudel 2013:19).

2007). Some contend that the notion of anti-Americanism has been exaggerated—though they do *not* go so far as to make the claim that it does not matter at all—while others believe it to be an alarming and dangerous phenomenon, particularly with regard to issues of national security (Nye Jr. 2010, Chiozza 2009, Wyne 2009, Keohane & Katzenstein 2007, O'Connor 2007).

The latter group argues that anti-Americanism is both an individual and collective phenomenon—as has likewise been asserted with regard to perception—made up of normative, cognitive, and emotional aspects. The first means that the U.S. serves as an 'other' in contrast to which social identities can be formed, reinforced, regulated, and/or made increasingly appealing; the second comprises social narratives/symbols which are used to understand or interpret the world, potentially leading to systematic prejudice; and the third involves the intensity of such anti-American sentiments (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007). These various aspects are further seen as being dynamic and open to change: "[as] attitudes and beliefs change, people become more or less susceptible to specific acts or persuasion...the use of argument to influence the actions of others, without using bribes or threatening force" (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007:14).

Consequently, U.S. diplomatic programs and outreach endeavors—like the 'Shared Values' campaign—have been promoted by scholars and politicians who feel that current anti-Americanism needs to be mitigated as soon as possible. This is because they tend to believe that negative opinions "do not necessarily revert back to favorable or neutral views, or they only do so after negative attitudes have contributed to actions adverse to the United States" (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007:21), such as the events of 9/11. The fear underlying this belief is that despite anti-Americanism's complexity, ambivalence, and heterogeneity—i.e. it is expressed in different forms—it may have already become too entrenched (Lynch 2007). Accordingly, substantial anxiety exists regarding the idea that "these expressions reflect a pervasive and sometimes

institutionalized distrust, which creates skepticism toward statements by the United States government and a predisposition to view U.S. policy negatively" (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007:24).

However, as mentioned in previous sections—and as more 'optimistic' scholars who believe anti-Americanism has been exaggerated argue—"there is more than one aspect of the United States that frames popular opinion. As publics balance likes and dislikes about the United States, they end up tempering the anger, resentment, and displeasure they occasionally feel...with ideas about U.S. freedoms, prosperity, and popular culture" (Chiozza 2009:4). For instance, people in China are often split—both collectively and individually—with regard to perceptions of/attitudes towards the U.S.: while there are some who admire American society "for its level of development, openness, social individualism, opportunities for economic advancement, and the efficiency of its bureaucracies...many of the same people see it as hegemonistic, aggressive, and arrogant on the foreign policy side" (Johnston & Stockman 2007:164).

Pro- and anti-Americanism are therefore not simply about what the U.S. is or what it is seen as being: actions which the national government carries out (or has carried out in the past), how it accomplishes these activities, and with whom it does so are also highly influential aspects of American society's image abroad (Chiozza 2007, Keohane & Katzenstein 2007, Lynch 2007). Furthermore, this means that there are multiple forms of anti-Americanism which can exist (O'Connor 2007), since U.S. cultural "symbols refer simultaneously to a variety of values, which may appeal differentially to different people in different societies and, despite their contradiction, may appeal even to the same person at one time" (Keohane & Katzenstein 2007:4).

These different forms of anti-Americanism include the following: (1) liberal, which involves dislike of American hypocrisy; (2) social, or antipathy due to conflicting values such as

those regarding the death penalty; (3) sovereign-nationalist, or protectionism with regard to a shared national identity separate from that of U.S. society; and (4) radical, a—frequently more violent—perspective which views the U.S. government's power relations and actions abroad as "hostile to the furtherance of good values, practices, and institutions elsewhere in the world" (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007:33). Moreover, mixtures of these often appear, such as an 'elitist' form where groups—both historically and currently—feel superior to the U.S. (e.g. the French), or that of 'legacy' anti-Americanism where insults or injuries from the past stimulate people's resentment, as exemplified in Iran and Mexico (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007, McPherson 2007).

Problematically, some contend that soft power cannot effectively function at this micro level of individual attitudes, because the various dimensions/aspects that make up popular views of the U.S. are relatively compartmentalized from one another (Wesley 2007). In other words, "approval of U.S. culture, values, and institutions...is not sufficient on its own to facilitate U.S. efforts of public diplomacy" (Chiozza 2009:5). It is therefore important to identify the various facets of individuals' cognitive processing—within a specific socio-historical/cultural milieu—which give rise to negative perceptions/images of the U.S. That is to say, one can better understand foreign beliefs about American society—including its actions, policies, and ideals—by "[discovering] who says what of the United States and under what...conditions" (Chiozza 2009:9). Consequently, as has been asserted with regard to the anthropological analysis of power and politics, studying "micro-political processes can...both illuminate particular local situations which might otherwise remain somewhat obscure, and contribute to an understanding of how processes at the local level not only reflect larger political processes and national-level conflicts, but may contribute to them" (Gledhill 2000:128).

In addition, those scholars who contradict conventional ideas about anti-Americanism note that concerns regarding international opinion of the U.S. are not new, but are in fact part of a long historical pattern (O'Connor 2007). Even during crises, people's impressions are fairly nuanced, "[reflecting] diverse evaluations of the various aspects of the United States" (Chiozza 2009:31) rather than a single image. Moreover, surveys show that such impressions/attitudes do not reflect a fixed ideological positioning, as their variability and diversity clearly demonstrate that individuals make discrete evaluations of different aspects regarding the U.S. Accordingly, foreign societies' impressions of the American government's political actions and policies will only be marginally influenced by/indicative of their distinct views of the nation's sociocultural milieu (Amin 2009, Seib 2009, Lynch 2007, Wesley 2007). Nevertheless, increased knowledge of/greater information about the U.S.—such as that obtained through diplomacy efforts or the positive reports of contacts abroad—does appear to slightly *increase* people's pro-American sentiments worldwide (Chiozza 2009, Chiozza 2007), renewing hope for cultural/public diplomacy projects like the AFS.

One of the primary controversies regarding anti-Americanism is whether rationality or irrationality play a role; in other words, whether such sentiments are based on arguments as opposed to prejudices (Lynch 2007). The problem with distinguishing anti-American opinions along these lines is that one effectively demarcates 'proper' (i.e. rational) criticism of U.S. society from that which is supposedly not, thereby dismissing the latter even if it is in fact a valid judgment (Chiozza 2009, McPherson 2007, O'Connor 2007). Some scholars have therefore argued that this dichotomy hinders understandings of anti-Americanism, which should instead be seen as comprising the particular moods, feelings, or attitudes of both 'elites' and 'ordinary' individuals which are based on a combination of knowledge, predispositions, and cognitive

capacities; that is to say, forms of anti-Americanism are "more contingent, more circumstantial, and more context dependent than is acknowledged in the current discourse" (Chiozza 2009:46).

Furthermore, the specific issue at hand—be it political, economic, or cultural—will affect people's feelings towards and perceptions of the U.S., such as if the issue involves something which they like or dislike (e.g. a particular cultural product). As a result, it has been shown that foreign publics "are willing to entertain simultaneously positive and negative opinions of the United States on its multiple dimensions, while systematically negative classification of any referents associated with the United States is more of an exception" (Chiozza 2009:77) rather than a rule with regard to anti-American sentiments. Thus as some scholars have asserted, there is "no coherent body of anti-American thought, let alone a movement" (Orr 2007:164). In reality, there are a variety of stereotypes, myths, and assumptions—often based on misunderstandings—which are held internationally regarding U.S. society and Americans; what is considered 'anti-Americanism' is simply a 'knee-jerk' response or reaction to these, or to the nation's failure to comply with them (McPherson 2007, Orr 2007).

In general, the multidimensional nature of international opinion regarding the U.S. leads to contradictory outcomes, especially those concerning the national government's soft power and diplomatic endeavors (Wesley 2007). This is because on "the one hand, [international opinion's complexity] tempers the emergence of a syndrome of opposition...[but] on the other hand, it dampens the efficacy of soft power as a strategy of public diplomacy" (Chiozza 2009:200). In addition, as was previously mentioned, just because foreign publics are hostile to or receptive towards the U.S. does *not* mean that their governments will feel/act the same: the latter may consider public attitudes in crafting foreign policies and interacting with the U.S., but it is unlikely that they will leave such decisions up to the whims of the populace (Wesley 2007). It is

for these reasons that the reception/perception of—and potentially-ongoing responses to—such programs as the AFS need to be studied, particularly vis-à-vis U.S. international relations and communicative efforts abroad, since if foreign publics' "positive feelings could be built upon, then America's tenuous position in the world might be strengthened" (Seib 2009:viii) and its image somewhat improved.

CHAPTER 4

❖ Cinematic Representation & Reception

I. Theorizing the Audience: Subject, Viewer, & Spectator

Public/cultural diplomacy debates are closely related to theoretical and methodological conflicts over perception and communication, yet they are also entwined with those concerning both cinematic reception (as discussed in the following sections) and the audience (covered in the current section). This is because the diverse perceptions/interpretations of foreign publics are the basis for diplomacy projects like the AFS where, for instance, "the nature of the relationship between the viewer and the world presented on the screen" (Linton 1982:187) is crucial to facilitating cross-cultural communication and understanding. In other words, it is thought that for such endeavors to succeed there must be some type of audience identification, based either on (1) similarity/desire—empathizing with the characters'/protagonists' plight or aspiring to their lifestyle, for example—as such identification is believed to inspire affinity towards the U.S.; or (2) the desire to emulate American society (Linton 1982). Audience reception studies can thus reveal how the cultural products of such efforts—like films—are received and perceived abroad (Melissen 2005, Staiger 1992).

This dissertation specifically addresses two key debates in the field of audience reception: the first is if audiences should be seen as active 'viewers', passive 'subjects', or as 'spectators' who are influenced by producers' intentions yet who are still able to develop unique media-text interpretations (Staiger 2005, Hagen & Wasko 2000, Morley 1996, Mayne 1993, Hall 1980). The second involves whether such media analyses should use ethnographic techniques: supporters favor their ability to contextualize audience members' situated interpretations, as well as ethnography's recognition of the individual, who—as an audience member or media producer—

has their own unique expectations, outlook, and history/past experiences (Schrøder 2007, La Pastina 2005, Evans 2004, Clua 2003, Drotner 2000, Allor 1996, Moores 1993). Among the many critiques that have been made—which will be further discussed later on—skeptics have argued that ethnographic methods are limited by unacknowledged subjectivity and potential condescension/elitism on the part of the researcher; by unequal researcher-participant power relations; and by whether researchers can accurately interpret participants' responses, which may be doubtful in foreign contexts (Hobart 2010, Staiger 2005, Griffiths 1996, Tomlinson 1991).

With regard to defining the audience, contentions tend to arise based on how media texts are thought to be used during consumption and reception. Where some scholars see people as passively receiving/incorporating the disseminated content, others examine active engagement, resistance, or appropriation on the audience's part (La Pastina 2005). In particular, they look at "the lived experience of spectatorship...shaped by a community's entanglement in national and transnational contexts of media production and consumption" (Friedman 2006:604). A study in China of Shanlin audiences' reception of the film *Twin Bracelets* (1991), for instance, showed that the viewings functioned not only as entertainment but also as a way of redefining how the film portrayed audience members' current and past lives. Spectators' ongoing commentaries/ stories regarding the film's connections to their lives, for example, involved reflections on their personal experiences, beliefs, and desires, as well as a critical analysis of how they and their lives have been portrayed—as 'backward', as the exoticized Hui'an woman, etc.—by outsiders in the mass media (Friedman 2006).

While this case demonstrates active involvement by the audience, it nevertheless also illustrates a semblance of passivity, as "the gaps in [audience members'] commentary gesture toward a tension between an active mode of spectatorship and a more passive mode of film

consumption, underscoring the pleasure generated by a "that's me" response while moderating it with a rejection of the genre itself" (Friedman 2006:613). Thus the perceived realism of the film encouraged identification—especially with the female protagonists—and a certain amount of 'passive' acceptance, while its perceived authenticity simultaneously stimulated resistance to the film's messages (including the unrealistic stereotypes) through redefinition and 'talking back' to the screen.

What this illustrates is therefore "the contingent nature of identification and the fluidity of viewer sympathies over the course of watching the film" (Friedman 2006:612): despite their identification with some of the female characters, they nevertheless challenged the cinematic portrayal of their lives through accounts of their own histories. This indicates that audience members may shift between different 'modes' of spectatorship depending on how they interpret the media content with which they are engaging. In addition, this particular study implies a more collective element to spectatorship and cinematic response/reception, where film acts as "a medium through which viewers reflect on their own lives and relationships with salient others and define a place for themselves in a larger social universe" (Friedman 2006:606).

The significance of such societal relations in audience studies is partially the result of the role that lifestyle research has played with regard to understanding media reception (Rosengren 1996). Specifically, there are three types of 'life patterns' thought to affect people's reception: their 'form' of life, 'way' of life, and 'lifestyle'. The first refers to components of one's life which are governed by the overarching societal structure (e.g. agrarian, industrial); the second denotes life features which are determined not only by this societal structure but *also* by one's position within the structure (e.g. class); while the third indicates aspects of life which are not only affected by both the societal structure and one's position in it, but *in addition* are influenced

by an individual's personal, conscious choices such as their distinct tastes/interests (Rosengren 1996). Consequently, reception studies must conceptualize viewing experiences as "[composites] of several elements: the physical characteristics of the setting, the social characteristics of the activity, and the psychological or personality characteristics of the viewer" (Linton 1982:186).

Stuart Hall's (1980) semiotic theories regarding the encoding and decoding of televisual texts are related to this approach, and though contested, they have endured in the fields of media reception and audience analysis. Specifically, it is the three positions/forms of decoding that he proposes which retain some validity and usefulness today. These positions/forms are: 'dominant-hegemonic', which interprets meanings as intended by the dominant group; 'negotiated', which accepts/privileges the hegemonic definition "while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions'" (Hall 1980:137)—in other words to the situation/experience of the viewer; and 'oppositional', which is when someone understands the intended/encoded message but interprets it/decodes it using a completely different reference framework.

Encoding is thus the process through which a set of messages is incorporated into a media text by its producers, and decoding is the process through which these messages are interpreted by the audience members (Hobart 2010). Yet the two are not necessarily in agreement with one another, as "receivers of mediated verbal and visual messages often get something completely different out of a message than what the sender intended to communicate" (Schrøder 2007:78). Thus while media recipients have some autonomy in their interpretations due to the polysemy of media texts, there nevertheless "exists a pattern of 'preferred readings'" (Hall 1980:134) that is encoded within such texts and which constrains possible audience decodings (Michelle 2007, Ambler 2004, Hagen & Wasko 2000, Livingstone 1998b, Morley 1996, Morley & Robins 1995, Livingstone 1993).

There are two main criticisms which have been leveled against Hall's work. The first is that it is reductionist and unrealistic to distinctively separate audience members' readings into only three categories (Michelle 2007, Mayne 1993)—that is, dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional—since what is constructed by the text "is only the spectator position, which the real spectator is not, however *obliged* to occupy" (Hietala 1996:182, original emphasis). Moreover, it is highly questionable "whether the recipient can *ever* actually assume a coherent subject position and produce the overall preferred reading for the simple reason that socio-cultural context in practice always differs from that of the textual position itself" (Hietala 1996:182, original emphasis). The second criticism is that "despite appeals to "polysemy," texts are usually treated as unified, reproducing without contradiction hegemonic ideology" (Staiger 1992:73).

Despite these critiques, such ideas have helped shape the increasingly prevalent view of reception as an activity which is both "historical and theoretical. It asks, *How* does a text mean? For whom? In what circumstances? With what changing values over time?" (Staiger 2005:2, original emphasis). This contextually-oriented perspective—emphasizing the relations or connections which exist among media texts and their users/readers, both historically and currently[23]—further suggests that whatever meanings or understandings are derived from such media texts (e.g. from cinematic images), these will be influenced by users'/readers' prior experiences with the real world—including learned cultural, perceptual, and filmic/technical codes or frames—and these interpretations will in turn influence their subsequent attitudes/ opinions and behaviors (Staiger 2005, Mody & Lee 2002, Livingstone 1998a, Anderson 1996, Nichols 1991).

[23] See Schrøder 2007, Hagen & Wasko 2000, Livingstone 1998b, Allor 1996, Press 1996, Livingstone 1993, Staiger 1992, and Morley & Silverstone 1991.

Consequently, most readings or decodings must be seen as contextual 'negotiations' (in the vein of Hall's definition), which makes it somewhat difficult to thoroughly understand viewing events without looking at both sides—production *and* reception—of the process as a whole (Michelle 2007, Schrøder 2007, Staiger 2005, Evans 2004, Hagen & Wasko 2000, Livingstone 1993, Mayne 1993). Such a comprehensive analysis is necessary due to the fact that cinematic ""comprehension" involves using frames (or codes or conventions) to make inferences about textual meanings, while "interpretation" involves using frames to make inferences about extratextual meanings, with one possible extratext that of an inferred "author" and his or her "constructive intention"" (Staiger 1992:20).

Overall, scholars must avoid romanticizing audience members' ability to resist, since their interpretations and/or appropriations of media texts will still be limited by their circumstances as well as the possible 'readings' offered by the texts themselves (Friedman 2006, La Pastina 2005, Staiger 2005, Anderson 1996, Morley 1996, Morley & Robins 1995, Mayne 1993, Staiger 1992, Hall 1980). One cannot approach media texts as being 'all-powerful' in their assignment of positions to spectators, nor spectators as being completely agentic (Schrøder 2007, Morley 2006, Hagen & Wasko 2000, Livingstone 1998a). The positions offered by such texts are in fact those perceived—or possibly generated—by the 'readers' themselves, and "[the] challenge, then, is to understand the complicated ways in which meanings are both assigned and created" (Mayne 1993:81).

Film audiences' receptions, interpretations, and perceptions/understandings are therefore diverse (Moores 1993): they should be seen as "forms of situated practice infused with specific understandings" (Friedman 2006:625) of the local, national, and global environments, shifting between the spectators' own lived experiences and the representations that they receive. An

ethnographic approach can reveal this movement, thereby enabling a more comprehensive "understanding of how people imagine themselves, construct others, and struggle against their own objectification" (Friedman 2006:625). This is because an ethnographic framework—unlike many other forms of qualitative research—specifically focuses "on situated, contextualized practice...[engaging] with the complexity of the relations between agents and cultural mediation. It necessarily encounters the embeddedness of practices of "reception" within other social relations, other mediations" (Allor 1996:215).

In addition to this important emphasis on the particular context(s) of reception and the connections between the latter's various social/individual aspects, an ethnographic methodology facilitates 'triangulation'—the use of multiple methods, data sources, and theories (Morley & Silverstone 1991). Such a technique helps researchers to minimize potential risks, like that of obtaining data which is dependent on a specific method; though their knowledge may still remain somewhat partial, it will nevertheless be more complete and accurate than it might otherwise have been (Morley & Silverstone 1991). Thus the "multi-stranded character of ethnography, produced by different techniques (observation, interviews, self-report, etc.), which can then be systematically compared, is a further advantage of the ethnographic approach" (Morley & Silverstone 1991:157) Consequently, using an ethnographic framework in studying film reception/audiences allows scholars to "consider how [cinematic] consumption sheds light on new relationships between subject and object, between who is represented and who has the power to represent" (Friedman 2006:625).

Furthermore—as has been previously touched on in this study—media "spectatorship is informed by deep and far-reaching structures that are simultaneously social and psychic, and which can only be understood by equally deep and far-reaching systematic analysis" (Mayne

1993:28). Accordingly, audience members should not be labeled simply as 'subjects'—which implies external domination or control, and is often an idealized concept—nor should they be considered solely as 'viewers'—that is to say, real people seen as being outside of theoretical categories. Rather, they should be regarded as 'spectators', a term which comprises "precisely those spaces where "subjects" and "viewers" rub against each other" (Mayne 1993:37). In other words, a spectatorship framework understands audiences as both subject *and* viewer, and it "involves an engagement with modes of seeing and telling, hearing and listening, not only in terms of how films are structured, but in terms of how audiences imagine themselves" (Mayne 1993:32), both individually and as a result of their social conditions.

This reconceptualization of audiences is important, since in a variety of fields—including communications, economics, and political theory—that which is presumed as constituting the audience "may bear little relation to actual audiences" (Livingstone 1998a:196) whose cultural contexts and 'decodings'/interpretations of the messages, media, and/or communications they receive are neither uniform nor static (Michelle 2007, Ambler 2004, Clua 2003, Livingstone 1998b, Morley & Robins 1995, Livingstone 1993). What is considered to be the 'audience' must therefore be understood in terms of its heterogeneity as well as the diverse motivations and/or predispositions of the individuals who constitute it (Livingstone 1998a, Allor 1996, Anderson 1996). For that reason, audience members and their receptions should be analyzed in terms of both 'normative' aspects—which is to say, societally-based commonalities/consensus—and more 'unique' elements—such as personal dissimilarities (Livingstone 1998b).

Consequently, reception/audience studies must avoid focusing either entirely on the 'macro' (social) or completely on the 'micro' (individual), as this inevitably limits the value of such research by undervaluing one level or the other (Hagen & Wasko 2000, Press 1996).

Rather, what is needed is a multi-level approach which accounts for the relations *between* micro and macro levels (Griffiths 1996, Morley 1996). For instance, "while the details of everyday life ...may turn out to be individually diverse and, arguably, interesting in their own right, if there is some systematic patterning by which they may be interrelated one may suppose a link back to the macro" (Livingstone 1998a:204). The point of doing this is to understand the relational nature of audiences (Mody & Lee 2002, Allor 1996); that is, "to avoid the reductionist tendency to limit the concept of audience to the (social)psychological or micro-level of analysis" (Livingstone 1998a:204).

Thus following a current trend in reception research, this study examines "the range of interpretations and the responses they [provoke]...[as well as] possible conditions for the production of those interpretations" (Staiger 1992:8) and reactions, attempting to contextualize the latter socio-historically, culturally, and politically in a way that "[considers] contexts in relation to their dynamism and complexity" (Clua 2003:62,63) rather than as static and geographically-bound. Moreover, as an ethnographic analysis of both the AFS' 'production' in the U.S. and its reception in Mexico, this dissertation not only strives to illustrate the benefits of such an approach—e.g. of contextualizing receptions and their audiences—but also to respond to related arguments about incorporating practice theory into media anthropology[24].

Akin to the debate over the use of ethnographic methods in media studies, advocates see 'practice' as a way of looking at the specificity of media-related experiences, or how actors perceive their actions in particular contexts (Couldry 2010, Hagen & Wasko 2000). Detractors, on the other hand, argue that such practices are both difficult to recognize and define; that interpretations may not correspond with participants' understandings; and that the approach

[24] Please refer to Chapter 7 for a more in-depth analysis of these concepts.

entails unproblematized or exaggerated depictions of audience agency (Hobart 2010, Mayne 1993, Tomlinson 1991).

The reason why I adhere to a more practice-based ethnographic approach, despite the potential drawbacks, is that reception and audience studies—as mentioned earlier—"need both close up/micro perspectives and long-sighted/macro ones, for different purposes, and at different moments...[Neither] perspective reveals the whole truth" (Morley 2006:15), but together they can offer a more comprehensive picture (Hagen & Wasko 2000, Griffiths 1996, Morley 1996). In other words, combining the micro and the macro enables a relational, multilevel approach, one which contextualizes media-people relations and recognizes audience members as *both* 'passive' and 'active' (Clua 2003, Livingstone 1998b, Press 1996); it also links these ideas to an "analysis of institutional and political power, media economics and broad cultural process" (Livingstone 1998a:205).

II. Nonfiction, Documentary, & Fiction

Studies examining the reception of fiction vs. nonfiction and/or documentary films indicate that this process is dependent on people's varying involvement—similar to engagement with regard to perception/communication—as well as the interaction between "a multi-faceted and carefully designed media offer and...the recipient's motivations, abilities, desires, etc., which need to be analyzed both separately and concurrently" (Suckfüll & Scharkow 2009:361). Many scholars therefore contend that it is through repeated contact with different types of films that audience members develop and modify/adapt their particular reception 'modes' (Suckfüll & Scharkow 2009). With regard to fictional films, for instance, these modes include that of the 'ego-emotional' (comparing onscreen issues with those in one's own life); 'socio-emotional' (comparisons occur with media characters); 'diegetic' (a sense of being *in* the fictional world

presented); and a more analytical or distanced mode involving "reflection on the *production* circumstances" (Suckfüll & Scharkow 2009:368, original emphasis).

These particular modes of fiction-film reception are offshoots or subcategories of four more-general modes of audience reception (Michelle 2007): referential (where the text is seen as being similar to life), transparent (where the text *is* or is seen *as* life), discursive (where the text is seen as a message), and mediated (where the text is seen as a production). Receptions will not necessarily be defined by one of these various modes; instead they are likely to reflect one or two more strongly that the others, allowing people to 'commute' between the different modes just as their involvement/engagement with a text may vary. Thus in analyzing reception, this concept is better understood as "a continuum ranging from *close* (and largely subjective and textually bound) modes of reception to the more *distant* and supposedly "objective" modes of response favored by critics and media educators" (Michelle 2007:195, original emphasis).

The transparent mode of reception would therefore be 'close', in that media texts are perceived as 'real life' and interpreted according to their particular internal logics; this mode is closest to Hall's 'dominant' position. The referential mode is less 'close', since it allows comparisons to the external world—that is, to audience members' specific cultural milieus—permitting spectators to question/contest the 'reality' offered by a text based on their personal history, societal norms, political events, and the like (Michelle 2007). Due to the fact that the mediated mode involves recognition of the constructed nature of media texts—in terms of aesthetics/technical aspects, producers' intentions, and/or genre conventions—it is a more 'distant' mode, as it may potentially disrupt spectators' identification or engagement, thereby undermining a text's ideological effectiveness. The discursive mode is somewhat more complex than the other three, since it may entail dominant, negotiated, *and* oppositional reception

positions depending on whether a text's message is (1) accepted; (2) partially accepted yet partially rejected; or (3) completely rejected/opposed and possibly critiqued. As a result, such position-taking depends on spectators' analyses of the received message, but it may also be influenced by their social, political, cultural, and/or economic positions, including prior beliefs and predispositions (Michelle 2007, La Pastina 2005).

Each mode reflects a unique form of involvement, and spectators will frequently switch between them depending on which one appears to be the most suitable for processing and interpreting a particular variety of media content: if the selected reception mode does not fit the cinematic 'stimulus' or 'input' that they are receiving, then audience members will change their mode of reception accordingly (Suckfüll & Scharkow 2009, Michelle 2007). It is important to note that these various modes "are *states* within the reception process. As such, they are unobservable and need to be inferred from the characteristics of (a) the media content, (b) the recipient, and (c) the reception situation" (Suckfüll & Scharkow 2009:370, original emphasis). Consequently, studies of audiences/media reception should carefully "delineate the relationship between modes of reception and viewers' social positions" (Michelle 2007:216), which is precisely what this dissertation attempts to do regarding the AFS. Moreover, doing so may enable researchers "to ascertain whether particular social groups...are predisposed to adopt particular modes of reception in relation to a given cultural text—even as [they] acknowledge the complex and multi-faceted positions of individual audience members" (Michelle 2007:216).

What distinguishes the reception of fiction films from that of nonfiction and/or documentary films is how they are perceived, particularly the associations of authenticity, accuracy, and reality which are made with regard to the latter (Cowie 2011, Spence & Navarro 2011, LaMarre & Landreville 2009, Pouliot & Cowen 2007, Plantinga 1997, Eitzen 1995, Renov

1993b, Trinh 1993, Nichols 1991). For instance, "[predicated] around the factual event, the documentary is often accompanied by notions of truth and credibility" (Koba 2010:8). Some scholars even contend that documentary/nonfiction and fiction are further differentiated by "their different representational structures of visual and verbal information and their different formal features" (Pouliot & Cowen 2007:242), such as pacing; camera shots; reliance on evidence, testimony, or commentary; lighting; and other traits (Nichols 1991).

However, the 'line' distinguishing cinematic modes is subtle and can be blurred (Slater 1990). Indeed, it is frequently more of a mental construct rather than an actual marker of any tangible differences between the films themselves, such as how certain visual codes tend to be identified with the documentary even though they can be used in fiction films as well (Koba 2010, Renov 1993a). For example, the former—documentaries—are *perceived* as "deploying the "real" image...[generating] impressions of authenticity and believability through the iconography of the real" (Koba 2010:20). They present not simply 'a' world—one which is made-up or an imitation of the real—but rather 'the' world itself, or at least a particular view of that world (Plantinga 1997, Trinh 1993, Nichols 1991). On the other hand, the latter—fiction films—are *perceived* as "creating and projecting, not just an imagined world, but an illusion of that world" (Koba 2010:28).

Thus documentary/nonfiction films tend to be separated from fictional ones—not intrinsically, but by audiences themselves—due to their distinctive foci, where the former's emphasis is on linking represented events with the real external world and the latter's is on engaging audience members through the suspension of disbelief (Cowie 2011, Spence & Navarro 2011, Pouliot & Cowen 2007, Renov 1993a, Trinh 1993). Ultimately, it is the labels which people—including distributors, directors, exhibitors, *and* spectators—assign to different

cinematic categories—based on such elements as filmic techniques (e.g. the particular visual cues) and the individuals' own expectations—that guide their perceptions, and hence their receptions (Koba 2010, LaMarre & Landreville 2009, Eitzen 1995, Nichols 1991). It is the combination of how cinematic texts are 'indexed' on the production side and 'read' on the reception side which determines how those texts are interpreted overall (Hagen & Wasko 2000, Plantinga 1997, Hietala 1996).

One way of understanding and/or explaining how audience members derive/construct meaning from media narratives is through the examination of their 'mental models'—in other words, cognitive structures representing features of the external world. These include models related to the following elements: (1) chronology; (2) situational or spatial aspects; (3) events/ actions (e.g. the 'story world'); and (4) stereotypes/schemas involving general patterns applied either to the real world or to a particular genre, including characters' behaviors, traits, or goals (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008, Hietala 1996).

With regard to their engagement, audiences' construction of meaning from media narratives is thought to be an activity which requires complete involvement/focus: people are transported or absorbed into the process of creating and applying mental models to the media text at hand, since "[experiencing] a narrative requires that the readers switch to the time and location of the narrative and the subjective world of the characters from whose point of view the story is told" (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008:262). Consequently, there is a sense of experiencing whatever is occurring in the story directly and of identifying with/adopting the position of the main character.

Specifically concerning the term 'documentary', there has been considerable debate among film theorists, documentarians, and spectators regarding its definition (Page 2009,

Plantinga 1997). For instance, "the distinction between "fact" and "fiction" is a vital and important one to popular movie audiences...It is certainly crucial in the reception of discourses that are commonly regarded to be forms of nonfiction, including documentary" (Eitzen 1995:81). One of the problems with this, however, is that even if a cinematic representation is supposed to be a reflection of reality, it actually comprises specifically chosen/organized sounds and images of whatever 'reality' it is presenting (Cowie 2011, Spence & Navarro 2011, Renov 1993b, Nichols 1991).

As a result, such a representation is "an artificial construct, a highly contrived and selective view of the world, produced for some purpose and therefore unavoidably reflecting a given subjectivity or point of view" (Eitzen 1995:82). This is due to the fact that—as was previously noted regarding perception—people's interpretations/images of the world (and hence their representations of the world) will invariably be influenced by personal interests, knowledge, desires, and socially-derived predispositions (Spence & Navarro 2011, Nichols 1991). Thus in terms of documentary, "because [recorded reality] is extracted from ongoing reality, it thereby distorts by becoming exemplary, standing in for but also excluding—as unrecorded—other views and other people" (Cowie 2011:21).

Accordingly, it is problematic to define the documentary based on the intentions of the 'authors'—as these may be variously interpreted by audiences—or to do so based on textual and technical features—since fiction films may involve such 'documentary'-related aspects as historical reality and shaky cameras, while documentaries (just like fiction films) may employ melodrama to engage spectators or to present a narrativized 'world' for audiences' consideration (Spence & Navarro 2011, LaMarre & Landreville 2009, Page 2009, Eitzen 1995, Renov 1993a). One idea which has therefore been presented by some scholars as a defining/essential difference

between documentary and fiction is that the former is perceived as making *assertions* or *claims* —which are supposedly truthful/factual—about what it is presenting (Cowie 2011, Plantinga 1997, Nichols 1991).

This distinction with regard to asserting/claiming/arguing a particular point is thought to be "partly a matter of conventions (e.g., whether the text looks like a documentary is supposed to look) and partly a matter of the discursive content (e.g., how the distributor labels and describes the program)" (Eitzen 1995:86). Moreover, in terms of discursive content, such argumentation specifically involves two components: (1) 'perspective', or the filmmaker's implied view of the world; and (2) 'commentary', or the filmmaker's explicitly-stated view of the world (Nichols 1991). Taking this idea even further, a few researchers contend that nonfiction films actually have several functions related to the argumentation concept, including analyzing/interrogating; recording, revealing, or preserving; expressing; and persuading/promoting (Plantinga 1997, Renov 1993b). Others suggest that documentaries not only make claims/arguments as they "describe and interpret the world of collective experience...[but] even more, [they] [join]...in the actual *construction* of social reality" (Nichols 1991:10, original emphasis).

However, not all are in agreement regarding such assertions, and the problems with this suggested differentiation between documentary/nonfiction and fiction are as follows: (1) as discussed earlier, textual conventions or cinematic techniques are transposable between the fiction and the nonfiction/documentary genres (Renov 1993a); (2) "for every piece of incontrovertible evidence, more than one argument can be fashioned" (Nichols 1991:117), thereby making documentary more akin to fiction; and (3) audiences do not always interpret documentary/nonfiction films as making arguments—in fact, it is often "the purported absence

of an authoritative perspective that gives credibility to nonfictional representations" (Spence & Navarro 2011:67)—or they may even be indifferent to the claims which are being made.

In general, there is simply the implicit idea or presumption that documentaries—as well as nonfiction films—entail a rational/thorough inquiry and that they tell the truth; people then make sense of these cinematic texts in various, idiosyncratic ways (Michelle 2007, Cowie 2011, Renov 1993a). In particular, spectators' confidence or doubt regarding the messages they receive —and thus how they interpret them—are based on an underlying question which unites their perceptions and receptions as audience members of documentary/nonfiction cinema: whether or not the film in question might be lying (Plantinga 1997, Eitzen 1995, Slater 1990).

Accordingly, when movies are perceived "to lie (or, for that matter, to "tell the truth"), that perception is with few exceptions a product of the metatextual label or interpretive framework that [people] apply to the text, not a product of the form of the text per se" (Eitzen 1995:91, original emphasis). Documentary is therefore a way of 'reading' cinematic texts which produces a different type of audience response than when such texts are 'read' as fiction, as has been demonstrated in studies where audience members are informed that apparently nonfiction texts are in fact fictive and their responses change dramatically, despite there being no variation in the films' content, style, or other features (Eitzen 1995). In other words—akin to the multiple arguments which documentaries can make—the same material, "evidence, or facts, can often be placed quite convincingly within more than one system of meaning, or given more than one interpretation" (Nichols 1991:152), thereby engendering a variety of significances and/or audience receptions (Moores 1993).

As this dissertation specifically examines cinematic reception and perception in Mexico, it is important to briefly note that cross-generic ventures in Mexican—and, more generally, Latin

American—films, is fairly common; moreover, "recourse to documentary modes of filmmaking, or the incursion of "documentary" techniques into fiction, has accompanied both the rise and the demise of socialism in Latin America" (Page 2009:5). In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, many revolutionary filmmakers employed documentary techniques—in particular an emphasis on didacticism—as a means of raising awareness/consciousness among their audiences. Likewise, the synergistic mixing of fiction and nonfiction/documentary 'conventions' has been used by various contemporary filmmakers in Latin America in order "to parody the formulaic narratives of Hollywood/industrial cinema, or to insert their work in the margins between genres, as a form of oppositional cultural politics" (Page 2009:9).

III. Truth, Objectivity, & Realism

Perceptions of reality, truth, and objectivity can influence how audiences engage with media narratives—including their acceptance or rejection of specific beliefs promoted by such narratives (Hobart 2005). In terms of documentary films, for example, "[the] "believability" of the documentary world—its verisimilitude—is produced when it is recognizably familiar, thus it is in some sense the same as the world [people] already know" (Cowie 2011:96). The assumption is that with nonfiction/documentary, spectators can see events for themselves through a purportedly 'objective' lens—though as described above, the camera's gaze is entirely subjective—identifying and engaging with the 'world' which is presented to them as they would with their everyday realities (Cowie 2011, Spence & Navarro 2011, Renov 1993b, Trinh 1993, Nichols 1991).

However this does *not* necessarily mean that a film, television program, etc. needs to be 'true' for it to be accepted and/or identified with, as fictional ones can also be very engaging (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008, Renov 1993a). For instance, some prior studies have shown that

"memory for visual and verbal information and the intensity of emotional reactions [are] greater overall for fiction films" (Pouliot & Cowen 2007:241), while films perceived as factual/realistic involve less emotional reactivity—although the latter may, like fiction, facilitate strong information recall as well. People's engagement can therefore impact the effects of audiovisual messages—including reactions to narratives or what is learned from them—since it is influenced "by the expectations and schemas [audience members] have developed during past viewing experiences" (Pouliot & Cowen 2007:241).

Interestingly, previous research has arrived at contradictory results regarding realism's role vis-à-vis media effects: some scholars have found that messages perceived as unrealistic have less influence on spectators' emotional, behavioral, and/or cognitive responses as well as their information retention, while others have found the opposite, or even the absence of any difference based on perceived realism or the lack thereof (LaMarre & Landreville 2009, Pouliot & Cowen 2007).[25] In order to explain such conflicting or anomalous results, it has been posited that characteristics and expectations which audience members associate with particular genres or themes—such as romance, life/death, etc.—may influence or guide their processing of media content, retention of information, and individual responses to the received messages (Pouliot & Cowen 2007).

In perceiving a narrative as 'truth' or as realistic/factual, it is primarily "the iconic resemblance with the physical world...that allows [people] to recognize and relate to the situations represented" (Spence & Navarro 2011:15). In other words, though a film, television show, or other media representation may be acknowledged as incomplete—given that it can only include a limited amount of information/images—the credibility of their claims to truth is

[25] Problematically, a few of these studies—particularly on cinematic effects—informed participants as to the type of film that would be screened, thereby hindering the researchers' ability to accurately determine or account for the resulting impacts (Pouliot & Cowen 2007).

strongly grounded in such narratives' similarity or closeness to the real world (Spence & Navarro 2011). However, there is a bit more to such perceptions that just the expectation of resemblance: for example, spectators tend to presume that nonfiction/documentary functions as a socio-historical record (Renov 1993b, Nichols 1991). In other words, they believe it serves as something which is "indexically bound to the subject represented" (Spence & Navarro 2011:15) in time and space.

This concept of realism is similar to that of truth since it too depends to a certain extent on being perceived as such by audiences. Yet it is also a 'mode of representation'[26] where the producers of a media narrative can employ certain stylistic/structural techniques—such as rhetoric, handheld cameras, overlapping sounds, the story's order, etc.—to *create* the appearance of reality—which is to say, the impression of "a direct correlation between the text and the sociohistorical world" (Spence & Navarro 2011:19)—and to present a persuasive message, whether or not the product they are making is a documentary/nonfiction (Renov 1993a, Renov 1993b, Trinh 1993, Nichols 1991). In a similar vein, it is frequently the case with nonfiction/ documentary that "[truth] has to be made vivid, interesting; it has to be "dramatized" if it is to convince the audience of the evidence" (Trinh 1993:96) being displayed. Consequently, realism can be used for fiction *and* nonfiction: in the former, it may be employed "to make a plausible world seem real; in documentary, realism serves to make an argument about the historical world persuasive" (Nichols 1991:165).

For either of these genres, realism can be (1) historical—in other words, more grounded in historical reality/the historical world); (2) empirical—where the images and sounds index

[26] With regard to documentaries, there are four specific types of representational modes: observational, expository, reflexive, and interactive. The first gives an impression of real time or of being 'on the scene', and it "conveys the sense of unmediated and unfettered access to the world" (Nichols 1991:43); the second involves directly addressing the spectators, emphasizing objectivity in order to advance a claim about the world; the third is a metacommentary about the process of representation, problematizing the constructed 'reality' of documentaries; and the fourth entails direct involvement in the documentary world by the filmmakers themselves (Nichols 1991).

something real; or (3) psychological—"[conveying] the sense of a plausible, believable, and accurate representation of human perception and emotion" (Nichols 1991:171). It is important to note that the 'markers' of realism—including specific film techniques—have changed over time, and are no longer the same as they were even just seventy years ago; moreover, inferences made by the audience can be significant with regard to realism—e.g. the sources' credibility, (in)authenticity of the media product, what tacit perspective is being advocated—particularly if there is minimal evidence supporting a narrative's claims or arguments (Spence & Navarro 2011, Plantinga 1997, Renov 1993b).

Objectivity is likewise complexly entwined with these notions of truth and realism. In terms of documentaries, the concept of objectivity implies a sense of detachment or indifference —specifically a lack of partiality or bias—yet it is *also* employed as "a representation and an argument...[Objectivity] as code, ethic, and ritual stands at some remove from "the truth"" (Nichols 1991:194) and from 'reality' because it is in fact a constructed representation of the world by the filmmakers (Page 2009, Trinh 1993). With respect to nonfiction/documentary, objectivity must therefore be understood as the following: (1) "a third-person view rather than a first-person one" (Nichols 1991:197); (2) being "free of personal bias, self-interest, or self-seeking representations" (Nichols 1991:197); (3) allowing audiences "to make their own determination about the validity of an argument" (Nichols 1991:197) and assert their own positions; while (4) *simultaneously* seeking to convince/persuade them. Objectivity is thus a problematic and elusive goal, since the impression that it gives spectators "of disinterestedness is [both] a powerful reassurance and a seductive ploy" (Nichols 1991:198) at the same time. Nevertheless, since "every representation is relative to a perspective, [scholars] still may embrace a *relative* objectivity" (Plantinga 1997:212, original emphasis), if not an absolute one.

In addition, there exist a variety of reasons why a narrative may be perceived as fiction (i.e. untrue), such as that it is fabricated; contradicts reality; or appears illogical, inconsistent, and implausible (Pouliot & Cowen 2007). Out of the latter two explanations, the first is considered to be 'online' since it is important for understanding the narrative itself *during* reception—namely in selecting a mental model—while the second is considered 'reflective' as it involves a *retrospective* evaluation of the narrative's realness and coherence (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008). However, perceptions of 'fictionality' are not necessarily part of *processing* the narrative while it is occurring, since this may interfere with the viewing experience (e.g. enjoyment, escapism): rather, fictionality may be tacitly acknowledged—like any other element of the story, such as characters or events—helping to shape whatever cognitive model is used to understand the narrative (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008).

Consequently, a perception of realism or fictionality "can be thought of as a judgment of the consistency between the mental models representing a narrative...and a viewer's appropriate, counterpart real-life and media experiences as reflected in schemas and stereotypes" (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008:267). Judgments of realism may also be made with regard to the constraints of the story itself; in other words, whether the actions, events, or characters make sense as part of what has previously been presented in the narrative or the world of the story, and thus with the situational or stereotype models which audience members have already constructed (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008). Accordingly, realism, truth, and objectivity do *not* guarantee audience members' unconditional acceptance. More accurately, "the realist film spectator often rejects representations with which [he or she] does not sympathize. This implies that spectators can be highly active (even oppositional) when viewing realist films" (Plantinga 1997:217).

Of particular relevance to this study's examination of the AFS and the reception of its films/classes is the fact that the more critical of an evaluation spectators engage in, the less engaged they will be with the media text's narrative; moreover, their personal "moods and traits should...[increase] or [decrease] the occurrence of critical evaluations" (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008:274). As a result, understanding foreign audiences' engagement—or lack thereof—will permit a more in-depth understanding of how the AFS' narratives regarding the U.S. are perceived and received abroad, as well as how participants' subsequent perceptions/beliefs and behaviors reflect their ongoing responses to the program.

Moreover, since the majority of the films screened by the AFS are documentaries, and as these tend to "cover key public policy and socio-political issues...reexamining the influence of documentary...from a socio-political lens provides a new understanding of the role documentaries play as an alternative outlet for political information" (LaMarre & Landreville 2009:538). Nevertheless, one cannot assume that upon viewing the AFS films—particularly 'call-to-action' documentaries—"the public will turn their newly acquired knowledge into action. Awareness does not necessarily lead to social change" (Spence & Navarro 2011:105), such as the improvement of cross-cultural relations between the U.S. and foreign societies.

Interestingly, some studies have shown that *negative* affect—negative emotions/feelings (e.g. disgust, guilt)—is elicited to a greater extent with documentaries, and that by attracting higher levels of attention, negative affect can lead to "stronger behavioral and action tendencies (e.g., learning about issues) than positive affect" (LaMarre & Landreville 2009:540). This has the potential to present difficulties for cross-cultural diplomatic endeavors like the AFS, where the emphasis is on creating *positive* feelings towards the U.S. by swaying foreign publics' opinions as well as shifting their perceptions—and, hence, their behaviors—to be more favorable

vis-à-vis American society (especially with regard to the national government's policies and activities abroad). It is therefore necessary to address overseas participants' expectations concerning the AFS *in conjunction with* their reactions to it, as the former are influential—either positively or negatively—with respect to the latter (i.e. people's perceptions and receptions of the program).

CHAPTER 5

In order to provide a thorough socio-historical and cultural contextualization for my dissertation's analysis of the AFS, this chapter—as well as the next one (Chapter 6)—focuses on the following topics: (1) the current social, political, and economic situation in Mexico; (2) the nature of U.S.-Mexico diplomatic relations—both historical and contemporary; (3) the early development and present-day state of the Mexican film industry; and (4) how this socio-historical/cultural context has influenced both Mexican filmmaking and U.S.-Mexico relations—particularly in terms of cinema.

❖ The Current / Ongoing State of Affairs in Mexico

In 2009 the Mexican economy took a substantial hit due to the international economic crisis, and although it has been recovering the economy remains an important subject for Mexican voters (Azul 2012). Running on a platform of economic growth and security, current President Peña Nieto was able to overcome his party's—the PRI or Partido Revolucionario Institucional[27]—past reputation for corruption, winning the 2012 election. In fact, a record turnout of 63% of eligible voters chose Peña Nieto, and while the opposing parties claimed that there were campaign violations—such as vote-buying and receiving extra media exposure—the results of the election still stood (Azul 2012, Padgett 2012).

President Peña Nieto is on friendly terms with the U.S. government, and has indicated that he would like to both maintain and strengthen economic ties with Mexico's northern neighbor (Felsenthal & Spetalnick 2012). Under his presidency the Mexican oil industry has been accepting foreign investment for the first time since 1960, and in order to increase bilateral

[27] Previously socialist, the PRI is now a centrist party; it is one of Mexico's three major parties which also include the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD).

economic ties between Mexico's government and Asia, President Peña Nieto visited Singapore and Indonesia in October 2013 as a participating member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Bali (Garekar 2013, Padgett 2012). Mexico is also part of the previously-formed Pacific Alliance—along with co-founders Chile, Peru, and Columbia—a pro-free-trade group that launched in 2012 and which is likewise seeking stronger economic ties with Asia (Garekar 2013).

Having assumed power during a fairly troubled time, President Peña Nieto's biggest challenge has been—and will likely continue to be—fighting the drug cartels which exert substantial control within a number of Mexican states. With their own private armies—and earning billions each year through drug trafficking—these cartels are powerful, ruthlessly eliminating any challengers (including judges, police officers, clergy members, politicians, and more). Felipe Calderón—Peña Nieto's predecessor—declared an all-out war on the cartels during his tenure as President, leading to a great deal of disorder and many deaths: to what extent current President Peña Nieto will pursue the cartels has been a topic of speculation, though he has asserted that it is a problem which he intends to tackle (Althaus 2013c).

In places like Michoacán, bishops have been speaking out against drug gangs like the Caballeros Templarios (the 'Knights Templar'), as well as against state and federal officials thought to be corrupt. The responses to such outcries have been varied, ranging from the murder of vocal clergy members—as well as that of a mayor who went on a hunger strike in order to obtain aid vis-à-vis the cartels and gangs—to the deployment of federal troops/police in late 2013 at the Lázaro Cárdenas port in an attempt to reduce meth shipments from Michoacán, as well as to reduce extortion and smuggling (Althaus 2013b, Althaus 2013c). Despite such bleak occurrences, violence has been abating recently in areas like Juárez: for example, an American-

style football club (the Jaguares) has been helping youths to extricate themselves from the gangs and to focus on other activities—like sports—rather than the 'temptations' of a criminal lifestyle (Althaus 2013a).

I. Gangs in Mexico (& Beyond): Street-Level Ethnography

Given that this dissertation's focus on the AFS' reception highlights the perceptions of Nacidos para Triunfar (ex-)gang members in particular, it is necessary to address the relevant literature and current status of street gangs in Mexico, as well as in the broader context of Central America and the United States. The intent here is not to add to or expand on this work per se, but to give a better understanding of the socio-historical/cultural context in which my study was conducted, especially in terms of its on-the-ground (or 'street-level') ethnographic approach to reception by members of Nacidos para Triunfar—my project's framework is thus strongly qualitative, a feature which has been advocated by many gang researchers (Covey 2010)[28].

With regard to the U.S., street gangs "[emerged] on the East Coast around 1783...The best available evidence suggests that the more serious street gangs likely did not emerge until" (Howell & Moore 2010:1) later on in the 19th century, however. Anthropologists and sociologists "of the Chicago School conducted some of the first studies on gangs in the 1920s. These researchers...advocated and regularly practiced urban community studies that involved fieldwork observation and intensive interviewing" (Vigil 2003:228). Such qualitative anthropological research became a nationwide phenomenon by the late 20th century, and in recent years scholars have advocated approaching the subject of gangs from a multidimensional view: in other words,

[28] Supporting both the methodological and theoretical approaches of this dissertation, a previous examination of youth gang members or 'pandilleros' was conducted in a similar manner, using a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and participation in community workshops (Avilés & Berthier 2009). Further resembling my own interdisciplinary research framework, a prior gang-related study set in Monterrey took up a "posicionamiento en el campo académico y político: [su] mirada teórica y metodológica está construida a través de varias fronteras disciplinares; [mira] desde la Psicosociología, la Antropología y lo que podríamos denominar como la perspectiva socio/cultural" (Domínguez 2008:1) as part of its examination of youth membership in transnational gangs.

by using a 'multiple marginality' or 'integrated systems' framework, wherein one "[examines] many factors, such as neighborhood effects, poverty, culture conflict and sociocultural marginalization" (Vigil 2003:230), just as my own study endeavors to do by contextualizing the AFS' creation, implementation, and reception. Doing so allows one to "[address] the questions of what, where, how, why, and with whom, and...[to] show dynamic exchanges and interrelationships" (Vigil 2003:231) between these factors, thereby revealing the linkages which exist as well as "[accounting] for the reciprocal actions and reactions" (Vigil 2003:232) that occur among them.

Historically in the U.S., these street gangs "[emerged] primarily in low-income ethnic minority neighborhoods" (Vigil 2002:6), due in large part—especially in cities like Los Angeles—to "[social] neglect, ostracism, economic marginalization, and cultural repression" (Vigil 2002:6). The combination of such cultural, social, economic, and political factors resulted in a sense of powerlessness, to which the street-level response/solution was the development of gangs; their formation was further increased as a result of several waves of immigration, and has therefore frequently been studied with respect to marginalized urban migrants (Covey 2010, Avilés & Berthier 2009, Domínguez 2008, Cruz 2007b).

Both macro- and microstructural factors—including social scarcity[29] and economic or 'ecological' aspects—are thus important causes underlying the creation/spread of gangs and must be studied carefully, just as the multiple marginality and integrated systems frameworks assert (Anzit Guerrero 2013, Villareal 2012, Cruz 2007c). In terms of the areas where Mexican-American gangs have arisen in L.A., for example, "[these] barrios are unlike the classic barrio ...in that their residents settled in already built-up areas, but the areas nonetheless are spatially

[29] This concept of 'social scarcity' includes the idea that "gangs thrive...where the direct contact with national or local authorities uniformly has been with law-enforcement agencies and security forces...In these places, the social arm of the State is weak, social services and aid agencies for the needy are equally neglected" (Cruz 2007c:106).

distanced from whites, rundown in appearance, and subject to the usual marginalization experiences that generate street gangs" (Vigil 2002:35). Likewise in Central America, gangs appear to "offer a broad range of resources and support in an environment that is normally characterized by exclusion, abandonment and insecure living conditions" (Cruz 2007c:68).

Such structural factors have led to regional differences in gang evolution throughout the U.S.: in the Northeast and Midwest, for instance, "[gang] emergence...was fueled by immigration and poverty" (Howell & Moore 2010:1), whereas in the West "gangs grew out of the preexisting Mexican culture...and their growth was fueled by subsequent Mexican migrations" (Howell & Moore 2010:1) to places like L.A. With regard to Latino and Chicano—i.e. Mexican-American—gangs in such Western urban areas, it has been suggested that their forerunners were the '*palomilla*', small and "aggressive groups of young Mexican men...that were attached to barrios in Mexico" (Howell & Moore 2010:20, original emphasis) and became linked to neighborhoods in the American cities where they eventually found themselves (Covey 2010)[30].

Many of these nascent Mexican gang members viewed (and some today still view) the regions which were ceded to the U.S. as part of the 1848 Treaty of Hidalgo—specifically Nevada, Arizona, Texas, California, and New Mexico—as having been stolen from their families, making them feel marginalized and "alienated in their own homeland" (Howell & Moore 2010:9) despite having been naturalized due to the annexation of these territories. Consequently, such gangs provided—and continue to provide—"a sense of belonging and a sense of identity, although this may be eroding in some barrios in favor of earning quick money" (Covey 2010:60) via criminal activities like selling drugs.

[30] Scholars have noted that the "intense bonding to barrios and gangs is unique to Los Angeles and other Western cities" (Howell & Moore 2010:10); moreover, in some cases it is thought that this solidarity "significó una total indiferencia y hasta el desprecio por el resto de la sociedad" (Anzit Guerrero 2013:2).

Overall, the earliest gangs were not criminal groups: it was in the late 1800s that violence and criminality became prevalent, such as due to territorial disputes. In New York, for instance, "post-World War II urban renewal, slum clearances, and ethnic migration pitted gangs...against each other in battles to dominate the changing neighborhoods" (Howell & Moore 2010:4). Two particularly notorious gangs—the *Barrio/Calle 18* (the 18th Street gang or M-18) and the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13)[31]—have spread out from L.A.[32] to the rest of the U.S., and "there are reports suggesting that these gangs are engaged in criminal enterprises normally associated with better organized and more sophisticated crime syndicates[33]...MS-13 and M-18 gang members may be involved in smuggling operations" (Franco 2010:1), drug sales, and extortions as well.

While many scholars see these two gangs as being quite dangerous vis-à-vis public safety and national security due to their violent activities and 'transnational' tendencies—they have, for example, established bases in Mexico and Central America—others contend that they are not as influential, strong, or dangerous in the U.S. as they are in Central America[34], nor even close to the violent, large-scale threat which they have been made out to be in either region[35] (Garzón

[31] Most scholars assert that the name derives from the following: "*Mara* is slang for gang, and *trucha* means trout in Spanish or is slang for a shrewd person" (Covey 2010:140, original emphasis). However, some believe that the "palabra "mara" deriva de las hormigas marabuntas en alusión a la forma en que éstas se expanden, invadiendo y devorando todo lo que encuentran a su paso" (Anzit Guerrero 2013:1,2); that *salva* stands for El Salvador; and that *trucha* is in reference to the Salvadoran word for being attentive. Nevertheless, on all sides of this debate the origin of '13' in the name is much more uncertain (Palma & Rico 2011). The M-18 group "adoptaron el nombre de Calle 18 debido a la ubicación en donde vivían; a la Calle 18 también se le conoce como Mara-18" (Palma & Rico 2011:112).

[32] MS-13 is thought to have originated in the 1980s in L.A. as Salvadorans immigrated to escape the civil war, while M-18 was formed in the 1960s in L.A. by Mexican and Salvadoran migrants who were not allowed to join the city's existing Latino gangs (Anzit Guerrero 2013, Santamaría 2013, Palma & Rico 2011, Covey 2010, Dudley 2010, Franco 2010, Domínguez 2008).

[33] In fact, these two gangs have aligned themselves with just such an organization, 'La Eme' (EME) or the Mexican Mafia (Howell & Moore 2010), which at one time gave orders to "all gangs operating south of Bakersfield, California, and into northern [*sic*] Mexico" (Manwaring 2010:112).

[34] As proof of the danger/threat they present, one study asserts that "[la] red criminal de las maras se extiende en más de doce estados dentro de los Estados Unidos" (Anzit Guerrero 2013:7)—another quotes the total as being thirty-seven U.S. states (Palma & Rico 2011). Researchers arguing against this danger/threat point to gang tattoos, clothes, etc. as demonstrating that "el carácter transnacional de las maras…se limita actualmente al ámbito de los cultural y simbólico" (Balmaceda 2011:103).

Vergara 2013, López 2012, Balmaceda 2011, Palma & Rico 2011, Bunker & Sullivan 2010, Howell & Moore 2010, Rodgers & Muggah 2009, Cruz 2007a, Cruz 2007b). Moreover, some have asserted that with regard to such gangs and *maras* in general, "the belief that they play a significant role in drug trafficking is exaggerated" (Dudley 2010:82).

There are several factors which have contributed to the gangs' supposed transnational influence: to begin with, deportation policies like those adopted by California in 1994 (Garzón Vergara 2013, Santamaría 2013)—whereby substantial numbers of gang members were deported from the U.S.—have enabled the establishment of "MS-13 and M-18 gang cliques in [deportees'] home countries...effectively [transporting] U.S.-styled gang culture to parts of Central America and Mexico" (Franco 2010:1,2). It has been suggested by some scholars that subsequently, these "deported gang members banded together for social and economic advantage, as a way to compete with existing Central American and Mexican gangs" (Franco 2010:7). In addition to such 'repatriation', it has also been posited that these gangs were influenced by "the culture of violence that preceded their emergence, including one in which guns were prevalent and ex-combatants from the long-standing civil wars were active in criminal networks" (Dudley 2010:82).

Furthermore, those who have been deported frequently re-enter the U.S.—illicitly—via its border with Mexico, thereby creating a sequence of transnational movement which has been called the 'boomerang effect' by some scholars and officials (Anzit Guerrero 2013, Santamaría 2013, Covey 2010, Seelke 2010)[36]. Lastly, one of the features necessary to facilitate such

[35] Interestingly, "research suggests that Latin American gangs have historically been less violent than their North American counterparts but may be in the process of becoming more violent and more similar to Hispanic gangs in the United States" (Covey 2010:57).

[36] Despite the relative importance of migration vis-à-vis transnational criminal networks in Central America and Mexico, there has in fact been "una relativa reducción en la migración mexicana y centroamericana hacia Estados Unidos desde el 2005… mientras que el número de migrantes mexicanos no autorizados en Estados Unidos disminuyó de 7 millones en 2007 a 6.5

transnational diffusion "es la corrupción al interior de las instituciones del Estado…Los procesos de expansión requieren de una compleja organización de la cual hacen parte funcionarios de las aduanas y de migración, policías, miembros del sistema judicial y también autoridades electas" (Garzón Vergara 2013:17,18).

The general features by which such gangs are identified include that they "are criminally active and operational in more than one country...involved in criminal activities committed by gang members in one country that may be planned, directed, and controlled by gang leaders in another country...tend to be mobile and adapt to new areas...[and] the criminal activities of such gangs tend to be sophisticated and transcend national borders" (Franco 2010:2). Specifically, these types of gangs are called 'third-generation gangs', which fit within a classification scheme of three categories (Palma & Rico 2011). Unlike the third-generation gangs, first-generation ones "are turf-oriented and localized...engage in unsophisticated criminal activities, and tend to have loose leadership structure" (Franco 2010:4); while second-generation gangs "are characterized as having an organized structure similar to a business...gang activities tend to be drug-centered" (Franco 2010:4), taking place over larger areas than those of the first generation gangs.

Third-generation/transnational gangs thus operate at a more 'global' level as somewhat mercenary- or terrorist-like groups; in other words, as complex and threatening networks (Bunker & Sullivan 2010, Cruz 2007a)[37]. This is the result of evolving communication and

millones en 2010" (Santamaría 2013:62). Consequently, some scholars have concluded that possibly even as early as 2003, "la importancia de los flujos migratorios [disminuyó] considerablemente" (Balmaceda 2011:102).

[37] However, some researchers have countered that such gangs are not really very complex, that they "operate as networks...with varying degrees of organization and hierarchical structure but nothing close to organized crime syndicates" (Covey 2010:28). In fact, they argue that street gangs are more often "the contractors hired to carry out crimes" (Covey 2010:29) by these much larger highly-complex/structured criminal groups, often functioning as a 'smoke screen' for the latter and for their illicit activities (Anzit Guerrero 2013, Palma & Rico 2011). For instance, they may act as the "local security apparatus of the smaller cartels, or as modest street vendors connected to large players on an informal basis" (Rodgers & Muggah 2009:308).

information technologies (e.g. cell phones, the internet); globalization[38]; as well as patterns of migration/travel worldwide; all of which have led to a situation where "gangs formerly confined to local neighborhoods...[are spreading] their reach across neighborhoods, cities, and countries. In some cases, this reach is increasingly cross-border and transnational" (Bunker & Sullivan 2010:36), as seen with the third-generation gangs. However, most street gangs are *not* operating at this level (Palma & Rico 2011): rather, "they typically lack the hierarchical leadership structure, capital, and manpower required to run a sophisticated criminal enterprise" (Seelke 2010:23) and they are "more horizontally organized, with lots of small cliques with their own leadership and no centralized, overarching leadership setting strategy and enforcing discipline" (Franco 2010:6). Studies of such gangs, particularly in Central America, "generally define *pandillas* as localized groups that have been present in the region, and *maras* as a more recent phenomenon that has transnational roots" (Seelke 2010:23, original emphasis). Gangs known as *pandillas* are thus more a form of "localized institutional responses to the circumstances of insecurity, exclusion, and uncertainty...The *maras*, on the other hand, are groups that can be directly linked to specific migratory patterns" (Rodgers & Muggah 2009:305, original emphasis).

One can only conclude that the "phenomena [*sic*] of gangs is complex, multifaceted, and constantly evolving" (Franco 2010:14). Instead of being a static occurrence, the development of gangs is "an ongoing process of evolution and transformation" (Cruz 2007b:21), involving multiple factors/causes "which have been woven together over time by political and social policies, cultural and historical conditions, and collective and individual decisions" (Cruz 2007b:60). On the whole, today's gangs tend to be more structured, violent, and wide-ranging, leading U.S. federal agencies to increasingly collaborate with the Mexican government—as well

[38] There are gang scholars who contend that "[due] to globalization, gaps are increasing between the world's rich and poor because of activities such as outsourcing of jobs" (Covey 2010:15), and that consequently, "street gangs are a product of both global and local factors" (Covey 2010:15) not one or the other.

as with the administrations of countries throughout Central America—in order to create a more regional and comprehensive system for reducing the gang problem (Santamaría 2013, Palma & Rico 2011, Seelke 2010, Rodgers & Muggah 2009). In doing so, they are trying to "[move] toward a bilateral approach to addressing the problem" (Franco 2010:14), possibly even a multilateral one [39].

Specifically, the U.S. federal government is attempting to "pursue coordinated anti-gang activities through five broad areas: diplomacy, repatriation, law enforcement, capacity enhancement, and prevention" (Seelke 2010:20). For instance, the MS-13 Task Force—created in 2004 by the FBI—was designed to enhance American and Central American intelligence-gathering and information-sharing. Similarly, the Merida Initiative is a bilateral endeavor—carried out by the U.S. and Mexico—to account for "amenazas...para la seguridad nacional a través de las fronteras. Esta cooperativa de seguridad pretende frenar la corrupción, reformar los sistemas judiciales y dar asistencia técnica" (Palma & Rico 2011:117,118). This undertaking also works to enhance social/community programs which help at-risk youth, as well as to better social, economic, and political conditions contributing to the gang problem.

With regard to the nations of Central America, there appears to be a unique vulnerability "to violent crime fueled by drug trafficking and corruption because they are geographically located between the world's largest drug producing and drug consuming countries" (Seelke 2010:22). However akin to the U.S. gang situation described above, the problem seems to be perpetuated by the combination of multiple interconnected social factors (Villareal 2012, Dudley 2010). These include rapid population growth, health/nutrition issues, governmental instability, "poverty, social exclusion, and a lack of educational and job opportunities for at-risk youth"

[39] Unfortunately, many of the national governments involved "continúan teniendo enormes dificultades para construir espacios de cooperación bilateral y multilateral que vayan más allá de las declaraciones formales" (Garzón Vergara 2013:2).

(Seelke 2010:24). Gang life thus may offer an attractive alternative to urban youth who face this type of social marginalization, dearth of prospects, and a disadvantaged future, potentially providing them with some measure of security, both financially—through informal and/or underground economies—and personally (López 2012, Ramos 2012, Villareal 2012, Covey 2010, Cruz 2007b).

In fact, due to the lack of employment opportunities, such "informal underground economies have become formal economies in many countries and communities" (Covey 2010:6), combining both legitimate and illegitimate activities (e.g. selling drugs). Other factors which have been cited as contributing to the gang problem—such as by worsening socioeconomic conditions and thereby increasing poverty levels/crime rates—include industrialization, modernization, and urbanization (Anzit Guerrero 2013, Santamaría 2013, López 2012, Ramos 2012, Avilés & Berthier 2009). However, some scholars argue that "more urbanized and industrialized countries have more extensive and better record-keeping systems that capture gang data and consequently feed the illusion that there is more street gang activity" (Covey 2010:13).

Increasingly aggressive governmental tactics to prevent or resolve the gang problem in these countries "no han tenido el impacto deseado" (Villareal 2012:41): they have generally failed and/or had negative results[40], while the anti-gang programs that have seen greater success resulted from "community-driven efforts to respond to particular problems which [were] then supported by capacity-building programs for leaders from those communities" (Seelke 2010:30). Homies Unidos is one such example from El Salvador—it is similar to the gang-prevention NGO examined in this study (Nacidos para Triunfar)—a program which "was comprised of ex-gang

[40] Some scholars contend that "[esto] se debe a que están construidos desde la concepción adulta hacia los jóvenes, y no incorporan un enfoque orientado hacia ellos para explicar un problema que impacta mayoritariamente a este segmento poblacional" (Villareal 2012:41). Others have suggested that the problem is how "combatir a las maras con la represión policial y sin medidas sociales…empeora la situación" (Anzit Guerrero 2013:5) rather than fixing it.

members and nongovernmental organizations...[offering] a variety of services and prosocial activities for at-risk youth" (Covey 2010:142). Due to the successes of these types of programs—though their achievements are still fairly small—many policy-makers contend that "a holistic approach to the problem must be developed [which] addresses its root social, political, and economic causes. There is disagreement, however, over the proper level and combination of preventive and suppressive policies that should be used" (Seelke 2010:35).

Consequently, a subtle shift has been occurring away from what is described as 'first-' to 'second-generation' gang-related policies: "first-generation initiatives such as *Mano Dura* can be characterized as *security- or enforcement-first*...[combining] aggressive, militarized crackdown operations with increased penalties to deter gang membership" (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers 2009:385, original emphasis). Unfortunately, such policies have tended to propagate "un círculo vicioso: problema-represión-más problemas-más represión" (Avilés & Berthier 2009:70), thereby aggravating the gang problem and the public stigmatization of gangs while also "preventing [gang members'] reform and ultimately meaningful reintegration into society" (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers 2009:385, original emphasis), all of which contributes to the lack of success described above (Ramos 2012, Villareal 2012, Domínguez 2008)[41].

In contrast, the second-generation types of policies—towards which many programs and policies are now leaning—are known as "*Mano Amiga* (friendly hand) and *Mano Extendida* (extended hand) interventions. In theory, these...focus not just on symptoms, but also on risks of gang violence" (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers 2009:385, original emphasis). For example, activities that they include "[range] from voluntary weapons collection, temporary firearms-

[41] In particular, these crackdown policies have led to a transition wherein the *maras*—like MS-13 and M-18—have become "más cercana a un modelo de bandas criminales o delincuenciales" (Santamaría 2013:67), engaging in such activities as extortion and arms dealing, as well as allying with larger criminal organizations for whom they may traffic things like drugs or weapons: these alliances thus function in a manner akin to how smaller, more localized *pandillas* are used by big cartels (Garzón Vergara 2013, Palma & Rico 2011).

carrying restrictions and alcohol prohibitions, to environmental design in slums and targeted education and public health initiatives focusing on 'at-risk youth'" (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers 2009:385), all of which are based on an understanding of the local context and underlying causes motivating gang membership (López 2012, Villareal 2012).

However, these second-generation initiatives encounter their own problems, such as that there is little evidence of their impacts and few indications that they are realizing any kind of significant change beyond the rhetorical; thus "there is some concern that second-generation interventions tend to be all smoke and no fire" (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers 2009:391). Even more problematically, there is concern that second-generation initiatives which attempt to partner with the public may be developed in such a way that those who are already "marginalized may be excluded, and partnerships themselves may fall under the sway of more powerful local groups and political associations" (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers 2009:387). This therefore presents a possible issue for locally-created programs like Nacidos para Triunfar, as well as for transnationally-oriented initiatives like the AFS[42].

In Mexico[43], the various categories of gangs frequently operate in conjunction with the cartels[44], especially the third-generation form of gangs which often exhibit "many of the organizational and operational attributes found with net-based triads, cartels, and terrorist entities" (Bunker & Sullivan 2010:37). Studies of Mexican street gangs—of all three types—

[42] If such outreach programs "no se aproximan de manera adecuada y no se adaptan a las comunidades y/o pandilleros, su probabilidad de éxito es limitada" (Villareal 2012:42).

[43] The gang situation "en México no es homogéneo. Existe una gran diversidad de estas agrupaciones respecto de su ubicación geográfica…[Las] de la frontera norte tienen una fuerte influencia estadounidense; las del centro están conformadas por *chavos banda* o jóvenes "esquineros"…mientras que las pandillas de la frontera sur tienen una gran influencia de sus pares centroamericanas o *maras*" (López 2012:103, original emphasis). Specifically in Monterrey, the present study's research location, scholars have argued that the development and increase in gangs—especially youth gangs—is a "respuesta a la crisis económica, de la que los jóvenes son parte estructural y protagónica" (Avilés & Berthier 2009:78); in particular, they see it as a response to the ongoing ramifications of the 1980s economic crisis.

[44] There are four large cartels in Mexico: the Tijuana, Sinaloa, Gulf, and Juárez cartels (Manwaring 2010).

have shown that they "[are] often aligned with drug and human trafficking cartels. There [appears] to be a link between Mexican street gangs and organized criminal activities as the cartels [hire] gangs to carry out criminal acts" (Covey 2010:135), including acting as the cartels' "temporary hired guns, and drug and contraband runners" (Manwaring 2010:112). Nevertheless, the transnational *maras* themselves—which were previously discussed—"are positioned to negotiate the establishment of their own trafficking corridors through Mexico, and are strong enough to compete effectively with Mexican gangs...[They] are also positioned to organize friendly and unfriendly takeovers of small cartels" (Manwaring 2010:112, original emphasis) throughout Mexico.

With regard to the *maras*' rise along Mexico's southern border—especially in Chiapas—there have been two primary factors supporting these groups: "primero, el cruce de *mareros* centroamericanos por el territorio nacional y, como consecuencia, la creación de células mexicanas de *maras* en diversos estados del país. En segundo lugar, el retorno y la deportación de mexicanos de Estados Unidos, que…formaron parte de dichas pandillas [MS-13 and M-18] y que reproducen en sus lugares de origen lo que aprendieron de éstas" (Ramos 2012:180, original emphasis); this second factor was previously described in relation to the general spread of third-generation transnational gangs. Several other aspects specific to Mexico have further assisted the increase and spread of the *maras* throughout the country: its "frontera altamente porosa, con una presencia importante de actores vinculados al crimen organizado, y condiciones de pobreza y exclusión social entre la población juvenil que reproducen el marco estructural donde nacieron las maras en el norte de Centroamérica" (Balmaceda 2011:115).

Consequently, this convoluted assortment of cartels, gangs, and *maras* in Mexico—as well as the Mexican Mafia—has created "an almost anarchical situation throughout the country.

As each gang and cartel violently competes and juxtaposes itself to maximize market share and freedom of movement and action...an operational environment characterized by the blurring of crime and war" (Manwaring 2010:112) has arisen, allowing for the creation of criminal 'free enclaves' or 'para-states' throughout Mexico. This has resulted in the assassination of many government officials—and other anti-gang advocates—as well as "intimidation, direct threats, kidnapping, and the use of relatively minor violence on a person and/or his family...*prior* to elections" (Manwaring 2010:114, original emphasis). The gang phenomenon in Mexico therefore seems quite powerful, while the state itself appears to be somewhat weak and ineffective; at least insofar as some of the gangs have been transformed into 'de facto' governments. In consequence, "positive political sovereignty, democracy, socioeconomic development, territory, infra-structure, stability, and security are slowly being eroded" (Manwaring 2010:115).

With regard to stopping drug trafficking by Mexican gangs—and the cartels—the U.S. and Mexican administrations have engaged in an 'on-again, off-again' relationship with respect to such prevention. Though they "made important strides — joint border control efforts through "Operation Cooperation" in October 1969...and the 1978 U.S.-Mexican Extradition Treaty — bi-national cooperation also saw significant setbacks in the 1980s and 1990s, with U.S. frustration over...revelations of high-level corruption in Mexico" (Astorga & Shirk 2010:46). However, Mexico has experienced similar irritation "as a result of U.S. unilateralism (e.g., Operation Casablanca) and significant violations of Mexican sovereignty (e.g., the abduction of Dr. Álvarez Machain) that hindered greater cooperation" (Astorga & Shirk 2010:46). Pressures related to the Iraq War following 9/11—such as for Mexican support—also led to tensions between the two nations, as did controversial American security measures which were implemented at the border. However, there has been more counter-gang collaboration/cooperation of late in relation to "the

extradition of criminals, exchange of information, police and legal training, and the sharing of equipment and technology, thanks in large part to high-level diplomacy" (Astorga & Shirk 2010:46)[45].

II. The Potential & the Drawbacks of NGOs

Scholarship regarding NGOs involves a great deal of controversy, thus this section of my dissertation is not intended to take up a position within these debates, nor is it designed to expand on prior work per se. Rather—as with the preceding section which contextualized relevant gangs—since a substantial part of my focus is on the AFS' reception vis-à-vis Nacidos para Triunfar's (ex-)gang members, it is necessary to address the relevant literature and current status of NGO studies in order to situate my own work within this broader context. Moreover, anthropologists have made comparatively few scholarly contributions to the field of NGO research[46], particularly with respect to "how complex sets of relationships among various kinds of associations, the agencies and agents of the state, and individuals and communities have had an impact in specific locales at specific times" (Fisher 1997b:442), which is what this dissertation attempts to address. Some scholars have even asserted that in terms of such 'third sector' research—as opposed to studies of the government or business sectors[47]—and especially with regard to NGOs,

[45] Some scholars have also advised that in order to resolve gang issues in Mexico, what is needed is "un proceso permanente de interacción entre la comunidad y los operadores de políticas sociales" (Villareal 2012:42) instead of programs which are fairly temporary—like the AFS might potentially be considered.

[46] Specifically, "the profile of anthropologists and anthropological approaches in current third sector research is relatively low" (Lewis 1999:1), even though anthropological work—on development, policy issues, etc.—has the potential to be extremely relevant to such research, as does its existing ethnographic data. Most contributions have come from sociological studies, economists, and political scientists; however "[anthropological] studies that have remained alert to specific contexts have made more significant contributions to rethinking the nature of NGO relations" (Fisher 1997b:449), and contextualization is a key feature of this dissertation. In addition, anthropologists now appear to be taking more of "an interest in the ways in which NGOs play a role in mediating relationships between global processes and local lives" (Lewis 2001:2), but there is still very "little work which examines what actually goes on inside these organizations" (Lewis 2001:172)—something which this study has attempted to remedy to a certain extent through its examination of Nacidos para Triunfar.

[47] A few scholars argue that NGOs do not in fact constitute a 'third sector', rather the "real third sector, located somewhere *between* the public and the private sectors in institutional space, belongs...to people's associations and membership organizations. These differ from institutions in the public and private sectors in that they undertake voluntary collective action and self-help.

anthropology can help provide "detailed micro-accounts...[widening] the scope of third sector research (by throwing light on the diversity of organizational life and challenging Western bias and ethnocentricity) and...[deepening] the analysis of third sector research through its distinctive use of an actor-centered, process-based analysis" (Lewis 1999:1), as is the methodological and theoretical approach of the present study.

Consequently, through its examination of the NGO Nacidos para Triunfar in Monterrey, Mexico, my dissertation endeavors to reveal—to a certain extent—how "policy gets translated into practice. This...often [involves] looking at situations that involve the work of third sector organizations" (Lewis 1999:10), such as how the AFS is implemented and received by the members of Nacidos para Triunfar. In doing so, this study may also potentially enhance "understandings of translocal flows of ideas, knowledge, funding, and people; shed light on changing relationships among citizenry, associations, and the state; and encourage a reconsideration of connections between the personal and the political" (Fisher 1997b:439)[48].

As has been observed with diverse types of NGOs, Nacidos para Triunfar has forged extensive and complex linkages with government agencies—like the DOS—as well as with networks/groups attached to specific transnational issues (such as the AFS and its interest in gang violence). Accordingly, in analyzing its members' receptions/perceptions of a diplomatic program like the AFS, this dissertation acknowledges that despite their 'third sector' label NGOs are *not* necessarily separate from politics/the state (Fisher 1997b)[49]. Furthermore, while "[the]

Such a distinction assigns NGOs to the private sector rather than to the middle sector" (Uphoff 1996:23, original emphasis). Others have also claimed that NGOs actually form a 'subsector' of an evolving/changing third sector (Lewis 2001).

[48] As some scholars have argued, "doing research that builds theory and knowledge not from abstract principles but from the 'ground' up may be a more fruitful way forward than the attempt to take such principles to the 'ground' and merely apply them" (Pearce 2000:35).

[49] Development studies often create a dichotomy between 'civil society' and 'the state', despite the fact that doing so is simplistic and "ignores the nature of power within society" (Stewart 1997:17) as it actually is. In fact, this dichotomization is a fairly recent development, as civil society used to be "discussed only in relation to the nation state. However, it is now commonly argued that

word ‘power’ is startlingly absent from most discussions of NGOs” (Stewart 1997:15), such an omission is not made in the present study, which examines the power relations involved within and around Nacidos para Triunfar as well as the AFS.

NGOs emerged in the late 1700s through the early 1900s, and began focusing on ‘empowerment’ starting in the early 1990s: “[this] history begins with the rise of national level issue-based organizations in the eighteenth century, focused on the abolition of the slave trade and peace movements” (Lewis 2001:40). Over the course of this time period, NGOs have played a variety of different roles: (1) the “*implementer*...defined as the mobilization of resources to provide goods and services” (Lewis 2001:68, original emphasis); (2) “the *catalyst*...defined as an NGO’s ability to inspire, facilitate or contribute towards developmental change” (Lewis 2001:68, original emphasis), which also includes advocacy; and (3) the “*partner* [encompassing] the growing trend for NGOs to work with government, donors and the private sector on joint activities” (Lewis 2001:68, original emphasis).

Today, NGOs are complexly—but actively—involved in world politics, as both conspicuous and unseen participants: for instance, “[they] are prominent...in organizing massive street protests” (DeMars 2005:1), such as those against the War on Terror; but they “are also obscure, for example, as shadow partners in international legal maneuvers” (DeMars 2005:1). In their work they employ a ‘modular technique’—that is, a specific set of practices like conducting seminars, letter-writing, or boycotts—and they generally take their authority from “global norms that exist somewhere “above” governments; indeed, above politics itself. Ironically, [these] norms...are most often statements and agreements made by governments themselves, speaking collectively through intergovernmental organizations” (DeMars 2005:19).

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the nation state is in decline and that civil society increasingly represents itself across nation-state boundaries through the formation of global institutions” (Lewis 2001:55). Nevertheless, rather than completely separating out civil society, it is more beneficial to “focus on the relationships between the [state and civil society] in a given context” (Lewis 2001:61).

Much of the literature on NGOs attempts to create a typology of these organizations, or uses the term indiscriminately to describe a heterogeneous array of organizations (Srinivas 2009; Brehm, Harris-Curtis, Padrão, & Tanner 2004). However, due to their multidimensional natures, it is more useful to focus on NGOs' diverse attributes[50], such as their "orientation and level of operation" (Vakil 1997:2062)—where 'orientation' refers to "the type of activities that NGOs engage in" (Vakil 1997:2063) and the 'level of operation' refers to local/community-based, regional, national, or international outreach—as well as their specific "sectoral focus (such as health, housing or agriculture) and other evaluative factors (such as accountability, participation and gender equality)" (Vakil 1997:2062).

It is with regard to these evaluative factors—particularly accountability[51]—wherein a great deal of academic debate arises. Some scholars have argued that "[what] will succeed in the long run are relationships [which] produce multiple net benefits that are broadly dispersed, not narrowly calculated and distributed...[extending] beyond the project, community, or enterprise at hand" (Uphoff 1996:33, original emphasis). According to this perspective, researchers must therefore account for both direct and indirect costs/benefits in evaluating NGOs' results (Uphoff 1996)[52]. More specifically in terms of NGO accountability, "[funding] has been and always will be a problematic issue...The important considerations are how these funds are negotiated and

[50] By taking a more critical perspective, this reveals "the variety of organizations pursuing, without coordination, distinct interpretations of a public good" (Srinivas 2009:621). Along this line, many scholars contend that NGOs should be analyzed with regard to their variable contexts, "which [have] political, historical and cultural dimensions" (Lewis 2001:6) that must be taken into consideration—the current study attempts to do just that vis-à-vis Nacidos para Triunfar.

[51] NGOs are frequently "cast as the global analogs to domestic police, judges, and administrative bureaucrats in a rule-of-law democracy" (DeMars 2005:20), however unlike these domestic officials, NGOs are instead "self-appointed rather than elected... In addition, while NGOs may hold other actors to account, they themselves are relatively unaccountable to either procedural rules or outside actors" (DeMars 2005:20).

[52] For example, one of their primary indirect benefits—especially with regard to international NGOs—is that they help propagate "horizontal, transnational links between societies, and also transverse relationships between the government of one country and the society of another. These transverse relationships are particularly susceptible to creative political mobilization" (DeMars 2005:52). NGOs may thus be potentially involved in world politics not only as "agents of social and political action, but also [by] constituting the structure of international relations at three levels: the micro-level of individual NGOs, the mid-level of the country or regional network, and the macro-level of the international system" (DeMars 2005:61).

who is accountable to whom, for what, at what time, and by what process. That process of negotiation...is itself a reflection of power relations in international development" (Biggs & Neame 1996:40).

As a result, although NGOs are often seen as being cost-effective and independent developmental instruments, such a view "[runs] the risk of ignoring the wider social and political context of development intervention and funding" (Biggs & Neame 1996:41) which influences NGOs, *including* governmental interference[53]. Believing that such organizations are totally separate leads to "a romanticized view of NGOs set against a "straw-man" representation of governments. The notion that NGOs select their development tasks hints at mythical autonomy and is highly questionable if NGOs are supposed to be acting in response to local needs and as agents of empowerment" (Biggs & Neame 1996:44)[54]. Consequently, some scholars contend that NGOs should be more reflexive, as they may "see in their own behavior some of the actions of those in governments and the private sector that they often condemn (self-promotion, a failure to learn, and so on)" (Biggs & Neame 1996:48).

Akin to the programs which are being implemented in order to reduce the increasingly-transnational gang problem (described in the previous section), NGO and development projects' "combined impact on macro structures has been disappointing" (Biekart 1996:80), and thus their

[53] In particular, "individual NGOs are becoming more dependent on official aid, especially...when there has been a discernible flattening-out of voluntary income from the public" (Edwards & Hulme 1998:2). While official funding of NGOs is not a new phenomenon per se, the increase in such financing "[gives] rise to important questions concerning NGO performance and accountability, NGO-state relations, and the ability of NGOs to act independently in pursuing their goals" (Edwards & Hulme 1998:3). Accordingly, there is concern as to whether NGOs may be tempted to adopt specific functions solely to attract donations: "[the] danger is that accountability will be skewed to the most powerful constituency, which...may mean the official donor agencies" (Edwards & Hulme 1998:10), including the state. However—based on the existing evidence—there appears to be "no universal relationships between official funding and the "corruption of NGOs," nor are there any necessary correlations between NGO size, growth, function, and funding" (Edwards & Hulme 1996:255).

[54] However, NGOs can indeed be subversive, since "[states] may be threatened if their legitimacy is brought into question through the exposure by NGOs of their inability to deliver" (Lewis 2001:33) on their social/economic promises to the public.

performance has been questioned[55]. One conclusion which has been drawn is that "it is difficult to assess the impact of NGO development programs as a result of poor data, diffuse objectives, rapidly changing circumstances, and poor-quality evaluation" (Biekart 1996:80). Moreover, other scholars have concluded that such "interest in results and impact (rather than in activism and good intentions) [reflects] a shift in the external basis of legitimacy of NGOs and the source of their funding" (Wils 1996:75).

Particularly with regard to Latin American NGOs—such as Nacidos para Triunfar—these tend to form close relationships with local grassroots organizations; they are strongly committed to real change within their communities/societies; and they generally accomplish their work using very small budgets (Béjar & Oakley 1996). However, these too have been met with questioning as well as some disapproval: "as expectations of NGOs have grown, the nongovernmental community has become more concerned about impact, assessment, evaluation, cost-benefit analysis, and sustainability. In this dialogue, Latin American NGOs are becoming the targets of more critical observation" (Béjar & Oakley 1996:91)[56].

In terms of where NGOs and development projects are headed, some scholars have argued that "new forms of partner co-operation are emerging, with the emphasis shifting from bi-lateral (i.e. two party)...relations that lead to vertical linkages. The trend is towards joint action in coalitions and networks, based on the interdependence of multiple actors" (Brehm, Harris-Curtis, Padrão, & Tanner 2004:167). It is possible that this shift will help address the problems related to

[55] As an example, people often ascribe to NGOs a "range of virtues, based partly on presumed advantages such as efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, participatory approach, and proximity to vulnerable people. However, such virtues are rarely proved: they are brought out in an invidious comparison with the "vices" of the state...On the basis of such arguments, expectations of NGOs run high" (Wils 1996:67). Furthermore, many of the problems such organizations encounter vis-à-vis accountability and performance "seem to be related to an inability among NGOs to decide what they really want to do, or to a mix of functions and tasks that may conflict with one another" (Edwards & Hulme 1996:258). Thus overall, "the positive press which NGOs often [receive] [has been] in some cases based more on wishful thinking than on hard facts" (Lewis 2001:12).

[56] Problematically, "[scholars] have not yet found a way to measure the impact of an NGO on the life of a local group or on the national context more generally" (Béjar & Oakley 1996:95).

effectiveness/impact, accountability, and funding which NGOs have and continue to face, but more research in this area is needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn. There are several other trends which are likely to continue and possibly to increase, such as the "shift in public support from development to relief. Another trend is a reduction in state funding" (Zadek & Gatward 1996:227) worldwide, as well as "a changing [international] environment...that will increasingly question the moral high ground that NGOs achieved during the 1980s" (Zadek & Gatward 1996:227). For instance, a fairly cynical view of NGOs has emerged wherein they are perceived more and more "as bloated bureaucracies...a self-serving elite, unwilling to submit themselves to the very forms of accountability that they advocated for others" (Zadek & Gatward 1996:230)[57].

[57] NGOs are now also seen in some instances as being highly ambiguous, "sometimes [displaying] a dual character...[combining] the rhetoric of Freirean transformative ideology for radical supporters at one moment, and the market rhetoric of enterprise culture for government, business and donors the next" (Lewis 2001:32).

CHAPTER 6

❖ The Evolving Relationship Between the U.S. & Latin American

With regard to political and economic issues, the whole of Latin America has changed quite dramatically, even in just the last twenty to thirty years. Democratic regimes now exist throughout the region—which experienced an economic boom in the 2000s—and people in Latin America are making their opinions known at the international level (Weisbrot 2011). Both in the past and especially today, U.S. interventions and/or influence within the region have not necessarily been appreciated: this is due to the fact that the policies and actions of the American government have generally focused on furthering trade ties or other national priorities, which often entailed promoting U.S.-friendly but locally-hated regimes in Latin American countries as opposed to encouraging democracy, stability, and/or development (Weisbrot 2011).

The ongoing impacts of such interference—as well as the enduring discontentment with them—have helped encourage the rise of 'regionalism' and cooperation in Latin America, particularly since the late 20th century (Gardini 2013, Mouline 2013). This term—regionalism—has come to be understood as referring to a (supposedly) common set of ideas, goals, and values, as well as a shared sense of identity and purpose, all of which are combined in the pursuit of development through the generation of institutions in a particular geographical region. Examples include international trade agreements—like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—and regional formations—such as the Mercado Integrado Latinoamericano (MILA)[58]—which generally involve political cooperation in order to enhance a specific region/area's economic competitiveness (Gardini 2013).

Much of this regionalism in Latin America arose as a result of dissatisfaction with the neoliberal ideology and policies that had been championed by the U.S. government (Gardini

[58] Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) is another regional example, promoting free trade among South American nations.

2013). Such frustration/discontent has, in turn, led to the development of regional Latin American groups that exclude Western powers to a great extent and which are interested in more Latin American-centric policies—including CELAC (the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States)—demonstrating what might be called a 'rebalance' vis-à-vis the Latin American-U.S. relationship (Mouline 2013). For instance, the launch of the Pacific Alliance in 2012—which included Chile, Peru, Mexico, and Colombia—is one recent example of the many organizations which have been created to foster Latin American integration and unity, as well as non-Western economic ties (Gardini 2013).

I. U.S.-Mexico Diplomatic Relations: Past & Present

The relationship between the U.S. and Mexico—including the official and informal behaviors that their national governments engage in vis-à-vis one another—has long been affected by a dominant-dependent (or reliant) approach/mindset, as well as by a pattern of neglecting the other, engaging in conflict, and—on rare occasions—cooperating (Weintraub 2010, Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009, Gómez 1983[1979], Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]). As employed here, 'dependency' is not the same as 'asymmetry', for there are many other countries with whom the U.S. administration differs in terms of its economic and military clout (or even its soft power). What distinguishes Mexico's case is that the extensive nature of the Mexican government's reliance "on the United States is replicated in few other countries...[Territorial] aggrandizement and proximity have shaped the mutual attitudes" (Weintraub 2010:ix, original emphasis) of these nations accordingly. In fact, due to this unique association which exists between the U.S. and Mexico, even the notion of *interdependency* between the two has been contested as "[obscuring] the relationship of domination at the core of Mexican – U.S. relations" (F. 1983:137).

In terms of the 'categories' within which the U.S.-Mexico relationship falls—negligence, cooperation, and conflict—these exemplify the types of interactions that the two societies have engaged in with one another, going as far back as Mexico's independence (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009, Vásquez & García y Griego 1983). Conflict—economic, military, etc.—in particular has had the most enduring impact on U.S.-Mexico relations, persisting throughout the majority of the 19th century and almost midway into the 20th. Furthermore, "[when] conflict permeated relations, Washington behaved as the dominant power and generally imposed its will" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:8). Negligence was prevalent from the mid-1940s through the late 1980s—the Cold War period—involving 'bargaining' (instead of conflict, imposition, and resistance) as well as "each of the two governments, deliberately or inadvertently, [investing] little effort in improving the quality of bilateral relations or deepening the opportunities for institutionalized collaboration" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:10). For the Mexican administration, this entailed a turn to isolationism, an emphasis on nationalism, and avoiding economic reliance on American society.

The shift in this relationship to more of a partnership "can be best understood as a process of learning, accelerated by cumulative crises. The crises in the 1980s over trade, drug trafficking, migration, or policies toward Central America forced both national governments to seek to find alternative ways to deal with each other" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:2). In particular, the two nations have been and continue to be closely linked to one another due to their socioeconomic and political ties: Mexico, for instance, is—and has been—a major importer of American products (Weintraub 2010, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977], Vásquez & García y Griego 1983). Consequently, previous partnerships and/or cooperation were generally the result of shared economic interests—or occasionally external threats—lasting only short periods of

time; this began to change as the 1980s progressed, with economic collaboration between the two steadily increasing (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009, Wilkie 1983[1977]).

Trade has thus been a key factor in facilitating "the construction of institutionalized relations between the United States and Mexico, culminating in the first half of the 1990s with the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:4). Non-institutionalization had prevailed prior to the 1990s, despite manifold interactions between the Mexican and American governments/societies (Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]). However, when they did decide to start institutionalizing their relations, "the reasons for building institutions, including NAFTA, went beyond...defensiveness for both the United States and Mexico. Both governments sought to facilitate cooperation, not just ward off trouble" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:27) as had generally been the case in the past. Moreover, by the start of the 21st century such cooperation had been extended to the realm of banking, "the exchange of information about domestic labor law enforcement, joint efforts to bring to an end wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, relations between local governments at the border, and so forth" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:4).

Nevertheless, this relationship has also been marked by strong tensions, and even such institutionalized relations between the two nations have encountered problems. For instance, the NAFTA agreement only protected corporate investors and did not offer its Mexican members any health, labor, or environmental standards: this led to demonstrations against it by farmers[59], teachers, and additional groups, even years after it was put into effect (Tobar 2008, Faux 2003). Polls have shown that the majority of the Mexican population thought NAFTA was bad for the country, and in fact NAFTA—as well as other measures of neoliberal reform—increased the

[59] Specifically, U.S. agricultural products undercut Mexican famers' ability to sell their crops at a profit and to make a living, which led to huge numbers from Mexico's rural population migrating into cities, border towns, and the U.S. in order to find work (Malkin 2009, Tobar 2008).

number of *poor* people in Mexico, *shrank* the middle class, and *stagnated* most of the nation's employment (Faux 2003). Largely because of this—but also due to the PRI's cronyism and repressiveness—in 2000 Mexican voters forced out the PRI neoliberals whose uninterrupted control had lasted for nearly seventy-one years (Archibold & Zabludovsky 2012, Azul 2012, Faux 2003).

Such tensions are also due to the historical—as well as more recent—humiliations and interventions enacted by the U.S. government in Mexico (Glade 2009, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]). One example of this is "the loss of half [of the latter's] territory in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, after Mexico's defeat in the Mexican-American War" (Weintraub 2010:2). It was primarily this war with the U.S. which instilled a societal sense of alarm, anger, and wariness due to its "heavy human, territorial, and economic toll...Mexico's attitude henceforth would be marked with distrust toward its northern neighbor" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:9). More recently, "some state and local governments, particularly on the U.S. side of the border, [have become] active and at times contentious in bilateral affairs" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:15) with the Mexican administration, as can be seen with California regarding undocumented immigration from the 1990s through today.

These types of incidents have recurred over the last 150 years—including the U.S. occupation of Veracruz and American interference with Francisco Madero's overthrow in the early 1900s—contributing to the historically strained—and still somewhat tense—relationship between the U.S. and Mexico (Weintraub 2010). For instance, despite the increase in collaborations during the 1980s, throughout this period Mexico's government and the broader Mexican society also "spearheaded the Latin American resistance to U.S. policies in Central America" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:24). Even the improvement of relations

starting in the 1980s did not completely eradicate feelings of hostility, as "older images of conflict and suspicion lingered on, especially in the national legislatures and specific regional settings, shaping and constraining the construction of collaboration" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:15).

Nonetheless, there are several studies which demonstrate that respect—perhaps better understood as 'opportunism' vis-à-vis the U.S.—still exists on the part of the Mexican people (Weintraub 2010). Furthermore, the two countries' governmental interactions and their policies with regard to one another have actually changed some over time, as "Mexican positions gradually became more insistent and U.S. behavior less domineering—but the earlier habits have not completely disappeared" (Weintraub 2010:6), nor have the memories of past actions. There are two specific areas with regard to which the Mexican government has definitively shifted to a more assertive stance—the trafficking of narcotics and migration—and it has also become more forceful with respect to opposing/weakening objectionable American positions (Gómez 1983[1979]). This includes during trade disputes and "when an issue is important to [Mexico] or is considered to be extremely sensitive, such as the refusal to negotiate any changes in oil policy in NAFTA" (Weintraub 2010:23). These subjects have often been challenging for the partnership between the U.S. and Mexico due to their sensitive nature and frequent mismanagement—in addition to accusations of misconduct/corruption—by the governments and lay publics on both sides of the border (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]).

Narcotics trafficking (and combatting this problem) is an especially apt example of the historical and current relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, since activities related to this issue "[have] exhibited a repetitive pattern: the [American government] pushes Mexico to take action to destroy and interdict crops, and [the Mexican government] reacts, partially at times and

more fully on other occasions" (Weintraub 2010:72,73). Cooperation with regard to this issue has varied over time—abating at some points and recommencing at others—particularly during the 1980s (Weintraub 2010). Such fluctuations continue today, with the Mexican administration becoming increasingly critical of American antinarcotics policies as well as of the U.S. government's problematic/contradictory solutions to the drug dilemma (Felsenthal & Spetalnick 2012, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]).

Likewise, unauthorized migration—specifically from Mexico into the U.S.—is another contentious topic for the two nations (Bustamante & Cockcroft 1983, F. 1983, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977])[60]. This is because, as prior studies have shown, "[the] perception of migration differs, understandably, between a country that sends migrants and one that receives them" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:151,152). For instance, migrants who have illegally entered the U.S. from Mexico are perceived as industrious, courageous, and generous in the latter due to their substantial remittances to family members; whereas in the U.S., they are often seen "as people who steal jobs from U.S. citizens of long standing and who overburden the welfare and education systems" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:152,153).

This subject is divisive even *within* the U.S., as exemplified by the "different regional attitudes toward...undocumented migration" (F. 1983:161)[61]. One of the reasons for this relates to the recent 2010 Census, according to which the population of Mexican-born people in the U.S. appears to be roughly fifteen times greater now than it was forty years ago, "[amounting] to more than 10 percent of the Mexican population in Mexico" (Weintraub 2010:98). As a result of both

[60] One could actually argue that the U.S. government is in fact partly to blame for (apparently) recent increases in illegal migration and in the number of unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S., since the intensification of American border security after 9/11—such as by increasing the number of Border Patrol agents—means that: (1) Mexican migrants, who in the past would have gone back to their homes seasonally, now must stay lest they be apprehended while crossing the border; and (2) those who *do* continue to traverse the border are more likely to be caught and detained.

[61] One example is Arizona's controversial 2010 immigration law, SB 1070, which was passed in part as a result of circumstances specific to the area: in that same year, for instance, Arizona experienced more illegal border crossings—from Mexico into the U.S.—than any other American state (Cooper 2010).

such statistics and state-by-state variation in the amount of illegal immigration experienced—in addition to the numerous myths[62] about undocumented workers (e.g. that they are more likely to be criminals or freeloaders)—Americans tend to feel differing levels of hostility and/or sympathy towards those living in the U.S. without legal/official permission. This is reflected in the various legislative proposals which have been made for how to deal with the situation, including the DREAM Act, the AgJobs Act, and the Kennedy-McCain Act (Bustamante & Cockcroft 1983, Cornelius 1983[1982]).

American anti-immigrant sentiment also appears to be cyclical, since it "has fluctuated markedly...usually in response to changing levels of economic stress and manpower shortages" (Cornelius 1983[1982]:373). This is aptly illustrated by the public intolerance which arose during times of scarcity/anxiety in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, leading to mass deportations. What complicates this situation in terms of U.S.-Mexico relations specifically are the following issues: (1) "[there] is a long history of temporary worker programs that mutate into permanent programs" (Weintraub 2010:107)—as well as the periodic initiation of bracero programs to supply the U.S. with laborers—making the migration issue seem somewhat less urgent (Wilkie 1983[1977]); and (2) American society continues to be heavily reliant on these undocumented workers—e.g. as agricultural laborers—despite the U.S. government's ongoing attempts to prevent them from immigrating (Bustamante & Cockcroft 1983, Cornelius 1983[1982]).

Related to the problem of immigration is that of the border fence between the two nations. This has been a particularly troubling topic for U.S.-Mexico relations, as "the fence signals that the United States wants separation even as it talks about integration" (Weintraub 2010:126); moreover, it is unlikely to have any real effect in stopping illegal entrance to the country. As discussed earlier, this is one area where the Mexican government is becoming more

[62] Leo Chavez's book *The Latino Threat* offers a critical analysis and contestation of such prejudiced fabrications.

assertive, especially with regard to criticizing the actions taken by the U.S. government along the border—these include the unilateral use of force, upgrading the weaponry of American Border Patrol agents, and in general, simply acting without Mexican authorities' permission (Weintraub 2010, Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009, Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977]). Such resistance to U.S. pressure is becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly concerning actions/ activities which do not appear to be in Mexico's best interests: an "important example of this was the refusal of President Vicente Fox to support the U.S. invasion of Iraq" (Weintraub 2010:134).

Media has played a substantial role with respect to this varying relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, especially in terms of shaping public opinion—in other words, their residents' perceptions of one another—and influencing the national agendas. For instance, in both countries until the late 20th century, the mass media—news, radio, film, television, etc.—worked specifically to support "the policies and prevailing views of the governing elites in each country with regard to the principal issues in U.S.–Mexican relations" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:90). Other examples include degrading images of Mexicans employed in early U.S. films, as well as "the widespread distribution of Mexican films in the US through the Consulates...[Cultural] attachés in Mexican embassies around the world have made it part of their policy to make Mexican films accessible for the general public" (de la Garza 2006:19). The growth of the internet—and its subsequent innovations—have likewise expanded the range of interactions between these two societies and their knowledge about one another, as it has "facilitated ready access to information as well as communications between a growing number of U.S. and Mexican citizens" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:92).

Today, U.S.-Mexico relations go far beyond diplomatic and official contacts: they now involve extensive commercial, cultural, and educational ties, with billions of dollars being

transferred between the two nations in trade[63] and approximately one million legal border crossings taking place each day (SER-SHCP-SE Joint Statement 2013, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2013). In addition, roughly one million American citizens currently live in Mexico, and in 2012 U.S. tourists to Mexico totaled over twenty million people, making it one of the primary destinations for American travelers[64] (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2013). Furthermore, the publics in these two nations now tend to hold more positive opinions and attitudes vis-à-vis one another—even when their governments are at odds (and despite American concerns over illegal Mexican immigration)—particularly in terms of promoting cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico. One example of this is how nationalistic—and often hostile—sentiments have become somewhat reduced in Mexico concerning the U.S.' presence there, like that of the latter's ambassadors (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009).

Nevertheless, it has been found that the American government tends "*to blame Mexico for policy failure of its own making*" (Weintraub 2010:136, original emphasis), such as with regard to antidrug programs which have not reduced domestic demand, or by accusing illegal immigrants for high unemployment rates. The U.S. government also frequently exhibits rigidity and/or inconsistency—such as by being arbitrary or erratic—in terms of its policies concerning Mexico (Cornelius 1983[1982], Ronfeldt & Sereseres 1983[1977], Wilkie 1983[1977]). These types of behaviors have been posited as being "part of a deeper attitude of the relatively low priority the United States has placed on its relations with Mexico. If Mexico had a more

[63] Economic ties between the two countries are extremely important, as illustrated by President Obama's trip to Mexico in May 2013 to co-announce—along with President Peña Nieto—the creation of the High Level Economic Dialogue (HLED), an annual meeting intended to strengthen commercial/economic relations between the two nations, promote mutual growth, and help create jobs; the inaugural Dialogue was launched in September 2013 (SER-SHCP-SE Joint Statement 2013). Another way of enhancing ties took place in November 2013 when the DOS—along with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—partnered with three private Latin American banks, making millions of dollars in local lending available for small or medium-sized enterprises: this partnership has opened up $60 million specifically in Mexico, where the banks frequently do not lend to financial institutions that are not banks (but which *are* a key source of financing).

[64] Going in the opposite direction, Mexican tourists traveling to the U.S. in 2011 added up to roughly thirteen million people, spending over $9 billion combined during their trips (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2013).

prominent place in U.S. foreign policy, more official attention would be given to changing actions that are anathema to [Mexican society and its government]" (Weintraub 2010:139).

Despite such problematic and deeply-rooted attitudes, during the 1990s the two countries' respective presidents attempted to "[take] a more hands-on approach to foster bilateral cooperation and manage the increasing communicative diversity" (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009:5), indicating the start of a more conscientious and/or mindful attitude towards Mexico on the part of the American government[65]. Moreover, efforts are still being made to increase cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico vis-à-vis contentious issues. In terms of the border, for example, this means involving both state and local institutions; incorporating a variety of problem-solving methods; and including transportation planning as well in order to address such topics as the environment, resources, and health issues (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2013).

In a similar vein, an Executive Steering Committee for 21st Century Border Management was created in 2010 to encourage advancements in making the border an increasingly modern, efficient, and secure boundary. There is also an existing U.S.-Mexico Binational Group on Bridges and Border Crossings which meets twice a year to improve the efficiency of such passages, as well as to coordinate plans for new ones (the ten American/Mexican border states actively participate at these summits). In addition, to better deal with such local issues as the mistreatment of foreigners or public health, Border Liaison Mechanisms—which are chaired by both American *and* Mexican consuls—function in pairs known as "sister cities" in order to mediate between the two countries (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2013).

[65] Similarly, the AFS may be an example of another positive step in this direction, especially since the program emphasizes listening and engaging with its participants as part of an *exchange* of ideas rather than one-sided presentations. My dissertation thus analyzes the program's events in Monterrey, Mexico, in terms of these ideas, as well as with regard to the AFS' goal of improving cross-cultural relations between the U.S. and foreign societies.

Such attempts at cooperation can also be seen in terms of counternarcotics efforts. Between (approximately) 2006 and 2009, then-President Felipe Calderón deployed thousands of federal troops throughout Mexico in an effort to fight organized crime and oppose the drug cartels—he also created a federal police force to help in this campaign—however the overall success of his efforts remains up for debate (Miroff & Booth 2012). During this same time period the Merida Initiative[66] was passed in the U.S., giving Mexico approximately $400 million in assistance each year to combat the problem (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2013, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2012, Gillman 2010). Comprehensive immigration reform nevertheless remained—and continues to be—elusive[67].

Similarly, in March 2010, then-Secretary of State Clinton—as part of a larger delegation—visited Mexico City in order to discuss bilateral counternarcotics efforts and border security after three people connected to the U.S. Consulate in Juárez were killed (Miller 2010). A new phase of bilateral cooperation was introduced as a result of this meeting, building on the Merida Initiative—some have called it "Merida 2.0"—by expanding aid to Mexico (over $300 million) in the fight against narcotics trafficking. The focus of this new plan, however, is specifically on non-military support as well as the improvement of economic/social conditions—such as by increasing employment and eliminating corruption (Gillman 2010, Miller 2010).

❖ The Mexican Film Industry

I. Development & U.S. Involvement

Cinema has played an important role in Mexico since its arrival in the late 19th century (soon after it was invented in 1896). It was already very popular by 1900, with movie houses and

[66] A three-year counternarcotics plan that has provided over $1.6 billion in assistance to Mexico—for border security, improving information technology, promoting lawfulness, strengthening communities, and more—since it began in 2008 (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 2012).

[67] Despite President Obama's effort to advance it in 2014.

'*carpas*'—traveling tents—showing both domestic and imported films throughout the country in order to "[provide] entertainment, education and opportunities for the moral improvement of the population" (de la Garza 2006:57). During the Mexican Revolution and early 1920s, Mexico's film production began to evolve into an actual industry, especially through cinematic products such as documentaries of the Revolutionary battles (de la Garza 2006).

The Mexican film industry has a long history of cultural/social and economic connections with American filmmaking and Hollywood, as exemplified by how "many Mexican artists... [trained] in the U.S. industry, contributing to Mexican cinema's inherently international style" (Fein 1999:124). In fact, the film sector in Mexico as a whole has adapted/appropriated a variety of foreign influences to produce its distinctive narrative/aesthetic style known as '*lo mexicano*', as often occurs in cultural contact situations (Fein 1999, Stock 1999, de Orellana 1996, Tuñón 1996). More specifically, following the Mexican Revolution—which took place in 1910—Mexico is said to have "swapped European influence for the far more aggressive US pressure" (de los Reyes 1995[1992]:75); in other words, to have exchanged what might be termed 'Europeanization' for so-called 'Americanization' (Serna 2014). Due to this complex historical and ongoing relationship between the American and Mexican film industries as well as their national governments, when analyzing the AFS it is important "to locate [the program's] texts within their transnational contexts of production and reception" (Stock 1999:283).

With regard to Mexican cinema in the early 20th century, the U.S.' influence extended into the former's production, exhibition, distribution, and beyond. In particular, the years 1920 to 1924 saw the consolidation of the American "cinematic presence in Mexico and the national industry was unable to combat this new aggressive influence" (de los Reyes 1995[1992]:75), or even to compete with it. Moreover, due to its political relationship with the U.S. government, in

the early 1920s the Mexican administration was only able to block those American films which were disparaging towards Mexico, and the national film market was therefore flooded with cinematic imports from the U.S. (Serna 2014, Noble 2005, Fein 1999, de los Reyes 1996, de los Reyes 1995[1992]).

Despite this 'invasion', cinema in Mexico was soon converted into a type of national space (Serna 2014). Starting in the 1930s, nationalism became an important aspect of cinema in Latin America, particularly with regard to films in such countries as Mexico and Argentina. Early on, for instance, spectators attended not only for the sake of entertainment but also to see their lives and their customs reflected onscreen (Paranaguá 1995[1992], Martín-Barbero 1993 [1987]). In fact, the popular genre of melodrama was frequently used for the expression as well as the dissemination of nationalistic themes in countries throughout Latin America (Martín-Barbero 1993 [1987]).

A great deal of this film-based nationalism arose due to resentment over the U.S. government's penetration into Latin America, for which American movies functioned as an important vehicle; accordingly, cinematic nationalism in places like Mexico often exhibited an 'us vs. them' quality (Serna 2014, de la Garza 2006, Paranaguá 1995[1992]). One example of this characteristic can be found in early Mexican motion pictures, since "in the few films where there are American characters they [are] consistently...the 'they' against whom 'we' must coalesce and unify" (de la Garza 2006:63).

Consequently, the Mexican film industry has emerged and progressed specifically "in response or resistance to the U.S., and it has developed ever since in the shadow of Hollywood" (Morris 2005:190). For instance, to maintain and further expand its national cinematic output, the Mexican government has often attempted to either defend or support Mexican filmmakers and

their products in the face of U.S. hegemony, and it has done so in a variety of ways: "from State financing or ownership of production and distribution companies (structural and industrial support) to the promotion of certain themes or narratives (cultural and ideological support). In many cases, these two have gone hand in hand" (Morris 2005:191). Moreover, through cinematic representations, the Mexican government and the Mexican film industry have constructed a sense of national identity "by 'othering' Americans as a society with weak moral values and [a] lack of communitarian solidarity" (de la Garza 2006:63)[68].

Thus in addition to nationalistic objectives—such as "[utilizing] motion pictures as a means of political centralization and ideological dissemination" (Fein 1999:127)—another important goal of the Mexican administration with regard to its film industry has been to produce domestic alternatives to prevalent American cinematic imports; in other words, "curbing the influence of Hollywood" (Morris 2005:191) through the creation of a national 'niche'. Early U.S. film depictions of Mexico and Mexicans (especially as 'the villain') were often quite negative and offensive to the latter—as were the moral values they portrayed—and a rejection of such images was therefore one of the primary motivations which led to the establishment of the Mexican film industry itself (Serna 2014, Morris 2005, Noble 2005, de los Reyes 1996, de Orellana 1996, Paranaguá 1995[1992]).

Nevertheless, Mexican cinema "did not [initially] plunge into serious industrialisation [*sic*] in [complete] opposition to Hollywood, but rather with its blessing, interested protection and active participation" (Paranaguá 1995[1992]:8). During its 'Golden Age'[69], for example,

[68] As Gupta has noted, "[representations] of the state are constituted, contested, and transformed in public culture...a zone of cultural debate conducted through the mass media, other mechanical modes of reproduction, and the visible practices of institutions such as the state" (Gupta 1995:385). In this case, such representations depict the American state in opposition to the Mexican state as a result of the past/ongoing relationship between the two; consequently, it is "imperative that [scholars] constantly contextualize the construction of the state within particular historical and cultural conjunctures" (Gupta 1995:389).

Mexican cinema "owed much of its existence to the lack of competition from Hollywood and the extensive financial and technical support offered by the U.S. government...This policy of support was part of the U.S. government's war strategy to bolster its image abroad and solidify alliances" (Morris 2005:193)—particularly through the production/dissemination of propagandistic films, but also through the use of less negative stereotypes in American motion pictures (Fein 1999, Fein 1996).

Furthermore, from the mid-to-late 1930s through the late 1960s, Mexico experienced a period known as the 'Mexican miracle' which consisted of "political stability and economic development unmatched anywhere else in Latin America" (de la Vega Alfaro 1995[1992]:85). Such stability was due in part to a WWII pact between the American and Mexican governments, which overcame their long history of conflict over oil expropriation, armed interventions, etc.: "in exchange for military co-operation, inexpensive labour [*sic*] and guaranteed sales of raw materials, Mexico received numerous loans and technological aid to invigorate its shaky economy and reposition itself in the Latin American, European and even US markets" (de la Vega Alfaro 1995[1992]:85).

As a direct result of this pact, Mexico's film production reached levels that were unprecedented, and the country's cinematic industry was able to create substitute films for Hollywood fare with larger budgets and better quality than ever before, as well as to disseminate them in a variety of guaranteed markets abroad (Agrasánchez Jr. 2006, Fein 1999, Fein 1996). Furthermore, due to such incredible productivity and to the substantial number of exportable motion pictures which were generated, "the Mexican film industry became the fifth largest sector of the national economy" (de la Vega Alfaro 1995[1992]:86).

[69] This period has been variously dated, however it is generally assumed to have started in the mid-1930s and to have ended in the mid-1950s—possibly the late 1960s—with its zenith occurring during the 1940s.

Mexican motion pictures have thus been shaped not only by the industry's resistance to the American cinematic presence, but also by the economic model which the latter represents and by the funding/resource opportunities—including film stock, technical assistance, and more—which the U.S. has provided (Agrasánchez Jr. 2006, Morris 2005, de la Vega Alfaro 1995[1992]). One example of this is how the American government's "Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs (CIAA), which had a Motion Pictures Division...[developed] a plan to modernize the Mexican film industry" (Agrasánchez Jr. 2006:56)—such as by providing new equipment to its movie studios and laboratories (Fein 1996). Mexican films which were produced during the nation's Golden Age offer considerable evidence of this phenomenon: "[se] observa manifiestamente en la dependencia técnica, en la manera de filmar y la difusión de algunos géneros" (Tuñón 1996:105).

Yet at the same time, Mexico's prosperous Golden Age also *waned* due to American involvement, declining precipitously—especially in the years following WWII—as the U.S. withdrew its assistance and recommenced its own film production; accordingly, competition resumed as well (de la Garza 2006, de la Vega Alfaro 1995[1992]). In retaliation, "the Departamento del Distrito Federal...announced new exhibition quotas designed to defend domestic production from the onslaught of postwar U.S. free-trade policies; it set aside 50 percent of local screentime for national production" (Fein 1999:135). However American pressure—exerted, for instance, by obstructing Mexican film exhibition and distribution in the U.S.—eventually forced Mexico's government to succumb to the Americans' demands and give up its nationalist tactics, since the Mexican film industry's transnational nature meant that "[as] long as Mexico had important U.S. audiences, it could not erect meaningful protectionist barriers to U.S. exports" (Fein 1999:152).

American cinema has therefore served as an example for and supporter of the Mexican film industry, as well as an obstacle, a catalyst for nationalism, and the source of many industry upheavals (Domínguez & Fernández de Castro 2009, Morris 2005, Paranaguá 1995[1992]). In consequence, the cultural, economic, and political relationship between the U.S. and Mexico with regard to the latter's film industry has been—and continues to be—highly ambiguous as well as somewhat contradictory. In other words, "[internationally] collaborative policies that yielded growth also produced dependence; official ambitions for sovereign national mass media were at odds with the Mexican industry's links to Hollywood and the U.S. government" (Fein 1999:128).

In a similarly contradictory vein, Mexican film production "sought to emulate the technological and aesthetic standards established by a cinema [Hollywood] whose moving images, with their emphasis on Mexico as a site of violence and sexual excess, served precisely ...to reaffirm [the Mexican state's supposedly] backward condition" (Noble 2005:39). This emphasis or theme in American cinema regarding the purported "incapacidad de los mexicanos para acceder al mundo del progreso y la civilización" (de Orellana 1996:21)—conveyed by juxtaposing the alleged 'inferiority' of Mexico with the presumed 'superiority' of the U.S.—is one which had in fact prevailed for a long time, since as early as the Mexican Revolution (de los Reyes 1996).

Furthermore, while the Mexican government had been intimately involved with the country's film industry since its inception—including its production, exhibition, and distribution aspects—as of the 1970s such influence greatly increased (Maciel 1999). This augmentation can be seen in the government's insistence on approving films through its "rigorous system of "artistic supervision" which is actually the censorship of movie content...practiced from the

project state to the exhibition of a completed film" (Maciel 1999:198) in order to ensure that cinematic topics are politically and socially acceptable (de la Garza 2006).

From the 1980s onwards, Mexico's private sector increasingly dominated the national film industry. For some scholars this change is (ostensibly) reflected in reduced artistic value and film quality, however the 1990s are seen as a cinematic 'renaissance' which "moved Mexican cinema to the forefront of all Spanish-language national cinemas" (Maciel 1999:220). This renaissance involved greater independence from the state and its cinematic policies, as well as increased private and—paradoxically—government funding (Maciel 1999). Taken as a whole, one of the primary reasons for the state's historical and ongoing involvement is that the Mexican administration considers "a film shown commercially in a theater [to be] collective and thus more potentially dangerous as a catalyst for social or political action" (Maciel 1999:218).

II. Current State: Social Issues, Global Circulation, & International Popularity

Without question, Mexican society has played—and continues to play—an important role as both a consumer and producer of movies for the U.S. (Serna 2014, Albarran 2009, de los Reyes 1996, Fein 1996, Tuñón 1996). As a matter of fact, "by the early 1920s Mexico was the most important Latin American consumer of [Hollywood's] products" (Noble 2005:29), and by the late 1940s the considerable popularity of the nation's cinema was clearly observable "throughout the Spanish-speaking Western Hemisphere...Mexican motion pictures were more popular than their major competition, Hollywood films" (Fein 1999:137). Even at this point in time—post-WWII—Mexico's cinematic products had already begun to have a substantial presence in markets worldwide—including those of the U.S., Europe, and Latin America—in addition to receiving international recognition at film festivals like Sundance and beyond (Agrasánchez Jr. 2006, Morris 2005, Fein 1999).

In effect, the global circulation and popularity of Mexican cinema—as well as its contributions to the world, both artistically and culturally—have only increased as time has passed (Morris 2005). For instance, many renowned filmmakers from Mexico currently work in the U.S. and in Hollywood—including Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Guillermo del Toro, among others—while the city of Los Angeles now plays host to a number of cross-cultural events (like the 2011 Guadalajara International Film Festival) as well as various industry panels on Mexican filmmakers, such as the American Cinematheque's presentation on "Mexican Filmmakers Working in L.A. and Mexico" (de la Garza 2006).

The increasing popularity of/demand for Mexican—and Spanish-language—films may be due in part to the growing diaspora of transnational immigrants from Mexico, a sizeable audience whose demand for/consumption of such products during the country's Golden Age actually ended up affecting the *U.S.* entertainment industry. For example, "[many] movie theaters that were regularly showing English-language films turned their attention to this expanding audience and to the revenue that it represented. Small and large theaters alike experimented with pictures in Spanish" (Agrasánchez Jr. 2006:33), and this 'experiment' lasted for nearly seventy years. In addition, "[the] United States represents one of the fastest growing Spanish language markets in the world" (Albarran 2009:295), and with more than forty-five million legal Spanish-speakers as well as a considerable number of undocumented Spanish-speaking residents—suggested to be roughly ten to fifteen million—it is "actually the second-largest Spanish language market in the world behind Mexico" (Albarran 2009:296).

The Mexican film industry—including its production, the training of its filmmakers, and its products' distribution—has thus become progressively more transnational, with venues like global film festivals serving as springboards for individuals' careers and for increasing their

films' domestic/international marketability, potentially turning them into blockbusters (Stock 1999). However, one issue which has arisen is that "when filmmakers and films constantly cross borders...a fervent yearning for authentic culture" (Stock 1999:272) emerges, even if the notion of 'authenticity' is tenable only as a fictional/distorted vision of reality. As scholars of Mexican cinema have noted—and as was briefly mentioned earlier in this dissertation—to attempt "the enumeration of "Mexican" techniques, and to police the borders of "Mexican cinema"...[ignores] the points of convergence between the nation's century-long tradition and others" (Stock 1999:272). That is to say, to try and "discern the authentic is to jettison the complexity of contemporary culture and to perpetuate cultural colonization" (Stock 1999:281).

As in the past, American society's influence continues to be felt by Mexico's film industry today—such as through its cinematic imports—and the U.S. endures as an image and/or theme in current Mexican motion pictures, at once "a hostile neo-colonialist power and site of a deeply coveted capitalist modernity" (Noble 2005:147). One reason for this persistence is that "[consistent] with the policies of neoliberalism, the [Mexican] State has abandoned its efforts to restrict U.S. movies, while privatizing many State production and distribution companies" (Morris 2005:207). Nevertheless, such changes have also *benefited* Mexico's filmmakers, since they have helped weaken the national government's ability to shape cinematic content and to use film for political/ideological goals, thereby allowing Mexican filmmakers greater freedom in addressing politically-related or controversial topics as well as in being more critical with regard to their visions of the nation (Morris 2005).

One topic which is of both historical and contemporary significance for Mexico's cinematic production—as well as for the Mexican government's ongoing relations with that of the U.S. (as was previously discussed)—is the Mexican-American border, both as a physical

entity and as a metaphorical construct (Pérez 2009, Noble 2005). This subject often involves the politics and power relations arising between the viewing 'subject' on one side of the border and the viewed 'object' on the other, as well as the notion that "[the] identities that [borders] purport to define are never as stable as the sheer materiality of the border-as-frame would suggest" (Noble 2005:149). With regard to the concept of identity, for instance, from the 1930s until the 1970s filming outside of Mexico City was discouraged by the Mexican motion-picture industry, thereby limiting whether and how Mexico's northern neighbor was represented (Pérez 2009).

Due to these limitations, "the Mexican film industry turned the border with the United States into an artificial space that symbolized the most questionable values of national identity" (Pérez 2009:106). It was portrayed as a dangerous place—populated by unsympathetic Mexican Americans and bigoted white Americans—"through which Mexican emigrants had to travel toward a destiny that stripped them...of their Mexican souls" (Pérez 2009:106). Since the 1990s such themes of shifting identity, deterritorialization, and the very nature of the border have been increasingly developed and become more prominent in Mexico's cinema (Pérez 2009, Noble 2005). This can be attributed to the emergence of an understanding that, between these two countries, "las fronteras no sólo separan sino que también unen" (Tuñón 1996:128).

Thus overall, the history—as well as the enduring relationship—which exists between the U.S. and Mexico "exemplifies the importance of the U.S. (mediated as perceptions of the [country and American society]) in shaping Mexican policy and, more specifically, the nature of the Mexican film industry" (Morris 2005:194). Furthermore, this history appears to be repeating itself: just as the DOS in the 1920s and 1930s employed American cinema "como instrumento para difundir imágenes internacionalmente positivas de los bienes, servicios y estilos de vida estadounidenses" (Fein 1996:43), the AFS now seems to be using films in a very similar manner.

CHAPTER 7

❖ Conducting Cross-Cultural Media Research

One of the problems associated with conducting cross-cultural/international research—despite the prevalence of such undertakings in social science fields like communications and media studies—is that these types of investigations are simultaneously "attacked as impossible and defended as necessary" (Livingstone 2003:478). A primary challenge which scholars face in conducting such research is "the nature of the particular units – nations – being compared" (Livingstone 2003:479), since these are not self-contained, homogeneous entities[70]; rather, they contain many cultural groups and exhibit flows of movement in and out[71]. Nevertheless, one of the arguments *for* undertaking such cross-cultural/international analyses is that "notwithstanding the onward march of globalization...nation-states continue to serve as convenient shorthand for distinctive histories, cultures and policy environments" (Livingstone 2003:480).

This dissertation adheres to the latter perspective in examining the reception of the AFS in Mexico, as illustrated by the previous chapters/sections which described the socio-historical, cultural, and political environment in which the program takes place. Such contextualization—as well as the breadth of analytical approaches employed in this study—forestalls another potential critique: that of viewing other cultures or nations using only a 'Western' lens and thus failing to recognize/account for cultural specificity (Livingstone 2003). Emulating prior cross-cultural and

[70] As Trouillot and others have suggested, it may be that "globalization renders the state irrelevant not only as an economic actor but also as a social and cultural container" (Trouillot 2001:125), since international corporations/institutions—like the World Bank—can now bypass the power of the nation-state.

[71] It is therefore important to recognize that the state is not a fixed entity, in particular due to the effects of globalization (wherein both media and migration play significant roles). Consequently, this study looked at the AFS' 'production'/assembly by the U.S. government and its reception abroad in terms of how globalization affects current American diplomatic strategies as well as foreign peoples' perceptions of them (e.g. due to social remittances from family or friends living in the U.S.). It is necessary to do so as the American nation-state now operates in an increasingly globalized world, one where its strategies have had to change from what they were in the past—with programs like the USIA—to new forms of diplomacy exemplified by the AFS. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have argued, "[if] the nature of [state] institutions and the sites of [its] instantiation are being transformed, it is precisely to these transformations that we must attend in our empirical investigations" (Ferguson & Gupta 2002:995).

international research, in this study I have therefore attempted to understand my interlocutors on their own terms; to systematically analyze the relations between the U.S. and Mexico (specifically in terms of the AFS); as well as to avoid applying my results to other contexts inappropriately or without substantiation—in other words, to avoid baseless generalization (Livingstone 2003).

So that my methodological approach would be more inclusive—and, hence, my examination of the AFS as thorough as possible—this dissertation addresses *why* the countries which are involved were chosen; *what* dimensions/elements are analyzed specifically; *who* is included or left out, and why; *how* key conceptual ideas (including soft power, cultural/public diplomacy, reception, etc.) have been developed/employed historically and in more recent works; as well as the implications of my research for international relations (including DOS/AFS projects) and future studies. It is important to address all such aspects, since the study's strength depends on identifying the relationships which exist or arise among these various components—both within and between each country being studied—as well as on understanding the contexts in which the actions of my interlocutors are being interpreted, thus combining etic (observer) and emic ('native') viewpoints (Evans 2004, Gudykunst 2002, Østerud 2000, Press 1996). Nevertheless, "however [scholars] determine and defend [their] choices in cross-national research, [they] should resist the fantasy that by this means a complete, comprehensive account can be produced" (Livingstone 2003:494).

I. Media Anthropology

The term 'media anthropology' was first coined after the 1969 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, stemming from anthropologists' concerns about the public's lack of knowledge regarding anthropology and the dearth of channels by which to disseminate such

information (Coman 2005). Two branches of study arose as a result of these worries: media anthropology, which focuses on research while examining the functions, impacts, processes, and structures of media information, technology, audiences, and professionals; and applied media anthropology, which uses media to communicate anthropological knowledge, as well as to expose the public to information that will promote a more open-minded perspective (Coman 2005). A variety of other names sprang up as well, from the anthropology of media to mass communication anthropology (and more), each with its own particular "difference in the design of the conceptual framework and of the subject matter" (Coman 2005:4).

Consequently, many scholars focus predominantly on ethnographic films and visual anthropology; some look at media production, consumption, and circulation; while others examine the media-culture relationship, including 'indigenous' uses of media. This study of the AFS follows more in the vein of yet another research area: "[looking] to mass media as a specific "field", [thus] employing cultural anthropological methods and concepts in order to interpret the "media culture"" (Coman 2005:6) along the lines of a Bourdieusian approach to literature. As a result, this involves analyzing "the influence of channels (oral, scriptural, audiovisual or Internet) on media content or media consumption...the processes through which these cultural products are institutionally created and distributed...processes by which these products are consumed and invested with meanings" (Coman 2005:6), as well as investigating the media content itself.

One of the reasons why an anthropological approach to media research can be beneficial is that it recognizes how, in today's increasingly interconnected/globalized world, "culture is produced, transmitted, recepted [*sic*] and re-signified through mass communication and within mass communication" (Coman 2005:19). Accordingly, an anthropological perspective is one in which media—particularly the mass media—are placed "at the center of the process of social

construction of reality, as an institution that generates specific discourses and logics" (Coman 2005:9) and which disseminates these through images that "have the status of *symbolic constructs*" (Coman 2005:9, original emphasis).

Media anthropology therefore views such images as structuring particular, contextualized perceptions of reality, however they can also provide "new arenas for political expression and the production of identity" (Ginsburg 2005:22). Thus it is an approach to analyzing media which examines the particular as it exists in the general, the local as it exists in the global, as well as how media processes/practices—like reception—can be both transient *and* somewhat permanent, contextual *and* shared, dominated *and* resistant (Coman 2005, Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005, Ginsburg 2005). Accordingly, media anthropology "is distinguished by an effort to track, qualitatively and with the kind of cultural knowledge that enables..."thick description," the practices, consciousness, and distinctions that emerge for people out of their quotidian encounters with media; however, these are also always situated within the context of a broader social universe" (Ginsburg 2005:20).

❖ Studying the Audience: Using Ethnography & Practice Theory in Media & Reception Analysis

The following sections illustrate the utility of taking an ethnographic, practice-based approach to media studies and reception analyses, particularly with regard to conducting multi-level research which accounts for both individuals and society as well as the interplay between the two. As previously discussed, cross-cultural communications, perceptions, receptions, and interpretations are not only individually-constructed but also societally-influenced; hence those "approaches created...for the purpose of contending with society turn out to be...appropriate for the study of the individual" (Miller 2009:3) as well.

Unfortunately, the general tendency in audience/reception studies—as well as research on cross-cultural communication and international relations—has been to omit the micro (i.e. the individual) in favor of the macro (i.e. society), or to omit the macro in favor of the micro. In response, this dissertation examines the *compatibility*—rather than the opposition or separation—of society and the individual (Miller 2009). I therefore consider both the micro and macro levels, while looking at how underlying societal structures are fundamentally involved in shaping individuals (and vice versa)[72].

In order to do this, I have analyzed the socio-historical contexts of the AFS and its participants, specifically with regard to three types of factors which affect media production and reception: those determined predominantly by societal structure; those governed by both societal structure *and* one's position therein; and those delimited by a *combination* of societal structure, position, and an individual's conscious/idiosyncratic choices (Rosengren 1996). Doing so allowed me to account for both 'collective' and 'individual' aspects affecting the program's assembly in the U.S. and responses to its deployment in Mexico.

I. Ethnographic Media Research

The use of ethnographic methods in conducting media research is a topic that has long been debated by academics (Morley 1996). Among the critiques which have been made, one of the most enduring is that "much of what passes as ethnography deviates considerably from what at least anthropologists mean by the term" (Jankowski & Wester 1991:55). What this indicates for some scholars is that the (frequently) shorter length of such studies—and, hence, researchers' reduced contact with their interlocutors—does not permit the type of in-depth analysis

[72] In considering the micro level of the individual, verifying that people's accounts were 'factual' was not necessarily a concern of mine since I was more interested in what those accounts revealed about their preoccupations/perceptions, as well as what their accounts and preoccupations/perceptions brought to light regarding the broader socio-historical/cultural contexts.

characteristic of anthropological ethnography, and also fails to establish any kind of intimate rapport (Jankowski & Wester 1991). For instance, with regard to television reception—which takes place over a longer period of time than a film's—it has been argued that "audience ethnography needs to be repositioned as a fieldwork-based, long-term practice of data collection and analysis...[allowing] researchers to attain a greater level of understanding of the community studied" (La Pastina 2005:139).

However, there are other scholars who support such research, questioning whether long-term participant observation is the only—or even the best—route to take, and invoking the idea of microethnographies, where the objective is to *narrow* one's scope and *condense* the study's duration (Evans 2004, Murphy & Kraidy 2003, Griffiths 1996). They contend that "[valuable] interpretive accounts can be based on relatively small periods of observation, focusing on media texts as much as people and activities. If the ethnographic goals are achieved, the research...is itself legitimately ethnographic" (Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005:3). For example, prior work—such as on the relationship between Welsh-speaking viewers and U.K. television programming—shows that "notwithstanding their potential methodological weaknesses, micro-ethnographies... can make an important contribution to [scholars'] understanding of regional cultural identities" (Griffiths 1996:48). Nevertheless, such supporters also caution researchers "not to fall into the trap of shallowness" (Evans 2004:206) by pursuing too small of an area, since the study may then become disproportionately about the researcher's own experience(s).

In addition, these types of analyses are often accused of being less holistic in their approach, as they frequently do not "[investigate] many aspects of the particular group of society being studied" (Jankowski & Wester 1991:55), sometimes focusing on only one. Consequently, a secondary critique/argument has been made with regard to generalizing ethnographic research

from one cultural context to another: "[ethnography] is a fine thing, but it always runs the danger of descending into anecdotalism and [scholars] should not mistake the vividness of the examples it offers [them] for their general applicability" (Morley 2006:8). In contrast, some scholars maintain that "it is possible to extrapolate larger political and social themes from small-scale ethnographic research, although any conclusions must be tempered by a recognition of the limitations of the design and modest scope of such studies" (Griffiths 1996:61). Others have even argued that if media ethnographers are committed "to a *critical* ethnography – one that is concerned with how power is taking shape and transforming people's lives on a global scale – then they must overcome their queasiness with the possibility of making generalizations" (Murphy & Kraidy 2003:15, original emphasis).

Despite such problems and critiques, the call for—and use of—ethnographic methods in media/audience studies has persisted, including the analysis of media 'texts' and related documents; conducting extensive interviews; as well as engaging in direct observations (Morley 1996, Jankowski & Wester 1991). However, even supporters note that such studies—rather than adhering to techniques which are specific to ethnographic research—frequently conflate the notion of 'ethnography' with any and all types of qualitative methodologies, including surveys, interviews, etc. (Press 1996): "[though] these techniques are often referred to by a single term – participant observation – this is in fact misleading" (Jankowski & Wester 1991:59), since the latter actually entails simultaneous participation in and observation of activities. Nonetheless, the significance of an ethnographic approach—particularly for cross-cultural media studies, like my own research on the AFS—is that it allows scholars to better discern the "[connections] between facts, relationships among people, and underlying reasons and rationales for certain activities"

(Evans 2004:203), from the production and/or selection of certain media—such as the AFS films—to their reception(s) and interpretation(s).

Accordingly, ethnographic techniques can be extremely useful for understanding the various links between media and international communications. Since the latter "necessarily involves communication across cultural divides, studies of this communication must grasp the meaning and consequences of this intercultural linkage" (Evans 2004:208), as can be achieved through an ethnographic approach to cultural data collection and analysis. For instance, the meaning(s) derived by audience members from the content of a particular cross-cultural media communication—transmitted via film, television, radio, etc.—will be 'situated', thus they will depend on the specific circumstances; the composition of the audience; spectators' personal experiences and social interactions; as well as people's individual moods (La Pastina 2005, Evans 2004, Murphy & Kraidy 2003).

An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to uncover these diverse underlying influences and to understand their potential impacts—such as for how the AFS is received abroad—especially when working with people possessing cultural, social, political, and/or economic milieus which are very different than his or her own. This is because "ethnography ventures beyond the immediate communicative situation to explore the cultural, social, [economic,] and political context in which" (Evans 2004:217) such cross-cultural media interactions occur. In other words, it "brings an attention to cultural difference, a commitment to close observation and recording, the provision of "thick" descriptive detail designed to reveal the contexts that give actions meanings to a community" (Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005:2). As a result, in cross-cultural/international communications, particularly those that take place through media and which are "thick with opportunities for missteps and unintentional harm, ethnography

offers a means by which the cultural significance and cultural ramifications of an act of communication can be discerned" (Evans 2004:222).

Another advantage of ethnography—as previously mentioned—is that while it may tend to privilege the individual, it also accounts for the collective, as well as the interplay between the two (La Pastina 2005). This is because it "brings the researcher into close contact with numerous informants from a society, often in a marathon of individual and small-group encounters" (Evans 2004:209). Therefore, in studying media audiences and/or producers—like the AFS' participants and its organizers—ethnographers can examine them both divided into individual spectators/ creators *and* as part of a larger social mosaic, thereby enabling a more accurate representation—as well as a better understanding—of the media reception/production situation (Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005, Evans 2004, Press 1996). Furthermore, such an approach to media research facilitates an "examination of the phenomenon not only in its immediate social, political, and economic contexts, but also in a larger historical framework, as well as its insertion in the broader regional, national, and global context" (La Pastina 2005:141).

For these assorted reasons—whether conducting research domestically or abroad—"ethnographers look at media as cultural artifacts enmeshed in daily lives, to see how they are imperfectly articulated with (and sometimes created as a counter to) larger hegemonic processes of modernity, assimilation, nation building, commercialization, and globalization, but in terms that draw attention to how those processes are being localized" (Ginsburg 2005:20). Ethnographies of media and audiences thus have a contextually-grounded focus while simultaneously offering a more international orientation by examining "localized research in relation to the global issues raised by transnational media processes" (Murphy & Kraidy 2003:7), such as power relationships and problematic cross-cultural communication.

Overall, most scholars agree that triangulation—in other words a multi-method, multi-theory/disciplinary strategy—with regard to both gathering and analyzing data is the preferable approach, as this "can assist in constructing a more encompassing perspective on specific analyses" (Jankowski & Wester 1991:63), thereby permitting a more holistic view. Moreover, doing so—and incorporating an ethnographic perspective—also allows researchers "to account for the interpretative agency of actual viewers and readers whose constructions of meaning are nevertheless subject to physical and symbolic 'resource constraints', including the limits imposed by prior processes of textual production" (Moores 1993:140). This is the type of approach taken in my analysis of the AFS, which incorporates ethnographic and other qualitative methods to analyze the program's reception by its Mexican participants, as well as "to observe community and social changes that might be related to media presence" (La Pastina 2005:142), especially that of the AFS.

II. Brief Overview of Practice Theory

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a new intellectual framework began to emerge in the field of anthropology which became identified as 'practice theory', though in fact it was "neither a theory nor a method in itself" (Ortner 2008[1984]:453). Deriving predominantly from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Marshall Sahlins, practice theory attempted to expand upon and potentially resolve a variety of theoretical and methodological concerns which plagued the field throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These included: a lack of emphasis on power; the link between social relations, structure, and agency; and how prior approaches had problematically ignored "the social groups, social relationships, social structures, [and] social institutions, that mediate *both* the ways in which people think ("culture") *and* the ways in which people experience and act upon their environment" (Ortner 2008[1984]:459, original emphasis).

Furthermore, as proposed by these earlier theoretical perspectives, 'agency'—or human action—was lost in the language of structure, and theorists' notion of stability hindered their capacity to deal with and account for change (Sewell 2005, Sahlins 1981). For instance, with regard to studying the state, a primary problem "is the predilection of social scientists at large, but anthropologists in particular, to anthropomorphize the state as a synecdoche for political agency" (Kurtz 2001:175). Doing so is not methodologically sound, as practice theory demonstrates, for it is better to "[allocate] political agency to human agents where it belongs and not to an anthropomorphized abstraction referred to as the state" (Kurtz 2001:176). This is what I have endeavored to do in the present study by looking at such human agents as the AFS' organizers, experts, team members, participants, and DOS officials.

Practice theory was therefore a response to these limitations, one which focused on real people "not simply as passive reactors to and enactors of some "system," but as active agents and subjects of their own history" (Ortner 2008[1984]:465). For this reason, it "provides a good way to explore the role of political agents...in securing the power and authority of government" (Kurtz 2001:186), such as through diplomatic programs like the AFS. Although a practice framework still views the 'system' as having a somewhat deterministic role with regard to human activity and the occurrence of events, practice theorists examine people's everyday practices (i.e. their actions and interactions) as these relate to—and facilitate understanding of—the system itself: its origin, reproduction, and variability. Though constrained and shaped by the system in which they operate, social actors—and their practices—do not simply reproduce or re-endorse the former, but also re-make and change it: accordingly, the concepts of culture and society cannot be divorced from that of human agency (Ortner 2008[1984]).

In a similar vein, practice theory also supports the idea that there are ties connecting people's actions and consciousness with broader social, economic, and political institutions: though the conditions of existence may be predetermined to a certain extent and beyond one's control, they can nevertheless potentially be affected by human practice. As a result, individuals' activities are "elements of a whole material social process...many and variable productive practices, with specific conditions and intentions" (Williams 1977:94). Such simultaneously dominant and resistive practices reflect power relations which influence all aspects of living, from economic and political activity to people's identities and perceptions of the world.

Practice theorists are thus particularly interested in the connections between power, agency, institutions, and social reproduction/change, as exemplified by Giddens' structuration theory which addresses the 'duality of structure' by taking it as "both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices" (Giddens 1979:5). Structures therefore comprise the rules and resources—including institutions—that produce and/or reproduce practices, which themselves are involved in the generation of social systems. As a result, these systems are 'structured totalities' wherein structures shape practices which in turn constitute/reproduce the structures themselves (Sewell 2005, Reckwitz 2002, Giddens 1979).

Consequently, power, agency, and social change are implicated in this relationship in two specific ways: (1) rules—or schemas, as preferred by Sewell—and resources—either human or nonhuman—act as the foundation for domination, enhancing or maintaining power; and (2) these rules and resources can possibly be transformed through practices, since they may be "drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction, but are thereby also reconstituted through such interaction" (Giddens 1979:71). Accordingly—although structures give agents the ability to act and may be chronically reproduced through the latter's behaviors—they may nevertheless

potentially be reconfigured, resisted, or intentionally mobilized through people's activities. Power must therefore be seen as being "instantiated in action, as a regular and routine phenomenon...Resources are the media through which power is exercised, and structures of domination reproduced" (Giddens 1979:91), due to the fact that such resources are unevenly distributed—and, hence, asymmetrically employed—in social interactions. Moreover, power is implicit in the word 'structure' itself, as the term "empowers what it designates...Whatever aspect of social life we designate as structure is posited as "structuring" some other aspect of social existence" (Sewell 2005:124).

Following a Bourdieusian approach, schemes of action and thought are thus "mediations through which the objective structures ultimately structure all experience...without following the paths of either mechanical determination or adequate consciousness" (Bourdieu 1990[1989]:41). They are shaped by one's *habitus*—a historically-produced "[system] of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1990[1989]:53)—which both generates and organizes individuals' practices based on their previous experiences, thereby guaranteeing the appropriateness and constancy of these practices over time (Reckwitz 2002). *Habitus* is the source of people's unintentional 'strategies' and accounts for the apparent regularity of social systems; in other words, for "the tendency of patterns of relations to be reproduced, even when actors engaging in relations are unaware of the patterns or do not desire their reproduction" (Sewell 2005:126).

However, there exists not only social reproduction and continuity but also transformation, since "the schemas to which actors have access can be applied across a wide range of circumstances" (Sewell 2005:140). In other words, social actors have some agency in potentially transposing what they have learned from their environments and *habitus* to new contexts—and to do so in possibly unpredictable ways—meaning that the enactment of social rules or schemas can

in fact lead to their transformation and to the modification of the social relations in which these actors are enmeshed (Reckwitz 2002). Agents are thus "empowered to act with and against others by structures" (Sewell 2005:143), however as mentioned previously, their ability to do so differs based on structurally-endowed and collectively-produced disparities of power.

Accordingly, structural reproduction can actually be a process of transformation, such as when cultures grapple with novel experiences or phenomena—by trying to interpret, organize, and/or incorporate them using existing cultural structures—and may themselves be altered in the process (Sewell 2005). Initial contact between Europeans and Hawaiians, for instance, was an event which led to both cultural reproduction and transformation for the latter group, since "[in] the course of reproducing that contact in its own image, the culture changed radically and decisively" (Sahlins 1981:33). As an example, the adoption of certain European features—including fancy utensils, cloth, and attire—by Hawaiian chiefs not only reproduced traditional social distinctions between the nobility and the rest of the population, but also jeopardized chief-commoner relations/interactions by stimulating uncharacteristic violence between them. Practices, therefore, can both define and re-define those who engage in them, altering their relationships to others and, as a result, the particular structures within which those sets of relationships exist.

Overall, practice theorists view social systems as being relatively seamless yet still somewhat dynamic wholes, made up of organizational rules or schemas "embodied...within institutional, symbolic, and material forms" (Ortner 2008[1984]:469). The on-the-ground practices of social actors contribute to both the constancy and the possible transformation of these systems—within which the agents act—as well as of the structures which endow them with the capacity to act in the first place (Reckwitz 2002). Consequently, systems "owe their practical

coherence – that is, on the one hand, their unity and their regularities, and on the other, their 'fuzziness' and their irregularities and even incoherences...to the fact that they are the product of practices" (Bourdieu 1990[1980]:86) implemented by real people, whose 'practical knowledge' —based on their lived experiences in the world—influences both their actions and the larger social structures.

III. Practice Theory & Media Research

As can be seen, practice theory has the potential to offer substantial insight into the relationships between structures, social systems, and actual (on-the-ground) practices. This is of particular importance for anthropological studies of media, which often omit "the *articulations* between the practices of social actors "on the ground" and the big "structures" and "systems" that both constrain those practices and yet are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by them" (Ortner 2006:2, original emphasis). Instead, such media research tends to focus on the practices themselves (i.e. practice as *practices*) rather than the theoretical conception of practice in terms of larger social structures.

Recent examples of this type of study can be found in Birgit Bräuchler and John Postill's *Anthropology of Media, vol. 4: Theorising Media and Practice* (2010). The book's stated objective is to use practice theory as part of media studies in "addressing questions that are central to the field, such as media in everyday life, media and the body, and media production" (Postill 2010:12), among others. However, the volume's emphasis is specifically on practices/ activities related to media, thereby redirecting such research *away* from systems/structures and "onto the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media" (Couldry 2010:36,37).

One of the primary problems with this (supposedly) practice-oriented approach is that social agents "are always involved in, and can never act outside of, the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed" (Ortner 2006:130), whether relations of solidarity or ones of power and inequality. As a result, scholars conducting media research must not lose sight of the broader social systems within which actors' practices/actions are not only constrained but also enabled by the larger structures that they in fact produce, replicate, and may potentially transform. Furthermore, in order to recognize and interpret the effects of people's actions/ practices with regard to social reproduction and transformation, analyses should be historically situated (Ortner 2006). Such an approach allows researchers to understand practices as the products of internal and external forces, as well as of specific power relations.

This dissertation endeavors to address the problems described above, which have emerged due to academic attempts at incorporating practice theory into anthropological studies of media. The intention of my research is thus to further develop/enhance the application of a practice theory framework vis-à-vis the analysis of film reception, specifically through an examination of the AFS' implementation and of its participants' immediate/ongoing responses in Monterrey, Mexico which uses two interrelated versions of practice theory. I employed the first—a *more* agent-oriented approach, modeled after the work of Ortner (2006, 2013) and Sewell (2005)—with respect to the program's assembly by the DOS and USC as well as its possible appropriation by participants, focusing on issues of power, intentionality/agency, and the pursuit of individual 'projects' by all those involved. The second—a *less*-agentic approach—was utilized with regard to the program's reception in Mexico, looking at systemic and structural reproduction/transformation from a Bourdieusian perspective, where "human action is guided

not by interests but by the struggle for practical efficacy and pursuit of recognition" (Calhoun 2013:64) in a particular field.

In examining the realms of literature and art, for example, Bourdieu observed that prevailing forms of expression and thought can be reshaped by newcomers. The latter may 'go beyond' and possibly transform these, "not by explicitly denouncing [them] but by repeating and reproducing [them] in a sociologically non-congruent context" (Bourdieu 1993:31). With regard to my work in this dissertation, such an approach involves looking at reactions to/receptions of the AFS as potentially being unrelated to its organizers' intentions. It also requires understanding the reproduction and transformation(s) of the AFS, of its structural resources and rules/schemas, and of the broader social systems (e.g. American diplomacy) as being driven not necessarily by intentionality or agency but by the *habitus* of those involved.

Consequently, in analyzing media—specifically film—my study undertakes a practice theory framework that includes agency and power while accounting for both social reproduction and transformation, considering these elements through the organization and execution of social practices (which themselves are influenced and/or molded by the *habitus*). There is an important rationale for taking such a methodological and theoretical approach: though people's responses/ actions tend to reproduce the traditional order of a system—given that the former derive from contextually-based dispositions and past learning/experiences shaped by an individual's *habitus* —they can nevertheless be used to cope with—and may possibly be adapted to—new situations (Calhoun 2013, Reckwitz 2002). As discussed in the previous section, this can be seen when people attempt to interpret, organize, and potentially incorporate novel phenomena using existing cultural structures, as the Hawaiians did during initial contact with Europeans (Sahlins 1981). Actions/practices thus not only reproduce but may also constitute or change structural features as

a result of the appearance of external elements—like the Europeans—and/or the instability of previously-established internal power relations (Ortner 2006, Sewell 2005, Giddens 1979).

Furthermore, this study's methodological and theoretical approach incorporates the *interplay* between transformations caused by social actors engaging in routine practices in new contexts[73] or using existing structures[74], and those due to people—specifically 'agents'—acting in (somewhat) original or intentional ways within their networks of social relations. Agency—which is seen as being part of the process of structuration rather than as a separate entity (Giddens 1979)—is included for the following reasons: (1) structures may be changed through people's possibly deliberate or purposeful practices/actions; and (2) structural resources and rules/schemas may be applied by social actors to novel contexts in different ways. Power—which is structurally-endowed, founded on rules/schemas, and exercised through resources—is also included, given that such resources are distributed unequally among social actors, thereby maintaining or increasing the power of some as compared to others.

Despite differing endowments of power, this more agent-oriented version of practice theory views *all* social actors/agents as "capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which [they are] enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree" (Sewell 2005:143). For instance, as a government-supported endeavor with clearly-stated objectives, the AFS exhibits power (in terms of resources) and agency (in terms of intentionality) in 'setting the agenda' for its outreach efforts with foreign participants. However, the latter's intentional actions and routine practices—such as resisting or appropriating aspects of the program and adhering to traditional cinematic procedures—while potentially demonstrating less power/agency than the AFS, may nevertheless present a challenge

[73] As described above regarding the Hawaiians.

[74] I.e. rules/schemas and resources.

to it. Accordingly, people do not just passively enact broader social systems but in fact contribute to the creation of such systems through their agentic practices/actions (though within the bounds of their structural constraints). Practice theory "attempts to see this making, whether in the past or in the present, whether in the creation of novelty or in the reproduction of the same old thing" (Ortner 2008[1984]:477).

My methodological/theoretical approach—which encompasses not only a Bourdieusian but also a more agent-centered version of practice theory—therefore takes the view of "social life...as something that is actively played, oriented toward culturally constituted goals and projects, and involving both routine practices and intentionalized action" (Ortner 2006:129). This perspective permits a better understanding of agency than that traditionally seen in media reception studies, which frequently assume the existence of completely free/unfettered agents, and in focusing "on the intentionalities of actors [lose] sight of large-scale social and cultural forces in play" (Ortner 2006:132).

Specifically, this methodological/theoretical approach separates agency into two closely-entwined, intrinsically-related forms (Ortner 2006). The first involves the concept of 'projects'; in other words, individuals' intentional pursuit of certain aims or plans which are nevertheless contextually-specific (shaped by social life/defined by cultural schemas). The second involves the exercise of power or opposition to it; that is to say, (unstable) relations of domination or resistance based on differential access to resources. With regard to this study, the agentic practices/actions of the AFS' organizers and its participants help reveal the two groups' individual projects as well as their structurally-derived power.

While a Bourdieusian approach to practice theory is decisively un-agentic, agency and its related notions of projects/power are critical considerations in examining media as part of what

Bourdieu (1993) calls the 'field of cultural production'. Though he limits the field to art and literature, it has been extended in other scholars' work to encompass the realm of cinema (as my own research on the AFS does). Within this field—seen as a site of struggles which maintain and/or transform the field itself—social actors (e.g. artists, writers, filmmakers) may occupy various dominant or subordinate positions. These different positions depend on one another for their existence and constitute the field of cultural production as a whole.

Accordingly, "the structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field" (Bourdieu 1993:30). Social actors operating within the field of cultural production thus engage in conflicts with each other over the available 'possibilities' or resources—and, hence, over the ability to succeed in this field—through their position-takings vis-à-vis one another (Bourdieu 1993). Furthermore, their products—including works of art, novels, or films—are socio-historically contextualized manifestations of the field and of society, that is to say: (1) of the structurally-based positions and dispositions of social actors; (2) of their agentic struggles/ power relations in the field; and (3) of the structuring of the overall field and the broader social system (Bourdieu 1993).

Consequently, in order to understand the practices of social actors involved in the field of cultural production—which, in this study, include the practices of all those involved with the AFS—one must take into account the following: (1) their agency—that is, their intentional pursuit of and/or ability to enact certain projects or goals—as well as their constraints in taking positions; (2) their power relations or struggles with one another over resources and positions; and (3) their *habitus*—the historical and current dispositions which orient/direct their overall trajectory within the field. Such social actors must therefore be seen as both constrained and

autonomous, dominated yet resistant, retaining agency—and power—"by resisting domination in a range of ways, but also by trying to sustain their own culturally constituted projects" (Ortner 2006:147). For instance, their trajectories within the field of cultural production "[are] produced partly by choices, by the way the artist played the game, and by material factors" (Calhoun 2013:55), where the way in which the game is played "is itself shaped by the objective circumstances [the artist] has experienced and internalized as *habitus*" (Calhoun 2013:55).

With regard to cinema, Sherry B. Ortner's recent book *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (2013) exemplifies the approach to practice theory delineated above, accounting for the complex interrelations of structure, agency, and power by analyzing American independent film in terms of the diverse practices, products, institutions, and structural limitations that have contributed to its development and which continue to influence both its reproduction and transformation[75]. Specifically, the persistence of independent filmmaking in the U.S.—as well as its transformations in terms of the different 'scenes' that have arisen (like avant-garde)—has been affected not only by structural factors (e.g. rules/regulations, resource availability/distribution), but also by on-the-ground, somewhat-more agentic aspects such as film-related practices.

The Professional-Managerial Class or PMC's involvement (as investors, producers, etc.) demonstrates how such elements have influenced the reproduction/transformation of American independent cinema. For instance, the distinctive 'Generation X' *habitus* of the PMC—including members' education, politics, and 'culture'—as well as how this particular *habitus* has affected the choices made by the PMC regarding film techniques/subject matter, have both guided independent cinema's attention towards increasingly dark or ambiguous topics (e.g. pedophilia) and material which criticizes politics/power dynamics. Accordingly, in looking at media—from a

[75] I employed aspects of this approach to practice theory as well in my own research on the AFS' assembly and reception.

practice theory perspective—as part of the field of cultural production (or perhaps a filmmaking 'scene'), one *must* account for the particular socio-historical/cultural context(s). This involves grappling "with the complexities of partial transformation and partial reproduction; with the multiple, ubiquitous temporalities of social life; and with the embeddedness of knowledge itself in historical practice" (Calhoun 2013:64).

Though not specifically related to media, the work of Jean and John Comaroff on the reception of/responses to Christian missionaries in South Africa illustrates the importance of such contextualization, particularly with regard to understanding different expressions of agency. This is because it is just as critical to "account for the motivations of rulers as it is to understand those of the ruled" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:9). In other words, when employing a practice theory approach it is necessary to account for the motivations—or agentic projects, both of domination and resistance—not only of those who are *not* structurally-endowed with power (via resources such as cultural capital) and who are therefore 'subordinate', but also of those who *are* (i.e. those who rule/dominate). Thus it is important to examine both sides of such relationships, since "the exercise of power over subordinates is normally in the service of the pursuit of some project...But subordinates inevitably have projects of their own" (Ortner 2006:151).

It is through social practices, for example, that individuals—like the Tswana in South Africa—produce, reproduce, remake, and give meaning to their existence. As a result, colonizers —such as the Christian missionaries—have sought to gain control of indigenous practices as a way of influencing people's perceptions and experiences (and, hence, of exercising power over them). By incorporating a socio-historical analysis of Tswana practices, the Comaroffs' research reveals that these involve both agentic projects—"cultural goals organized in and around local relations of power" (Ortner 2006:145)—*and* forms of agency-related power. This can be seen in

how the Tswana reappropriated/resisted the churchmen's imposed culture, "some of it to be absorbed silently and seamlessly into a reinvented—or, rather, reified—ethnic "tradition," some to be creatively transformed, some to be redeployed to talk back to whites" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:12).

Resembling the Comaroffs' work, my dissertation examines the agentic and routine practices of both 'colonizer' and 'colonized' through their particular power relations, intentions or projects, and *habitus*-derived dispositions. This entails analyzing the respective practices of the AFS' organizers—individuals working at or with USC's School of Cinematic Arts and the DOS' Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs—and of the program's Mexican participants. Given that a primary focus of this study is the AFS' immediate/ongoing reception abroad, I specifically investigate the ambiguous, intertwined processes of acceptance and resistance as these are expressed with regard to the program's presence and purpose(s), as well as changes—or the lack thereof—in participating individuals' activities. Such shifts and/or consistencies are indicative of transformations in/the reproduction of structural aspects of, for example, the NGO Nacidos para Triunfar, as well as potentially at the level of the broader social system.

Mexico is an ideal case study for such a practice-based, ethnographic analysis of the AFS because of the U.S. government's long history of diplomatic (and often propagandistic) efforts vis-à-vis the former—especially with regard to its cinema—from collaborations during WWII to the containment of Mexican exports following the war (Fein 1999). This socio-historical context reveals previous American attempts "to shape the actions and perceptions of others by exercising control over the production, circulations, and consumption of signs and objects, over the making of both subjectivities and realities" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:22). The AFS' stated objectives lack such blatantly imperialistic/colonial intentions, and the program does not overtly or directly

attempt to influence Mexican cinematic production or governmental policy. Nevertheless, this diplomatic endeavor's ostensibly 'educational' purpose/project has a similarly hegemonic aim: that of influencing Mexican participants' everyday practices/activities[76], as well as shaping their experiences, relationships, and expectations concerning the U.S. As observed in the Comaroffs' study, "power is held to flow from the capacity to spread one's control across the social field" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:141)—with regard to the AFS, this can *also* entail control across the field of cultural production[77].

Practices must therefore be understood in terms of the complex relationships between the intentionality/agency—including projects, power relations, etc.—and prior subjectivities or dispositions which shape them. Moreover, they should be seen as embodying a domination/ resistance dialectic; in other words, "the clash of people's projects, their culturally constituted intentions, desires, and goals" (Ortner 2006:151). This dialectic is implicit in the dual nature of structures, where the latter not only govern social agents' interactions but may also be challenged and/or reconstituted through such interactions (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, Giddens 1979).

In consequence, ignoring the significant role of structures—as occurs in many media studies, like some of the works from Bräuchler and Postill's aforementioned volume—results in an incomplete understanding of how power and agency are institutionally or structurally established, while also potentially enacted in strategic or intentional ways through people's actions/practices (Giddens 1979). For example, it is an oversimplification to assume that media "texts represent structured constraints while audiences find spaces within these to exercise agency...Rather both text and reader must be understood in terms of structural and agentic

[76] Such as how Nacidos para Triunfar conducts its gang-prevention efforts/events, and what the latter actually are.

[77] For instance—as will be described later on and at greater length—the AFS program frequently endeavors to impart American-based ideas regarding filmmaking to its foreign participants (e.g. how to produce or distribute motion pictures), such as by having them create and screen their own films based on what they have learned from the AFS' informational classes/workshops.

factors" (Livingstone 1998b:247). As illustrated in previous sections regarding the constraints which delimit audiences' readings, "the interpretative acts of the audience are woven into their everyday social practice and depend upon the discursive socialization that each individual has experienced" (Østerud 2000:125).

Thus in terms of both the encoding/formation and decoding/interpretation of media texts, "the practices of the social production of meaning are constrained by existing social structures, which are however both reproduced and changed by those very practices" (Schrøder 2007:85). Furthermore, such an omission produces only a partial explanation of social reproduction and transformation: with regard to media studies, for instance, it results in scholars discounting how representations—such as those in film, television, etc.—may be susceptible to change. Even if people "try to reproduce conscientiously that which they have known, what they actually produce is bound to vary...from what is intended" (Sewell 2005:191) in light of their differing access to structural resources and dissimilar application of structural rules in actual practices.

Moreover, as seen earlier regarding the Hawaiians, a group's specific conditionings/ dispositions—shaped according to their *habitus*—and current context produce and/or influence their self-representations/images, as well as the practices which construct and maintain these (Mattern 2005, Sahlins 1981). Accordingly, variations in representation and practice can only be adequately understood/interpreted "by relating the social conditions in which the *habitus* that generated [the practices or representations] was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented" (Bourdieu 1990[1980]:56, original emphasis). Consequently, in order to better analyze social reproduction and transformation with regard to the AFS' reception, this study necessarily strives to understand both the *habitus* and current conditions within which the AFS'

specific media representations of the U.S.—its films—are chosen and received (at the DOS/ USC and in Mexico, respectively).

Practice theory has much to offer anthropological studies of media, however various theoretical aspects of this approach are often disregarded in favor of a 'practice as *practices*' perspective which omits the intricately involved ideas of social structures and systems. Such a perspective also inadequately addresses the interrelated concepts of power, agency, and constraint that are inherent in people's everyday practices/activities. As demonstrated in *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (2013), these types of theoretical and methodological problems can—and should—be overcome. As a whole, this dissertation endeavors to do so by analyzing both the AFS' and its participants' associated practices and structures (as well as the connections between them) as part of the broader social systems of Mexico and the U.S.

CHAPTER 8

❖ Analytical Framework of the Study

I. Studying "Up"

With a study such as this which examines the inner-workings of a branch of the DOS—specifically the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which oversees the AFS—and those of the media organizers/experts assembled by USC's School of Cinematic Arts, the researcher is inevitably doing what Laura Nader has called 'studying up': in other words, examining "the colonizers...the culture of power...the culture of affluence" (Nader 1972:289). However, in this particular case I am looking at the less-powerful 'colonized' as well, thereby extending the study's range both up *and* down. As John Gledhill has asserted, "[it] is a rare research proposal which contends that anthropology offers a root-and-branch alternative perspective on some fundamental contemporary human issue" (Gledhill 2000:9), but that is precisely my intention with this dissertation. Such a comparative framework, though difficult to achieve, enhances one's understanding of the issues at hand by looking at a topic—the AFS—from two different yet related perspectives: in this case, that of the DOS/AFS organizers and experts ('up'), as well as that of the AFS' Mexican participants ('down').

One of the reasons for studying up is that doing so allows scholars to address social inequalities and power disparities, since, for example, powerful American organizations and institutions can impact people's lives around the world—not just in the U.S.—including those of the less powerful 'underdogs' who have traditionally been the focus of anthropological research (Gusterson 1997, Nader 1972). Following the example set by prior investigations which have studied up vis-à-vis government and public agencies, this analysis of the AFS examines the

latter's purposes/goals and procedures—in other words, why and how they do what they do—as well as the societal implications, both in the U.S. and in Mexico.

In so doing there were a number of obstacles to my attempts at studying up, especially with regard to access since "[the] powerful are out of reach on a number of different planes; they don't want to be studied; it is dangerous to study the powerful; they are busy people; they are not all in one place, and so on" (Nader 1972:302). Such problems of access extend to one's ability to conduct participant observation: this particular research technique "does not travel well up the social structure. Participant observation was designed to facilitate the understanding of small, face-to-face societies...where a stranger could easily be absorbed" (Gusterson 1997:115) into everyday life. This process does not work as well in so-called 'elite' contexts, "where ethnographic access is by permission of people with careers at stake, where loitering strangers with notebooks are rarely welcome, and where potential informants are too busy to chat" (Gusterson 1997:116).

In fact, some scholars contend that in these situations researchers should de-emphasize and/or reduce their use of participant observation while instead employing "strategies that blur the disciplinary boundaries between anthropology, sociology, political science, cultural studies, and even journalism" (Gusterson 1997:116). This approach constitutes a methodology called 'polymorphous engagement', one which entails "interacting with informants across a number of dispersed sites, not just in local communities, and sometimes in virtual form; and...collecting data eclectically from a disparate array of sources in many different ways" (Gusterson 1997:116). Such 'eclectic' data collection involves techniques like formal interviews; reading and/or watching the news; examining official documents (electronically or as printed materials);

attending to news and/or events in popular culture; conducting fieldwork by phone or email; and investigating virtual spaces.

I myself was unable to obtain direct access in order to observe the selection and evaluation processes for the films which constitute the AFS showcases. Consequently, I reached out to the DOS officials, AFS administrators, and different media experts individually, with varying amounts of success. In addition—despite being denied direct access to the AFS' assembly process—I was still able to acquire useful data by working to avoid the limitations of traditional anthropological research, such as that of needing to be physically present during the AFS selection/evaluation processes. For example, due to the evasiveness (and lack of entry) I encountered while analyzing the DOS' involvement in the AFS, I had to rely less on participant observation, obtaining substantial information instead by reading official documents, public-relations texts, and news articles related to the AFS, as well as by reaching out to those involved through individual (i.e. somewhat more confidential) emails and phone calls.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of this dissertation with regard to cross-cultural relations, it is also necessary to consider the risks of studying up. This is because studying more public organizations—such as the DOS and USC—involves a dilemma: whether one should apply two different 'ethics' in studying up vs. studying down (Nader 1972). Previous work suggests that one should *not* apply the same ethics used for studying (and presenting data on) 'foreign cultures' or that which is 'private' to the analysis of organizations, bureaucracies, and institutions—like the DOS, USC, or even the AFS itself—which can have greater and more public effects, since the impacts of one's research and findings could possibly be more damaging (Nader 1972). In addition, those who are the subject of one's research when studying up are powerful and will likely read what is written about them—possibly disagreeing with it—making

it important to engage in a dialogue with one's participants as well as to carefully consider how one writes up the study's results (Gusterson 1997).

Interestingly, since the initial calls for anthropologists to study up, not very much has been done in this regard—particularly with corporations and military or government institutions—due to the difficulties of gaining access: as mentioned earlier, "[part] of the reason we have not had more studies of these elites...concerns the problems of access and methodology inherent in studying [them]" (Gusterson 1997:115). As previously noted, these various difficulties in studying up arose with my own investigation as well, however I was still able to garner information *individually* from my DOS, USC, and AFS interlocutors. Such data—though sometimes partial—provided my work with a more in-depth understanding of the production/ reception of the AFS program.

II. Methodology

This study is a multi-sited ethnographic examination of the AFS and of its Mexican participants' receptions/interpretations of the program's films and activities, as well as an analysis of the AFS' potential implications for cross-cultural communication/understanding and foreign relations. As other scholars—including anthropologists—have noted, "[the] effects of governmental interventions, and their reception by target populations, need to be teased out from, and situated in relation to, the multiple forces configuring the sets of relations with which government is engaged" (Li 2007:279). This is precisely the goal of the current study, as can be seen from its detailed contextualization of the diverse governmental and non-governmental organizations, individuals, and situations which play a part vis-à-vis the AFS. Moreover, it follows the precedent set by prior ethnographies of government, which "pay attention to how programs take hold and change things, while keeping in view their instabilities, fragilities and

fractures, and the ways in which failure prepares the ground for new programming" (Li 2007:279).

All of the present study's participants—both in Mexico and in the U.S.—were informed as to how the collected data would be used and protected prior to becoming involved in any substantial way. As such, potential interlocutors were given information regarding the scope, duration, and purpose of my research as part of our initial meetings—via information sheets/ consent forms which were either given or sent to them at the start of fieldwork—and they were allocated one or more days (though this amount of time was often not necessary) to decide whether or not they wished to participate. They were then contacted—by phone, email, or in person, depending on their specific location—within the following few days in order to determine whether or not they would be participating.

I began this study in 2012 with a comprehensive literature review at UCLA's Young Research Library and Arts Library, focusing on material concerning media representations—particularly cinematic ones—and cross-cultural perceptions of the U.S., as well as scholarly works discussing American cultural diplomacy efforts through internationally-disseminated films, both historical (e.g. the USIA) and contemporary (e.g. the ADS, precursor to the AFS). Following this extensive examination of the literature, I initiated the ethnographic portion of my research in the spring of 2013 (at the beginning of March). This portion of the study was conducted in person when possible and by phone, email, or Skype when not: it included interviews with AFS experts[78], organizers, and team members involved in prior/current showcases—such as those who had assembled films for the 2012 and 2013 programs, or who were doing so in 2014—in order to determine how and why particular films are chosen.

[78] Experts included distinguished professors in cinema studies, film industry professionals, as well as preeminent filmmakers.

During the summer of 2013—following my U.S.-based interviews—I traveled to Mexico, examining possible research sites and conducting preliminary inquiries in the city of Monterrey, where the AFS program was previously held in 2012. Though Nuevo Laredo and Piedras Negras were both also used as locations for the 2012 AFS, the program was employed in more extensive outreach in Monterrey, as members of the AFS worked with many groups and in several different areas during their time in that city. While there I developed numerous contacts—also conducting brief interviews, surveys, and observations—among former participants who had attended AFS events in the following places or as part of the following groups: the Monterrey International Film Festival and its staff; the Centro de las Artes[79]; the Escuela Adolfo Prieto – Taller de Experimentación Plástica[80]; the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales de Nuevo León[81]; the NGO Nacidos para Triunfar[82]; and the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León – Facultad de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano[83].

Unfortunately—as discussed earlier—I was unable to directly observe either the 2012 or the 2013 AFS film selection processes, specifically the assembly of the AFS 'short list' at USC and its review by the DOS in Washington D.C.: as part of the review, films are either confirmed (granting them a place in the upcoming showcase) or they are denied approval. Nevertheless, although I could not analyze these selections/evaluations in person—such as by sitting in on the meetings where the official rulings are made—I conducted individual interviews in March, April, May, and June of 2013 with DOS representatives (both in the U.S. and abroad) who are involved in making the final selections in order to establish the following: why certain films are approved

[79] A CONARTE (Nuevo León Council for Culture and the Arts) cultural center/theater.

[80] A training/development program for artists and members of the general public.

[81] A binational center.

[82] A local NGO that works specifically with current and former gang members in an attempt to reduce gang-related violence.

[83] A school within the larger university.

over others; why each is selected to be screened in a particular country—or for particular national/cultural groups and societal sectors—rather than elsewhere; what objectives inform these decisions; and how the U.S. (i.e. its citizens, policies, and activities) is represented in the sanctioned films.

During this period of individual interviews, the specific research questions that I addressed were: (1) How is U.S. society portrayed in the selected films, and do they reflect the AFS' stated goals for representing the U.S. abroad? (2) What are the aims or purposes in choosing these particular films and in sending them to the designated countries—and societal groups—where/for whom they are to be screened? (3) In what ways do program organizers think foreign participants have or will benefit from the AFS (i.e. from the screenings and workshops/ classes)? (4) What has the AFS' overseas reception been like before: positive, negative, or a combination of both?

Following my 2012-2013 fieldwork in the U.S. and Mexico, I maintained contact with my interlocutors and continued my research in Los Angeles from the end of 2013 through mid-2014. After the official announcement of the 2014 AFS films and host nations in January/ February, I began the second part of my doctoral fieldwork in Monterrey, Mexico during the summer of 2014: this lasted into the start 2015, with a final month of data analysis/write-up taking place in the U.S. This second portion of the study involved confidential questionnaires, personal and group interviews, as well as participant observation, in order to investigate how the AFS events held in Mexico had been received or interpreted by local participants—these included students, people working in some capacity with the Mexican film industry (e.g. filmmakers), and local NGO members.

The questions which I addressed during this time consisted of the following: (1) How is U.S. society—as depicted by the AFS—perceived by the program's Mexican participants, and how do their views compare with the coordinators'/filmmakers' intentions? (2) How do participants feel that they benefit from the program, and will they implement what they have seen or learned? (3) Is the AFS received differently than its organizers expected? In other words, does the program elicit more or less positive discussions regarding the U.S., and is it viewed as imperialistic or 'Westernizing'? (4) To what extent is the AFS received as a confirmation or disruption of existing perceptions?

This second portion of my fieldwork also included an in-depth ethnographic phase during which I conducted analyses of previous AFS participants' ongoing responses to the program, focusing in particular on those of local (ex-)gang members—specifically members of the NGO Nacidos para Triunfar—and filmmakers (with an emphasis on the former), as these two societal sectors were expressly targeted by the AFS[84]. As a more precise example of this research emphasis, I investigated whether/how the (ex-)gang members' NGO-related activities reflected their responses to the program as well as their (un)changed perceptions of the U.S., conducting one-on-one and group interviews; meeting with and shadowing both the NGO's organizers and its prior/current members[85]; as well as recording responses to the NGO's post-AFS activities (e.g. its educational, violence-prevention programs) in order to uncover the conversations being

[84] For instance, in 2012 the film *The Interrupters* was selected because it focused on gang-related violence/prevention, and the NGO Nacidos para Triunfar was a group for whom the film was screened and with whom classes were conducted since they work with current and former gang members to help prevent violence in Monterrey. The way to understand such targeting is that a diplomatic program like the AFS is in and of itself "the goal to be accomplished, together with the rationale that makes it thinkable, and the associated strategies and techniques...The relevant ensemble of population must be bounded, linked to a defined problem, and that problem linked again to an account of the mechanisms through which the problem can be addressed, the design for measures for evaluation and so on" (Li 2007:279). Hence for the 2012 AFS in Monterrey, Mexico, Nacidos para Triunfar was a 'bounded population' which could be linked to the 'defined problem' of gang violence and its prevention. In a similar vein, the Monterrey International Film Festival was also included by the AFS so as to create a connection—which was lacking at the time—between the Consulate and the local filmmaking community.

[85] The Director of the NGO invited me to do so in order to see changes being implemented following their experience with the AFS, as well as to observe what aspects had remained the same.

generated. During this part of the study I also conducted follow-up interviews with some my previous interlocutors to examine what they believe are the direct/ongoing reactions to the AFS (both in Mexico and elsewhere).

Overall, the total duration of this study was approximately three years, as I began my research in 2012; the initial interviews/preliminary surveys with those involved in the AFS—people at USC, the DOS, and former Mexican participants—took place during the spring/ summer of 2013; and the reception examination, follow-up interviews, and ethnographic analysis of AFS participants' ongoing response(s) took place throughout 2014 and into the beginning of 2015. Individual interviews with my interlocutors lasted thirty minutes to one hour each—as did the group interviews—and were conducted privately, such as in areas away from people who were not participating in the study or in separate rooms where the interviews could not be overheard. The confidential questionnaires were given to participants individually to be filled out independently, taking roughly twenty minutes or less to complete. In addition, all of the information/consent forms and surveys/questionnaires were "administered in the respondents' native language, and...[were] linguistically equivalent" (Gudykunst 2002:170).

III. Data Analysis

Depending on the type and quantity of information collected, this study's data were qualitatively analyzed in one or more of the following ways: (1) based on the question and/or topic they were associated with—such as imperialism, reception, or diplomacy; (2) based on the particular group(s) involved (e.g. AFS participants); and (3) based on the time period/event during which the information was collected (e.g. violence-prevention activities). In order to code/categorize the data, emergent themes and patterns—such as recurrent terms, interactions, behaviors, and ideas—were identified in my surveys/questionnaires, fieldnotes, and interview

transcripts. Within these categories, participants' responses/actions were subdivided to capture similarities and differences between them, to illustrate related themes/patterns, and to indicate their importance relative to one another. These categories, themes/patterns, and the connections between them were then employed to explain the study's findings.

IV. Methodological Advantages & Limitations

Though the benefits of ethnographic, practice-based anthropological studies of media have already been addressed, there is yet another advantage to this methodological approach: conducting media ethnographies enables scholars to be more reflexive and/or aware of their own effect(s) on participants. However, they must remain wary, as such mindfulness "does not 'immunize' the researcher from the complex political nature of any form of intervention and reconstruction" (Griffiths 1996:54) that they engage in with regard to what they are studying. In addition, this study's specific focus on the AFS' reception in Mexico provided it with two significant advantages: first, selecting one country in which to analyze the AFS' reception promoted feasibility, as there can be over twenty host nations selected for one year's showcase. Secondly, Mexico was initially chosen as one of the AFS' host countries in 2012, thus (despite the AFS' recent development) it has the benefit of a lengthier history—an approximately two-year relationship—with this diplomatic program as compared to many other nations, allowing for a more extensive analysis of the ongoing/long-term responses to the AFS' implementation.

Nevertheless, there are some other methodological limitations or potential drawbacks which this study faced, besides those described with regard to studying up and the application of ethnographic techniques to media research. For instance, while the use of memories as data in reception studies can be beneficial—akin to looking at diaries, journals, or scrapbooks—it can also be problematic, since each "[excavation] of response rests on the declared recollections of

individuals" (Staiger 2005:186). Such personal memories are not static, and though they may be based in real experiences, "memory is active, with details being altered" (Staiger 2005:191) over time. As a result, in studying audience receptions and interpretations of media—such as those of the AFS participants—one must "be alert to how people string together personal event memories" (Staiger 2005:192) and how they may change them consciously or unconsciously.

In addition, conducting surveys or posing specific questions during interviews can entail certain methodological issues, since the context(s) in which these occur—or even the researchers themselves—may influence what memories, beliefs, knowledge, and/or opinions are drawn on by one's interlocutors/participants (Morris 2005). Consequently, scholars of reception must attempt to "distinguish between self-generated memories of media versus solicitation of memories or specific programs. Differences between these two requests may produce diverse sorts of responses" (Staiger 2005:195), thereby affecting the data that is generated and the overall conclusions which are drawn.

This phenomenon is exemplified by the 'response effects' which have previously been observed with public opinion polls, where "[many] respondents react to the context in which a question is asked, to the order in which alternative responses are presented, and to wholly nonsubstantive and trivial alterations in questions" (Zaller 1992:32). One must therefore avoid automatically "[assuming] that expressed opinions reflect underlying beliefs and values" (Morris 2005:245), since the structure, order, and/or wording of one's inquiries—as well as the current environment in which people are being asked these questions (including their personal moods)—may affect their responses.

Furthermore, audience reception is a difficult topic to study because "it involves the task of making public that which is, at some level, 'private': the 'effects' of a text on a consciousness,

on the thoughts, attitudes and beliefs of a viewer, listener or reader" (Tomlinson 1991:50). Thus in conducting ethnographic research on this particular subject, one cannot avoid putting people in the self-consciousness-inducing position of having to *publically* articulate their opinions, and of doing so in situations which may possibly involve asymmetrical power dynamics between the researchers and their participants (Tomlinson 1991).

I strove to overcome such limitations and potential problems in this study, not only by familiarizing myself with the activities and films that were to be discussed with my interlocutors (Østerud 2000)—both those in the U.S. and in Mexico—but also by using my surveys as "complementary methodological [tools], helping to provide rough and somewhat crude indications of the public's perceptions" (Morris 2005:245) which I then fleshed out through my interviews, participant observation, textual analyses, and socio-historical contextualization. Furthermore, I analyzed the data derived from my questionnaires *qualitatively*, to avoid the possible risk "that when moving between qualitative and quantitative methodology [one] may well be moving between different objects of study" (Rosengren 1996:39).

In addition, by contextualizing my research in terms of historical and contemporary U.S.-Mexico relations, this study recognizes the power inequalities which exist between these two societies—and, hence, to a certain degree between myself and my interlocutors—thereby better accounting for their communications, interactions, and perceptions of one another (Kim & Hubbard 2007). For instance, to analyze how the AFS' films have been received and perceived by program participants in Mexico, one must first understand "the origins, process, and current status of the cinema in [that country]" (Maciel 1999:199). It is essential to do so—particularly when looking at the reception of a diplomatic project like the AFS—because identifying "changes in awareness, perception and, ultimately, behavior is necessary to objectively evaluate

the effectiveness of communication (i.e. the outcomes or results)" (Macnamara 2004:322), and thus the potential implications for U.S.-Mexico relations.

To facilitate such contextualization and enhance my understanding of the assumptions/ images which are projected onto the AFS (i.e. onto its films and activities), I have asked myself the following questions throughout the course of this study: "[how] do the facts of history translate into self-images and predispositions for perceiving current events and problems" (Fisher 1997a:72) in Mexico—specifically in Monterrey—and in what form do the latter's previous experiences vis-à-vis the U.S. persist? What kinds of 'spin' are placed on these experiences by the Mexican government, media, or public, and what stance is taken towards them by the AFS' participants? In terms of participants' reactions to issues raised by the AFS, do such issues reflect the former's concerns, and what other topics do people associate with them? It is in asking these types of questions that researchers may uncover and better grasp cross-cultural beliefs/perceptions, as well as "discover the meanings of concepts within the cognitive systems of the members of the culture(s) being examined" (Gudykunst 2002:169).

Finally, in order to surmount the potential methodological issues of ethnographic research, my study also followed a multi-level, multi-method—or 'triangulation'—approach, using interviews; (participant) observations; surveys/questionnaires; examinations of previously published research; as well as textual analyses—of AFS films, publicity materials, official documents, etc.—to examine both the 'senders'/'communicators' and the 'recipients' of this diplomatic program (Schrøder 2007, Macnamara 2004, Gudykunst 2002, Jensen 1991). Moreover, the AFS' production and reception—including ongoing responses—were analyzed based on (1) affective components, or emotional reactions to AFS films/activities; (2) cognitive components, or beliefs/knowledge about the films/activities; and (3) conative components, or

‘behavioral intentions’ regarding the films/activities (Brislin 1981). Along with my cultural/ socio-historical contextualization, proceeding in this manner allowed me to interpret the AFS’ production—as well as how it is received and perceived—in a manner which has been championed by scholars of film/media, reception/audiences, and perception/communication: “with constant reference to context, both that of the media discourses in question and the broad social context of historical and psychoanalytic circumstances” (Jensen 1991:140).

CHAPTER 9

❖ Setting the (Research) Stage

I first contacted the AFS during the summer of 2012, entering into an email/phone dialogue with its USC-based Project Administrator about my intended dissertation research and ideas for analyzing the program. Despite her initial interest, in January 2013—after months of discussing my proposed study with the DOS—she informed me that due to the program's busy schedule and the extensive access I would need, the DOS felt they could not grant my request to interview those involved and to conduct participant observation, since I would not be able to achieve (what they described as) a 'well-rounded understanding' of the AFS within their time constraints/logistical parameters. Impeded—but far from dissuaded—I continued to pursue my research by individually contacting various AFS experts and filmmakers, USC administrators, and DOS officials engaged in the project currently or previously, in order to interview them and find out more about the program. I began this process in the spring of 2013 and continued throughout the summer, using emails, cold-calls, and social media to reach out to anyone involved who was willing to speak with me.

As I began piecing together the manner in which the AFS program is assembled and implemented, I saw that how it was perceived on the receiving end was a crucially important yet seemingly ignored aspect of the program. The people involved with the AFS' organization whom I talked with—although not quite so much the program's team members, who are actually 'on the ground' in the various host countries—could easily tell me what the goals of the AFS were, but *not* necessarily what participants' immediate receptions and ongoing responses/reactions to it had been (although many were quick to assert their own opinions on the matter). Accordingly, the disconnect between these two 'faces' of the AFS—the production/implementation

component and the reception/perception aspect—as well as *why* people respond to the program in the ways that they do, and how their specific contexts *influence* these receptions/perceptions, thus became the primary foci of my study.

❖ Organizing the American Film Showcase: the Processes of Film Selection & Approval

I. Information from the DOS

The DOS had made it clear that they were working under a hectic schedule and had little or no time for my questions. Nonetheless, I attempted to interview—or, at the very least, to speak with—the Head of the Cultural Programs Division at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, who functions as the contact for the AFS on the DOS' side of the USC-DOS partnership. While I did not hear back from the Head of the Division herself, I received an email reply from a woman (henceforth to be known as Ms. Arnold[86]) in the Bureau's Office of Public Affairs and Strategic Communication, explaining that she had been asked to help me due to the fact that the Cultural Programs Division is quite small with many of its officers frequently traveling abroad. During our exchange, Ms. Arnold briefly addressed several of the questions I was interested in having answered: she described how and why particular films are confirmed or finalized by the DOS for the showcase, noting that each of the selected films must: (1) illustrate an array of viewpoints; (2) demonstrate 'high artistic quality'; (3) address diverse contemporary social issues; and lastly, (4) reflect the type of creativity (ostensibly) intrinsic to/made possible by a 'democratic society'.

Ms. Arnold also discussed the overall purpose or objective of the U.S. government in implementing this particular diplomacy program, which, she stated, was to bring (often award-winning) independent American narrative and documentary films to international audiences,

[86] The names which are employed in this chapter and the next two (Chapters 10 and 11) are all pseudonyms, as my interlocutors wished to remain anonymous.

thereby offering insight regarding life and 'culture' in the U.S., as well as in relation to issues affecting democratic societies. However, her answers to some of my other questions were much more in line with the DOS' earlier rebuff. For example, in terms of how foreign participants have benefited or will benefit from the AFS and what the program's reception has previously been like overseas, I was told to look at the blogs and videos posted on the AFS' official website (something which I had already done on multiple occasions), as these documented a variety of the filmmakers' individual travels/experiences as part of the program. Interestingly, it was an attachment that she sent me—presumably as a way of putting a stop to my queries—which proved to be the most beneficial for my research: Ms. Arnold had sent me the original request for grant proposals that had been published in the Federal Registry in April 2011.

Described as a 'cooperative agreement' between the DOS and an unspecified (non-profit) partner organization, the request documents in detail the AFS' selection process, implementation of the program, and subsequent follow-ups to be conducted, making it an invaluable source of data for my research—especially in light of the DOS' lack of assistance with regard to my pursuit of interviews with higher-ranking officials. Originally titled "American Film Showcase—Contemporary Voices in Documentary and Fiction Film", the AFS exists under the auspices of the 1961 Fulbright-Hayes Act, the purpose of which was to enhance mutual understanding and to strengthen ties/relations between American society and those of other countries. The AFS was thus conceived (initially) as a two-year public/cultural diplomacy program[87]; specifically, it was devised as a way of disseminating American films—both fiction and documentary—to roughly twenty-five countries around the world each year, showcasing the films and their filmmakers at

[87] The AFS program was originally envisioned as having a September 2011 start date and a January 2013 completion date, but it was the intention of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Division to renew the program for two more years with USC as its partnering organization, and then to open the grant up once more for general competition. However, this renewal and future re-opening are dependent on the program's success and its government funding (as of the end of 2014/start of 2015, it appeared to be flourishing).

U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and other post-supported/organized events like film festivals, as well as at binational centers, universities, and similar venues.

The professed intent is to give overseas audiences access to U.S. independent films that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to see, thereby illustrating (in broad terms) 'American' views on current events/issues and the role of filmmaking in sparking dialogues on problems/potential solutions, while also exposing the U.S. filmmakers involved to different cultural lifeways abroad. In conjunction with this public presentation of films, the grant request describes how participating filmmakers and film experts are expected not only to attend the screenings but also to hold lectures, workshops, and master classes; as well as to participate in additional outreach activities (e.g. interviews, media appearances), the topics of which include new media, digital technology training, cinematography, funding, cutting-edge animation techniques, and marketing/distribution. While the audience specified by the DOS is intended to comprise younger, underserved individuals—such as high school and university students—it also includes film professionals, NGOs and their members, festival goers, and activists. Follow-up programming was anticipated as well, such as return visits by participating film experts/ filmmakers—and potentially more comprehensive programs—or even trips to the U.S. by participants (e.g. having foreign filmmakers come present their work).

The partnering organization to the DOS is required to identify an assortment of American films—particularly documentaries—which provide a broad overview of U.S. society and the best that American independent cinema has to offer. In other words, they are expected to (1) be of excellent quality; (2) take different perspectives based on gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, etc.; (3) address a variety of topical issues/themes such as immigration, human rights, education, or the environment; and (4) illustrate the creative possibilities which are

available in an ‘open/free democracy’. Specifically, these films are supposed to be ‘balanced’ (i.e. non-political) in their views of American life, and must be selected in a way that takes into consideration possible socio-historical, political, and/or cultural sensitivities. They are also expected to fall into cinematic categories which facilitate differentiation among them, such as ‘biography’, ‘history/social documentary’, and ‘ethnography’. Following this film selection—a process devised by the partnering organization—the DOS’ Educational and Cultural Affairs Division must review and approve (or reject) the films that have been nominated, as well as endorse (or discount) any recommendations which may have been made by the selection panel.

According to the original grant request, the primary focus is on documentaries—over half of the selected films are required to be of this genre—since the DOS feels that they (1) exemplify the significance of free speech (e.g. inspiring public dialogue, thereby prompting change); and (2) that they can inspire more critical discussions of topical, often difficult issues (e.g. violence). Fictional movies and animated shorts are also included—enabling more flexible programming and potentially increasing audience interest, depending on the venue—however they must be connected to the selected documentaries thematically. The films and workshops/classes are then inserted into program models—or ‘modules’—which are created jointly by the partnering organization, the Educational and Cultural Affairs Division, as well as the Public Affairs Sections at participating posts (e.g. U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad), in order to ensure that events/activities are appropriate or suitable for each site.

The aforementioned film experts who participate in the AFS are chosen specifically by the partnering organization. They must be professionals or credentialed specialists—at least twenty-one years of age—who are knowledgeable/experienced with regard to independent filmmaking and documentary; cognizant of contemporary global issues, especially ones relevant

to U.S. society; and familiar with their own movie—that is, whichever AFS film they are traveling with—as well as with the program's other cinematic features[88]. Likewise, monitoring and evaluation of the AFS' outcome(s) falls to the partnering organization—such as by conducting surveys about participants' satisfaction, learning, and any behavioral or institutional change(s)—and each of the program's overseas events must be reported immediately afterwards to the DOS. Follow-up, however, is organized not only by the partnering organization but also by the DOS' Educational and Cultural Affairs Division, as well as by participating U.S. posts.

In general, the partnering organization (currently USC) is expected to have substantial knowledge of/experience with the following: conducting international exchanges; independent cinema (e.g. documentary); as well as film distribution, promotion, and exhibition, not only with regard to American motion pictures but also vis-à-vis global cinema (as indeed USC's School of Cinematic Arts has). As a whole, the AFS program involves close collaboration/consultation among the partnering organization, the Educational and Cultural Affairs Division, as well as participating posts' Public Affairs Sections. Nevertheless, the DOS (1) retains final authorization of the selected films/filmmakers; (2) determines which countries will participate in the program —commonly regions where it is most crucial for the DOS to foster mutual understanding and garner support for U.S. foreign policies; and (3) has final approval over all of the AFS' various arrangements, activities, and events.

[88] For example, one of my interlocutors (Mr. Elliot) has a degree in film and has had a long career in documentary filmmaking (including production, editing, and directing). He even worked for the USIA making documentaries—such as ones on urban planning/renewal, labor and race, as well as a slightly propagandistic film on communism and its negative aspects—which were only available to be shown abroad at U.S. Embassies. Mr. Elliot spoke of the USIA as an antecedent to programs like the ADS and the AFS—both of which he has previously been/continues to be involved with as an expert—specifically in terms of its goal of trying to spread knowledge about the U.S. abroad. He noted that AFS experts—unlike the filmmakers—are generally there to speak in broader terms about U.S. filmmaking and the production business, answering questions audiences may have about these.

II. The AFS & (Rare) DOS Interviews: Organizing & Participating

One of my initial interviews regarding the AFS took place in early 2013 with a prominent figure from among the AFS' various organizers, whom I shall call Mr. Adams. I began by inquiring as to how Mr. Adams had come to be a part of the AFS, learning that it was in fact the DOS which had come across the proposal for the AFS and then brought it to USC, thinking it a good fit for the university's cinema school; USC's School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) then applied for a DOS grant in order to conduct the program[89]. At that time, Mr. Adams was already involved in organizing a film series at USC—he was selecting and reserving documentaries for on-campus screenings—thus he possessed the skills and knowledge needed for the AFS[90]. Mr. Adams explained to me that he was therefore an obvious choice for organizing the AFS, and that he was excited to be a member of the program's staff given his enjoyment of traveling, his interest in international cinema, and his experience abroad, as well as his previous participation in exchange programs and involvement with the DOS[91].

Mr. Morris was another significant organizer/expert for the AFS whom I was able to interview. Akin to Mr. Adams, Mr. Morris' background as a scholar of documentary film at USC was an important reason for his participation in the AFS, specifically as one of three Principal Investigators for the program. According to Mr. Morris, this trio is made up of practitioners (i.e. filmmakers, administrators) and theorists (i.e. academics), a combination that is replicated by the AFS teams which travel abroad. This 'dream team', as he called it, works collectively to make

[89] One of my other interlocutors—Mr. Morris—confirmed this as well, noting that the program was based on the previous three-year-long American Documentary Showcase, and was brought to USC's attention by the school's affiliates in Washington D.C. when it was opened to new grantees under the revised name 'American Film Showcase'.

[90] This combination of having a film-related skillset, documentary experience, proximity (to USC), as well as deeper knowledge of cultural issues and/or life in other countries was something that several of my interlocutors touched upon in explaining their selection as AFS experts. For instance, one of them (Ms. Davis) had substantial experience working abroad as a consultant—specifically with regard to the use of media for social change—and had taught classes on documentary filmmaking for many years when she was asked to participate.

[91] He had previously received a DOS grant allowing him to bring international film students to USC for the summer.

decisions regarding the AFS. Mr. Morris explained that he had felt prepared to participate in the program as a result of his background with contemporary documentaries—such as being a jury member at festivals—and due to his extensive international travels; moreover, he found it 'right up his alley' given his passion for contemporary documentary work.

Another four of my interlocutors—Ms. Cole, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Jones, and Ms. Phillips—had previously participated in the American Documentary Showcase (ADS) when they were asked to become involved in the AFS. Like Mr. Adams and Mr. Morris, Ms. Cole was eager to participate: her job involves working with international filmmakers and finding documentaries from around the world to screen on public television, and although she already travels a great deal as part of her employment, she thought that undertaking the role of expert for the AFS was an excellent opportunity to use media as a form of cultural diplomacy, showing American documentaries to people worldwide as a way of promoting U.S. diplomatic efforts abroad. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Jones both not only had experience with the ADS, but also have backgrounds in filmmaking: Mr. Jones, for instance, has made several documentary films, many of which were screened in Ecuador as part of the ADS[92].

With regard to Mr. Roberts, he was already acquainted with those at USC who made the decision to undertake the AFS, and he was both willing and able to help them develop the program based on his prior work with the ADS; it was, as he described it, a 'perfect storm'. Personally, since Mr. Roberts is not a U.S.-born citizen, he was very proud to have been involved with the ADS and later the AFS: he felt like he himself was a living cultural exchange project, so it seemed perfectly natural for him to participate in these two programs, addressing questions about cultural similarities and differences as (he asserted) national barriers seem to

[92] When the ADS morphed into the AFS, Mr. Jones was asked to continue with the program as an expert. One of his films was even picked for the first year's AFS showcase, but unfortunately he was unable to travel with it and said that he was unsure where it had been sent.

increasingly be breaking down. Mr. Roberts wanted to show the world the respect that the U.S. government and American society have for others; the simultaneous freedom and constraint which exist in the U.S. with regard to artistic efforts (e.g. the limits that the commercial marketplace puts on cinematic production); and how the internet can be employed as a means of free expression for filmmakers—though with risks in certain countries.

Ms. Phillips likewise found her involvement in the ADS[93]—and subsequently the AFS—to be an important endeavor, since as a (self-identified) Latina woman she often found her representation of the U.S. to be surprising for program participants in foreign nations. As such, Ms. Phillips felt that she was there to break the stereotypes which people have about Americans, not just in terms of films or filmmaking but also in terms of who Americans are socially/ culturally and politically. In both Burma and Bosnia, for instance, Ms. Phillips noted that participants came up to her and said they had expected white male filmmakers to be those presenting; they did not expect any females, and especially not a Latina. Yet the programs were so successful that Ms. Phillips was actually invited back to one of the countries—not as part of the ADS or AFS, but through the Embassy itself in Burma—to do a month-long production workshop where students produced short documentary films of their own. Like Mr. Roberts, Ms. Phillips also felt that her involvement was really about building relationships: in other words, U.S. filmmakers creating and supporting amicable/professional relations with the people they meet in other countries[94]. She herself has maintained contact through email and periodic visits,

[93] Ms. Phillips was originally approached by someone from the International Documentary Association—which was one of the partner organizations involved in the ADS—who was familiar with her work as a documentary filmmaker and wanted to include one of her films in the showcase. Ms. Phillips traveled as a filmmaker for the ADS over a period of three years and now travels as an expert for the AFS, which approached her after the ADS transformed into the AFS and USC assumed responsibility.

[94] Ms. Phillips conducted a similar workshop in Paraguay through the Embassy there and under the auspices of the DOS.

developing friendships and/or mentorships with the filmmakers and students she has encountered as a part of these cultural exchanges[95].

Ms. Zwick—who has similarly served as an expert for the AFS—had previous experience with regard to film festivals—both international and domestic, including working as a programmer—and her academic background (as a scholar of documentary and new media) fit well with the goals of the program as described by the AFS' organizers[96]. Moreover, Ms. Zwick had traveled, lived, and taught in the region (Asia) and the specific country (China) where the program wanted to send her: such familiarity therefore made her an asset to the 2012 showcase which was held in China. Although (as Ms. Zwick hastened to say) she is not a specialist of Asia —she considers herself an Americanist—her work in documentary and new/transmedia made her more 'exportable'.

Akin to the experts discussed previously, Ms. Zwick had both personal and professional reasons for agreeing to participate in the AFS: her late mentor had inspired her to do more work internationally, and she felt that the program was a way of both continuing to do so while simultaneously furthering her mentor's previous international communications endeavors. She said that she enjoys this type of work, especially the initial preparation process; the learning which occurs once she has arrived in a new location; and the challenge of overcoming her own preconceptions by really listening to people in foreign countries in order to understand what they want, as well as to facilitate communication. To Ms. Zwick, the AFS seemed like an opportunity to learn a great deal and to share ideas, to 'give back' as an academic, and to act as a facilitator of dialogues vis-à-vis civil society issues. Thus overall, these experts—including Ms. Zwick, Mr.

[95] One example of this ongoing communication is how Ms. Phillips stays in touch with a woman from Colombia, emailing back and forth with her about the latter's work (which is on YouTube) as well as giving her feedback/advice. Ms. Phillips has also helped some of the filmmakers she has met to have their work shown in the U.S.

[96] These goals include the DOS' objectives—laid out in the aforementioned grant proposal for the AFS—as well as those of the program coordinators at USC, the latter of which are discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

Jones, Ms. Phillips, Ms. Cole, Mr. Morris, Mr. Roberts, and Mr. Adams—were already well-prepared for their AFS positions.

According to Mr. Adams and Mr. Morris, the way in which the showcases themselves are put together begins with a selection committee—generally composed of AFS staff (specifically SCA affiliates)—whose members spend the year compiling an enormous list of recent documentaries, one which comprises movies that they have seen at festivals or which have been screened at USC, and often includes films based on recommendations from SCA faculty or from the AFS' other collaborators (i.e. the International Documentary Association and Film Independent)[97]. As Mr. Morris stated, these films are not selected based on their aesthetic merits alone: while they should be of high quality, the films also need to have a sense of 'universality'—that is, some measure of international relevance/resonance[98]—and they must be the products of filmmakers with 'something to say' who are also willing to travel.

Mr. Adams further explained that the committee's list is then whittled down from hundreds of films to approximately sixty recommendations or so, including whichever of these that the committee members feel are the most interesting motion pictures of the year: they then assemble to discuss each of the films and to pare this reduced list down even more, to about thirty movies[99]. Mr. Morris observed that throughout this entire process, the AFS committee

[97] Mr. Jones explained that the committee asks for recommendations of documentary and narrative films that would be suitable for/worthy of the program. His criteria are to pick those which he thinks are 'stand-outs' of high quality (in terms of skill, craft, and subject matter); which best represent the U.S. (whether critical of it or not); and which might have global appeal. As a filmmaker and part-time curator/programmer, he sees numerous documentary films—and films in general—throughout the year, and can thus bring insight to the selection process. The goal, Mr. Jones asserted, is for the AFS filmmakers, experts, and team members to act as a 'Cultural Peace Corps', akin to the American jazz musicians who were sent abroad in the 1950s.

[98] One example that Mr. Morris gave was of sending films about the electric car to China, a nation currently dealing with the 'explosion of car culture' and increasing air pollution.

[99] Ms. Davis described how as one of the AFS' experts she had been asked during the program's first and second years to provide a list of films that she thought would be appropriate, and while many films did not make the final cut (oftentimes, she said, those which have gained some notoriety are selected), several of her recommendations did appear. Like Mr. Jones, Ms. Davis' criteria include how well-made the films are; whether they have a specific point of view; and if they depict the diversity of U.S. society —as well as topical or important issues—in order to present unique perspectives of the nation and its people.

members, organizers, and principal investigators are all in close contact with the DOS, calling their partners/associates who work at the latter on a regular basis in order to discuss the various ins and outs of the program.

Following the aforementioned assembly, the committee's list of thirty films is submitted to the DOS where officials watch them—and may occasionally add some for consideration—eventually recommending a final list of movies to be deployed. Mr. Adams noted that while both documentary and narrative/fiction films are included, the *majority* tend to be documentaries since the academic and/or professional backgrounds of many of the AFS organizers and experts are in documentary filmmaking. Nevertheless, these fictional features—just like the AFS' documentaries—are chosen based on outside recommendations, what films were screened at recent festivals, etc. Overall, in selecting films for the showcase, Mr. Adams and Mr. Morris both noted that the committee is *not* looking for films which might be difficult to screen abroad due to government censorship or other issues. The AFS' organizers do not want to disseminate anything that could be offensive—by being overly sexual, violent, or profane—and instead looks for cinematic stories with positive messages, or ones reflecting a particularly relevant social issue that could translate well abroad.

They thus have 'programs'—the aforementioned 'modules'—in other words, three to four thematic groups that may overlap somewhat and into which they try to fit these films, such as 'youth empowerment', 'human rights', and 'disability'. Following the approval of a final list of films, the DOS sends out requests to U.S. posts worldwide (e.g. Consulates or Embassies), asking for their preferences in terms of films and modules. Specifically, the DOS inquires as to how various diplomatic institutions could use the AFS films/modules—if they can at all—such as in a festival, as part of a professional workshop, or for an academic screening (e.g. at a

university, high school, etc.). Mr. Morris asserted that those involved in the AFS at USC make no decisions at this point in the process: the DOS itself sends these announcements to all of its posts, and if any of them are interested they can indicate that they would like to take part in the program[100]; the AFS organizers at USC must simply wait until they are informed as to which countries will be participating.

Consequently, participating U.S. posts make their choices using the list of films and thematic modules sent to the different nations where they are located—but only a selection of the total films/modules are actually proposed to these overseas posts by the DOS. According to Ms. Lopez—a DOS official and informal 'film expert' at her particular post with substantial experience using film screenings/discussions for diplomatic purposes (e.g. to present different sides on issues such as immigration)—the DOS notifies U.S. diplomatic posts via government cables which are transmitted well in advance.

As Ms. Burton (another of my DOS interlocutors) explained, what happens at this point is that once the notifications are sent out to worldwide U.S. Embassies/Consulates, the latter must put together an application or proposal. This submission is supposed to request a specific film (or films), explaining its (or their) suitability in relation to the particular locale—as well as in achieving the 'mission goals' of the individual post (such as reducing violence or enhancing border security)[101]—and suggesting various activities or events that would be organized and conducted by the post as part of its participation in the AFS[102].

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[100] Mr. Morris noted that due to the fact that those involved in the AFS at USC are kept mostly in the dark about the DOS' procedures, they are really not sure what the DOS' true priorities are in terms of cultural diplomacy. However, he also mentioned that the years following the program's initial one had been more transparent, and he conceded that the DOS' opaqueness was likely due to how the organization functions in general when it has private citizens (like those at USC) as partners.

[101] According to Ms. Gutiérrez—one of my DOS interlocutors, who worked closely with Ms. Burton during the AFS showcase in Monterrey, Mexico—the post's strategic goals were in line with the Mérida Initiative (labeled 'Plan Mexico' by its critics), an agreement between the governments of the U.S., Mexico, and several other Central American countries aimed at combatting transnational organized crime; narcotics trafficking; and money laundering: the central objectives are to strengthen communities and focus on at-risk youth. Consequently, the AFS' screenings, workshops/classes, and other events (e.g. panel discussions,

By way of clarification, Ms. Burton pointed to the close fit between *The Interrupters* (2011)—a film about both gang-related violence and its prevention in Chicago—and the cartel-related violence/deterrence efforts in Mexico. Since the DOS is always trying to find ways to address these types of social issues—which will vary depending on the specific context[103]—using films to illustrate that the U.S. government/American society face similar difficulties and are also striving to overcome them can help inspire discussions; feelings of shared interests or experiences; and greater bilateral cooperation[104]. Accordingly, when Ms. Burton and her colleagues—including Ms. Gutiérrez and Ms. Lopez—were examining the AFS' cinematic offerings and came across *The Interrupters*, they thought it was a powerful story which Mexican audiences could relate to, addressing a sensitive and difficult/complex subject (gang violence) in a way that would persuade people to confer cross-culturally regarding the best practices for resolving this problem both in Mexico and the U.S.

Ms. Burton asserted that DOS posts are therefore interested in participating in the AFS because the program's films provide a means of visually demonstrating social problems and lead more naturally into conversations, opening up dialogues in a way that few government programs

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Q&As) involved collaborators like local NGOs that work with ex-gang members and at-risk youth (e.g. Nacidos para Triunfar), as well as university students who were enrolled in social work programs.

[102] Ms. Gutiérrez corroborated this, explaining how posts must send a template regarding what they plan to do—in terms of activities/events—if they receive their particular (desired) films, and what their expected budgets will be. What was most important for the post in Monterrey with regard to the showcase, Ms. Gutiérrez asserted, was to put the film (*The Interrupters*) in the Monterrey International Film Festival, which took place in August 2012: this was because it was a first-time event for the post, which had not previously participated in the Festival.

[103] For instance, the filmmaker sent to Laos in 2013 screened his documentary on physical and mental disability—*Lives Worth Living* (2011)—and met with Lao activists for the disabled who related to similar concerns as those presented in the film, such as having "little access to buildings, jobs, transportation, etc." (Neudel 2013:19).

[104] This was exactly what Ms. Gutiérrez found to be the case with *The Interrupters* in Mexico: audience reactions were very positive, she noted, as people could relate the work being done by NGOs in Monterrey to the efforts of CeaseFire in Chicago vis-à-vis the reduction of gang-related violence. The social work students at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León were also inspired by what they saw and by the discussions following the screenings, since these revealed to them not only the idea that the U.S. and Mexico share similar problems, but that they themselves could make a difference and the ways in which they might be able to do so (i.e. possible solutions). Moreover, Ms. Gutiérrez noted that Ms. Cole's workshop/class for local producers was especially rewarding for the participants—and, hence, beneficial for promoting cross-cultural ties—as the latter do not normally receive many visitors, especially ones with the types of suggestions and film connections which Ms. Cole has.

or speeches can achieve. Ms. Phillips confirmed this, noting how the goal is to show people a deeper and 'more human' image of American society: in other words, that the U.S. is not a one-dimensional entity; that its government is not perfect; and that it endures many of the same social, cultural, and political issues encountered in other countries[105]. In addition, the program's activities can be targeted to specific audiences based on their needs/interests, as well as those of the post itself[106]. For example, Ms. Burton indicated that in Mexico there had been two target audiences: the local film communities[107], as well as those involved with crime/violence and its prevention (including at risk youth, former/current gang members, NGOs, and local officials).

The lack of strong connections with local filmmakers and cinematic communities was a primary reason for focusing on the former[108], as was the significant deficiency of funding for

[105] Following in a similar vein as Ms. Phillips, Ms. Davis explained that films selected for the AFS are often somewhat critical of the U.S., with the goal of conveying the complexity of contemporary problems regarding food, energy, the environment, etc.: in other words, portraying the reality of life in the U.S.—since it is often idealized in foreign countries based on hyper-violent/ sexual mainstream media images—and trying to find solutions to these issues. She also noted that such objectives were not necessarily new ideas, as they were underlying goals of earlier programs like the USIA; however the latter (unlike the AFS) were much more propagandistic.

[106] Ms. Phillips noted that as an expert with the AFS she usually conducts workshops and presentations, often on a specific topic concerning documentary filmmaking. She might also present herself and show clips of her own work, discussing what it is like to be a female, Latina documentary filmmaker in the U.S. Though Ms. Phillips observed that the posts tend to select experts/ filmmakers who are the best fit for their anticipated audiences—for example, she was once sent to Colombia where it was thought participants could relate to her because she is Latina and speaks Spanish—she takes it upon herself to ask in advance who the people are that she will be presenting to; what their level of filmmaking is (if any); and what they want to learn/what they need. For instance, Colombia has a well-supported group of independent filmmakers, but they were interested in learning more about types of community outreach, such as how to incorporate their films into social movements or how to distribute their films within the broader community. Similarly in Bosnia, Ms. Phillips encountered a great deal of interest with regard to self-distribution, as there was a small yet strong filmmaking community, but one which had little access to any means of distribution.

[107] Ms. Burton further observed that having filmmakers and film industry professionals from the U.S. conduct the workshops/ master classes also functioned as a means of strengthening ties with these particular communities.

[108] Ms. Lopez informed me that due to her prior diplomatic work involving film—including partnering with the American Documentary Showcase, the AFS' predecessor—her participation in the AFS primarily entailed setting up contacts with local organizations that the program could work with and which reflected the latter's goals (e.g. the Monterrey International Film Festival, various youth programs). Though she herself did not choose *The Interrupters* for the AFS—nor did she determine the workshops/classes—her input on the film—as well as that of her contacts—contributed to its selection, as both she and the organizers of the Monterrey International Film Festival thought that it would be a good fit, one which would attract younger, possibly underserved audiences (e.g. students; past, current, or potential gang members; budding filmmakers). Ms. Lopez also shared programming ideas with Ms. Burton—based on her previous experiences—for the workshops/master classes that were conducted by the filmmakers and AFS experts.

creating films in places like Monterrey[109]. Having an AFS expert talk about resources like online distribution and how to make movies without a big budget was thus a way of connecting with these local groups, as well as of providing them with new filmmaking practices and ideas. Those currently or previously involved in violence and its prevention were focused on due to the fact that ending violence and building stronger communities is one of the four 'Pillars' of the Mérida Initiative, designed to reduce Mexico's drug-related violence and crime: areas of interest include Monterrey—site of the 2012 AFS program (along with the smaller border towns Piedras Negras and Nuevo Laredo)—as well as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez.

I was also informed that in coming up with their specific proposals and in deciding which particular audiences to focus on, U.S. posts frequently collaborate. Ms. Burton, for instance, talked with USAID at the American Embassy in Mexico City in order to learn who they were working with and what types of activities they were engaged in so that she could coordinate the USAID audiences with those of the AFS and create workshops, classes, or events accordingly. In addition to having input with regard to these activities, the Embassy also needed to give its approval before the application (including program plans and budget) could be sent to the DOS. After a proposal has been approved locally, it is then sent to the Washington D.C. branch of the DOS—specifically the Educational and Cultural Affairs division—where it undergoes review and final approval.

Once approved, the in-country portion of the AFS' implementation must be financed by the particular nation's public diplomacy funds as well as by the DOS: for Ms. Burton, this entailed applying to the American Embassy in Mexico City and to USAID for funding. There is also a great deal of involvement by local groups at this organizational level, both on the part of

[109] Mr. Elliot likewise noted the lack of funding/distribution for smaller documentary and feature films in South Korea, a problem which (he maintained) is experienced by filmmakers the world over.

the local staff working at U.S. Embassies and Consulates, as well as of local government officials, non-profits (e.g. Nacidos para Triunfar), and cultural centers (e.g. CONARTE): they help to coordinate the screenings, panel discussions, and other events.

Based on the posts' selections—and following the DOS' approval of their proposed activities (i.e. once a film *and* the suggested events/programming have been approved for a specific country)—the AFS organizers then try to schedule filmmakers and experts around each feature/module. However, this can be a complex process: as Mr. Roberts noted, sometimes a particular movie is at the heart of a trip—in other words, a filmmaker travels with their own film to a country where the AFS activities revolve around *that* film—and if the filmmaker has to pull out of the program at the last minute there may be a scramble to find a replacement, or the trip may be canceled entirely. On the other hand, sometimes there are several movies—a cluster—which are shown together, along with one main feature (i.e. the 'attraction'). These are often inserted into existing film festivals or are used to create a unique cinematic event sponsored by the U.S. diplomatic post in conjunction with local contributors.

The strategy, as explained by Mr. Adams, is to 'place' the films first—since the AFS wants each one to travel abroad, but may in fact have several trips occurring simultaneously—then once the organizers know what the program will be for a specific country, they can determine which experts would best fit with the film (based on the latter's schedules as well)[110]. In 2012, for instance, *The Interrupters* (2011) and its filmmaker were both sent to Monterrey: the cartel-related violence of that city, as well as the efforts to prevent it being performed there, were seen as being similar to the violence/violence prevention of the film's Chicago setting, and therefore as having some relevance to the Monterrey community. In addition, a television

[110] Ms. Cole confirmed this: she too traveled to Mexico, and though she was originally scheduled to go to Piedras Negras she ended up only attending the Monterrey-based events, as the AFS activities she was involved in made more sense in that location rather than elsewhere.

executive who had helped fund the film was paired with the filmmaker as an AFS expert to give a workshop/class on financing motion pictures, using *The Interrupters* as a case study.

In general, Mr. Adams and Mr. Morris both noted that these AFS experts are chosen in such a way as to bring together a diverse range of people who reflect a mix between academics and professional filmmakers (though some of the academics are filmmakers themselves). The former are normally selected from among the USC SCA faculty or from other universities with whom the AFS staff and/or SCA faculty already have contacts/relations or some form of experience (e.g. as colleagues). Half of the experts are therefore scholars[111] whose academic/ theoretical expertise is used by the AFS in classes abroad, including ones concerning the forms of documentary; the genre's evolution over time; and its functions/purposes in communities. The other half of this group of experts is made up of professional filmmakers, whose expertise and experience is employed by the AFS in workshops, such as ones regarding strategies for telling stories through film; how to edit one's cinematic product; how to use the camera; and more.

The AFS thus combines people with practical *and* theoretical experience into teams which are sent abroad, pairing them with a film/module that either aligns with their area of expertise or (on occasion) is based on who they will be working with overseas. For instance, if the AFS experts are supposed to be working with documentary-filmmaking students, the program's organizers will have a professor who specializes in this subject teach a class for them, but will *also* have a professional filmmaker interact with them in a more hands-on workshop where they can discuss—and possibly experiment with—different aspects of film production, lighting, camera set-up, and the like.

[111] Interestingly, Ms. Zwick felt that the program was much more focused on filmmakers, and that it included many more filmmakers than academics. Thus her role, she asserted, was more about being a 'context provider', setting up the larger context of the films, explaining the history of documentary, and acting as a support for the filmmaker(s) in public situations (e.g. as a Q&A mediator).

Mr. Roberts further explained that, for the most part, the diplomatic posts specifically tell the AFS experts and filmmakers what they need/want, normally informing the latter of (1) their potential audience's age range and how much they know about filmmaking or documentary films (e.g. what they have been exposed to cinematically); (2) the time constraints for the screenings, classes, panel discussions, and workshops; and (3) whether there is any thematic overlap between the movies being screened which could be worked into the experts'/filmmakers' activities[112]. Having received this information, Mr. Roberts said that one could design a class/ workshop in accordance with these traits, and thereby identify potential experts to teach/lead it.

Mr. Morris expanded on the DOS' involvement with the chosen experts, explaining that an orientation process occurs at USC after the selection of films and filmmakers—around the time when participating DOS posts are being made known (usually these posts and their host countries are announced at the end of January/the beginning of February[113] and are publicized online as well). This, Mr. Morris said, was the only time they could have open conversations—in person—with their DOS contacts, who come to talk with experts and filmmakers potentially going abroad[114]. Overall, Mr. Morris found that these officials do not really 'lay their cards on the table', even at the orientations, but he felt that this was just part of how the DOS functions.

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[112] Ms. Zwick noted, for example, that the U.S. post in China had helped her to frame her talks/lectures specifically for her Chinese audiences.

[113] In 2013, for instance, the AFS orientation took place on February 22nd and 23rd at USC's School of Cinematic Arts. While I was initially invited to attend the 2014 orientation by Mr. Morris, my attendance was precluded due to the fact that the coordinators never informed me of the date it was scheduled to occur. (Though Mr. Morris kindly let me know about a separate panel/presentation which took place at USC in April, it was neither directly related to my research nor was I able to attend due to scheduling conflicts.) This apparent setback was not as problematic as it might seem at first glance: (1) the DOS officials were already unlikely to speak openly with me—given the either guarded or nonexistent responses I received to all of my previous requests for interviews—even in the context of the AFS orientation (several of those involved with the program informed me of this as well); and (2) the AFS' organization in the U.S. prior to its deployment abroad was not the sole focus of my research, which emphasizes the program's local implementation and reception in Mexico—vis-à-vis cross-cultural relations/ communication—to a greater extent than its U.S.-based aspects.

[114] As described on the AFS' official website, the orientation is a time when all of the selected film experts and filmmakers (i.e. the 'film envoys') can come together with the AFS organizers—the on-the-ground AFS team members working at USC to coordinate the program; various DOS officials; and representatives from the other two collaborating organizations (i.e. Film Independent and the International Documentary Association). They introduce themselves, discuss the program—i.e. logistics,

CHAPTER 10

❖ Implementing the American Film Showcase Abroad

I. The Individual Experiences of Organizers, Officials, Team Members, & Experts

i. *Specific to Mexico*

Mr. Adams has participated in several AFS trips, including having traveled to Mexico in 2012 alongside *The Interrupters* (2011). During this particular expedition, he noted that the DOS was actively engaged due to the high security risks: this is not necessarily always the case, as the DOS was much less hands-on during Mr. Adams' journey to Cyprus. As a team member—rather than just an organizer—he felt that the AFS program was well-structured and very diverse, particularly with regard to his experience in Mexico, where the film was programmed into the Monterrey International Film Festival—giving it a much broader audience—as well as being screened for various community high schools; NGOs (e.g. Nacidos para Triunfar); and for university students specializing in communications and social work. Mr. Adams also spoke with members of NGOs who—many of them former gang members like in *The Interrupters*, which was being screened for them—were trying to prevent violence. He found the experience to be extremely affecting and very powerful, since he was engaging with people who had survived the violence and were offering personal testimonials from their own lives[115].

At the same time, he also found the experience to be an uplifting one, particularly when talking with the younger school children who seemed to be happy, normal adolescents. Seeing

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including scheduling, how pairings of films/countries are decided, the goals of the AFS, as well as other requirements—and to hear from previous experts/filmmakers about the latter's experiences with the AFS.

[115] Ms. Gutiérrez likewise noted a strong connection not only between local participants and the documentary—resulting from the shared violence/gang problems and potential solutions to these issues—but also with *The Interrupter*'s filmmaker and the AFS expert, making it a very constructive and rewarding experience for those involved. At the Monterrey International Film Festival in particular, she observed that the screening and Q&A were met with great interest and positive feedback by audience members (the Festival's staff were also quite pleased to have included the film). One reason for this, Ms. Gutiérrez believed, was that people do not generally have the opportunity to watch such non-Hollywood, independent films. The local media was also interested in the AFS program, and the filmmaker gave several interviews regarding it.

them made him realize to an even greater extent how important it was to spread *The Interrupters*' message, and thus to help prevent these students from making dangerous decisions: the AFS was offering him a crucial opportunity to engage with them. Similarly, in conversing with various Monterrey-based organizations which are trying to create change/prevent violence by promoting activities to occupy people's time (e.g. sports, music, theater), or by creating additional communities through which to structure their lives—other than spending time with gang members—Mr. Adams learned a great deal. He was apprised, for instance, of their struggles to obtain government/community funding, as well as of their anger at the local, national, and international media for overemphasizing the cartel-related violence rather than reporting on more positive aspects (i.e. the efforts which are currently underway to address it).

Taken as a whole, Mr. Adams felt that the AFS had helped these participants to see the commonalities between their situations and those of people living in American society, specifically by making them more aware of the fact that the violent problems they experience are *not* unique to Mexico, but can be found in the U.S. as well. This not only makes the issue appear more universal, he asserted, but also allows them to see Americans in circumstances similar to theirs and to learn new ways of responding to violence or of tackling their own problems. In particular, he found that Mexican audiences had very positive responses to the AFS screenings of *The Interrupters*, as they not only appreciated the film but also found it inspirational to see how people (i.e. the individuals featured in the movie) were willing to be so courageous, putting themselves in dangerous situations which could result in physical aggression or otherwise jeopardize their safety.

While Mr. Adams felt that *The Interrupters* was unique in terms of being a very accessible/emotionally engaging form of cinema verité—i.e. following people's lives in real

time—which audiences strongly responded to, he thought that *all* of the films selected by the AFS each year are just as significant because they tackle difficult issues and have inspirational themes[116] (though ones addressing more challenging topics, like AIDS or homosexuality, are often too difficult to take abroad due to cultural sensitivities). Mr. Adams further asserted that these films not only benefit foreign participants by reflecting the universality of certain issues and providing ideas for new ways of handling difficult situations—as he had witnessed vis-à-vis *The Interrupters*—but also because their accompanying workshops/classes can be beneficial in more practical, hands-on ways. During one of his other AFS trips, for instance, Mr. Adams had conducted in-depth story/production workshops with students where he helped them make short films. He found this to be an effective way of teaching them how to represent their ideas, how to depict stories from their cultures/communities, and how to collaborate with one another.

Moreover, Mr. Adams thought that such interactions could have a lasting impact for the following reasons: (1) he had helped the students develop stories to tell about their *own* communities; (2) he was able to stay in contact with them after the program ended; and (3) he believed that the students would continue *independently* to try and tell stories about their communities[117]. Mr. Adams thus felt that the AFS was constructive on a variety of levels: first, because communities need to generate both their own filmmakers/narratives, and the program gives people the feeling or inspiration that they *can* tell their own stories, even if they do so just for themselves and not for a broader audience. Secondly, he observed, the AFS shows films—particularly documentaries—that raise awareness vis-à-vis contemporary social problems, a type

[116] Ms. Cole likewise thought that each year's list of AFS films resonates on a strongly emotional level, especially by bringing up topical issues which could inspire discussions (e.g. progress, morality, youth). She also found the yearly film lists to be quite diverse, noting that they include serious movies as well as more 'fun' ones like *Inocente* (2012) and *Don't Stop Believin': Everyman's Journey* (2012).

[117] However, these workshops comprised a much smaller group of people than are generally seen with the AFS programs, allowing for greater intimacy than normal.

of consciousness which Mr. Adams believed could instill long-term impressions for communities worldwide. Yet in terms of the U.S.' image abroad, Mr. Adams also noted that by merely showing one film—or even just a few of them—the AFS program offers only a very narrow perspective on topics related to the U.S. He was therefore unsure as to how much this diplomatic endeavor could actually change international views of American society.

Like Mr. Adams, Ms. Cole also traveled to Mexico as part of the 2012 AFS program; however, her experience was somewhat different than his in that she participated as an expert on the program's team instead of as an organizer/coordinating team member. Specifically, Ms. Cole conducted a cinematic workshop for students in Monterrey on movie financing/funding sources, film development, pre-production, distribution, and transmedia: it consisted of two six-hour sessions—what she referred to as 'cram courses' for film students, aspiring filmmakers, and more experienced independent filmmakers.

The way in which this particular workshop came about was that the U.S. Consulate—working with the AFS' organizers as well as art schools in Monterrey—wanted someone to talk to students about independent film. Ms. Cole therefore proposed these two 'mini-classes': one for more entry-level students and a second for more advanced or professional students who had made films before, where the latter could discuss their own projects (including documentaries, animation, fictional movies, experimental ones, etc.). However, Ms. Cole also ensured that the information which she presented remained fairly general, so that it would still be applicable to/ relevant for *all* of her participants. Once the idea was approved she was able to design the classes/workshops herself, and they took place over the course of two days.

What facilitated the creation and implementation of these workshops/classes was that before the AFS program commenced in Monterrey, Ms. Cole, the filmmaker who created *The*

Interrupters, the AFS organizers, and the U.S. Consulate had collectively discussed the general composition of their audiences. Ms. Cole's was more academically-/professionally-oriented, while the filmmaker had a broader and somewhat more diverse audience both in Monterrey—such as at the Monterrey Film Festival, which included cineastes in addition to the general public—and when he took the film to Piedras Negras and Nuevo Laredo, where he screened the film for and talked with NGOs as well as local community members.

One of the most encouraging aspects of Ms. Cole's experience was the positive response that both her teaching and the overall program itself received. For instance, she had invited the AFS filmmaker to attend her second workshop/class in order to do a case study of his documentary: the students not only acquired substantial information regarding the filmmaking process, but also engaged in an in-depth discussion of the physical danger that the filmmaker was in while filming. Moreover, the students responded positively to the personable manner in which Ms. Cole conducted her workshops/classes, and she said that they sat in rapt fascination upon hearing about both Ms. Cole's and the filmmaker's experiences.

Though she was not certain whether the students came away with a sense of the AFS as being a U.S. diplomatic effort, Ms. Cole still felt that they had gained a great deal from the experience—as well as from the opportunity to meet herself and the filmmaker. Her reasons for believing this were as follows: she thought (1) the activities/events were an excellent supplement to the knowledge which the students had previously received in the classroom; (2) the AFS gave them the chance to meet with as well as to be inspired/encouraged by filmmakers from around the world; and (3) they were able to make the acquaintance of several professionals in the American film industry who might be able to help them in the future.

Ms. Cole highly recommended the AFS program and hoped it would continue beyond the grant's initial period, but she nevertheless feared that foreign publics might negatively perceive it as a 'great white American hope'; that is to say, as a program telling them about 'how great Americans are', which she asserted was *not* the AFS' intention. Like Mr. Adams, Ms. Cole also noted the importance of the AFS as a two-way dialogue or exchange, where experts/filmmakers do not simply 'teach' those who participate in the program, but also engage with their audiences —such as by trying to find out what people in Monterrey are doing to prevent gang violence rather than just talking about the efforts taking place in Chicago[118]. This type of program needs more time, she concluded, since having only a few years is not nearly enough in which to develop the kinds of relationships that the AFS (and, hence, the DOS) wants to build, or to track the differences which the program might be able make in participants' lives—such as by changing negative stereotypes or drawing attention to the parallels between societies (e.g. violence, as well as its prevention, in the cities of Chicago and Monterrey).

Mr. Shaw was another AFS team member who had traveled to Mexico as part of the program's delegation; specifically, he was involved in screening and discussing the film *The Interrupters*, as well as holding filmmaking-related workshops/classes in several cities in Northern Mexico—Monterrey, Piedras Negras, and Nuevo Laredo—where gang and cartel violence has escalated in recent years. Akin to my other AFS interlocutors, Mr. Shaw was excited and eager to participate in the program: while initially surprised that such a diplomatic endeavor existed—one which presents candid images of the U.S. to other countries, rather than

[118] Mr. Elliot similarly commented on how he had met with young filmmakers in South Korea who were trying to educate people and generate social change. He also mentioned that this tied in to one of the program's goals, which was to help people with regard to critical thinking: in other words, to help them look at issues that are occurring in their countries, to show them ways in which they can address these and/or become active participants in trying to create social change, such as by making documentary films. Mr. Elliot saw this as 'leading by example'—especially in regions where there are fewer freedoms, such as the freedom of speech; in other words, showing people that they can generate change using the films and the experiences of the AFS team members as an example.

what he called a ‘Pollyanna’ depiction of American life—Mr. Shaw thought it was a wonderful idea, and one which he could genuinely support.

Although Mr. Shaw described it as a fantastic experience, one which stimulated some very engaging conversations with a variety of people (from students to ex-gang members), based on his account there were still certain aspects which he felt could have made the program—and, hence, its cross-cultural engagements—more effective. For instance, Mr. Shaw felt that increasingly open dialogues could have emerged in smaller/more personal settings, rather than at large public screenings such as those which were held in university and junior-high classes or at expansive forums like the Monterrey International Film Festival. As confirmation of this belief, he noted that the screenings and discussions which took place at smaller venues—including churches—or for smaller groups—such as the members of local NGOs—led to what he described as ‘real’ discussions rather than just typical Q&As. Yet he also conceded that there was substantial value in presenting the film to a greater number of people and thereby exposing them to its messages.

In addition, Mr. Shaw was struck by the level of concern which he encountered regarding violence, even in wealthier areas like the suburb of San Pedro Garza García in Monterrey. There were places where he and the other AFS team members could not go—including during the day—or where instead of traveling by car on the highway in order to reach their destinations, they had to fly as a result of the high level of violence. Moreover, Mr. Shaw was distressed by the fear and helplessness which participants expressed vis-à-vis this issue: they seemed, he observed, to feel fairly powerless in addressing the cartel and gang-related violence/murders. Nonetheless, many of the students at the university he visited—the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, or UANL—explained that it was because of their experiences with the violence in their own

communities that they had decided to go into such fields as sociology and social work, as a means of doing something about this problem.

In general, Mr. Shaw noted that at all of these screenings, classes, and discussions he did not feel as though he had to be an 'ambassador' for the U.S. government: rather, he could speak openly about the film, about violence in America, and about his own individual perceptions of living in the U.S. Mr. Shaw was also not reluctant to admonish the U.S.' role in this particular situation, given that it is a key market for drugs coming from Mexico and one of the main providers of weaponry to the latter, especially from border-state gun shops. Above all, he found the screenings to be especially poignant when they were held for ex-gang members as well as for those currently working with local gangs to reduce violence, since the situation in Mexico closely paralleled the efforts being made in Chicago. Mr. Shaw observed that the youths who attended these screenings had been through many hardships, and yet they had still 'come out the other end': he said that they spoke movingly about how various NGOs—such as Nacidos para Triunfar in Monterrey—had helped them leave gang life behind and find meaning in their lives.

Other screenings which were held for those working to resolve the violence issue engendered long discussions after the film was shown—particularly regarding what people in the audience were dealing with/their own experiences—as well as questions for Mr. Shaw vis-à-vis his personal thoughts on violence in America and on making films about it, both in the U.S. and in other countries[119]. Regrettably, Mr. Shaw noted that the film students and film professionals whom he and Ms. Cole worked with in Monterrey—as part of master classes and workshops—did *not* see themselves as documentary filmmakers; he believed this was due to a lack of

[119] As Mr. Shaw described in an article for the periodical *Milenio*, though he was not completely familiar with the situation in Mexico he felt that it was quite important—even necessary—for a local filmmaker to record the story of the violence and danger (Lemus 2012, Salmerón 2012). Mr. Shaw further stated that whether or not film can change the world, he believed—and had seen evidence—that cinema can cause people to think, to change their minds, and that this in and of itself could lead to transformations (Lemus 2012).

opportunities and funding resources for making documentaries, leaving the city's documentary-film community somewhat underdeveloped as compared to those seen in the U.S.[120]

Beyond Monterrey—in Nuevo Laredo and Piedras Negras—Mr. Shaw witnessed the hallmarks of decline due to violence: graffiti, boarded-up buildings, and a skyrocketing murder rate (which was not even reported in local news, as the press had been 'muzzled' or scared into silence). While he was certainly interested in using *The Interrupters* as a way to help reduce the violence and to generate discussions or possible solutions, Mr. Shaw found it difficult to have meaningful conversations with some of the AFS participants in these locations, like those audiences which were composed entirely of middle school students. Nevertheless, he found that even such young adolescents could relate to this serious topic, identifying correlations between their own world and that of the film; many, he noted, were very surprised that such violence actually occurs in American cities like Chicago (including those who had relatives living there).

While Mr. Shaw's audience members seemed to find it somewhat comforting that these problems and struggles are shared between the two societies, in their comments he observed many articulating the idea that as bad as the violence is in Chicago, it is far worse in Mexico; Mr. Shaw was even asked to come back and make a documentary on this issue in Mexico[121]. Interestingly, he found that Hollywood was in large part responsible for the growth in Mexican 'gang culture', especially through the success of films like *The Godfather* (1972) which make such a lifestyle seem alluring: this was something that gang members back in Chicago had mentioned as well in terms of what first attracted them to this particular way of life. Overall, Mr. Shaw was impressed by the similarities between the two situations and by the courageous efforts

[120] Lack of opportunities/options was also how Mr. Shaw described the descent of youths into gang life, both in Mexico and in the U.S. (Salmerón 2012).

[121] He declined, as he felt it would be better for someone who was actually from the country/region to make such a film (Salmerón 2012).

of people in Monterrey to address the situation, and he was pleased at how well *The Interrupters* resonated in Mexico with such a variety of distinct audiences (Salmerón 2012).

Ms. Burton was also involved in the AFS' implementation in Mexico, however as a DOS official she did not have as much contact with the participants as Mr. Adams, Ms. Cole, and Mr. Shaw did[122]. This is because she was primarily in attendance at the Monterrey International Film Festival and at a discussion panel which was held at the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales de Nuevo León (a binational center in Monterrey). Moreover, when the organization contracted by USC conducted surveys immediately following the AFS' events—asking what participants had enjoyed, what they had learned, and how they now felt about the U.S.[123]—she and the other DOS officials left, so that people's responses would not be influenced in some way by their presence. From what she understood, Ms. Burton said that most of the comments were concerned with how experiences in Chicago and Monterrey were similar and/or different, while many questions were posed regarding how people enmeshed in criminal activities can change or reform, as well as how one can promote such transformation through one's own work.

Ms. Burton felt that for the most part, the participants in the AFS program were motivated to think locally in terms of how the movies they saw—as well as the events, classes, or workshops they experienced—pertain to their own lives. In Mexico, she said, this could be seen with regard to how former gang members and people who are working with previous/ current gang members were inspired by *The Interrupters*, especially by the 'characters' with whom they could easily identify. They were stimulated by the idea of turning their own lives or

[122] Ms. Gutiérrez and Ms. Lopez were both in a similar position as Ms. Burton in this regard.

[123] Interestingly, although Ms. Burton could recall these surveys being conducted, and while many of my other interlocutors were aware that there was going to be an attempt at 'follow-up' after the AFS events, no one knew what the results of said follow-up had been, nor was I able to obtain any information about them—including what organization had been contracted to conduct them—from any of my DOS and USC contacts.

those of others around, of helping gang members to reform, and of working with their local communities to assist others (e.g. preventing violence, extricating youths from gangs).

ii. *Farther Afield*[124]

Though she was not part of the AFS program which took place in Mexico, Ms. Phillips underwent a similar experience with *The Interrupters* in Colombia, where the film was also screened: she found that participants were incredibly moved by the film, that they felt like they could relate to the situation. Though some had heard about gangs in the U.S., they had never before seen images like those in the film, nor were they aware of the work being done to combat such violence; in fact, many had not even realized that these kinds of issues occur in the U.S. Yet she found the reactions to cultural diplomacy programs like the AFS and ADS to be somewhat mixed. While in Paraguay, for example, Ms. Phillips gave a master class, showing a film, lecturing, and then engaging in a Q&A with the audience: during the concluding discussion, a woman asked her why she was *really* there and what the American government's agenda was in having her talk to them; furthermore, Ms. Phillips noted that (at least initially) people were hesitant, distant, and suspicious in several of the countries to which she had traveled[125].

However by the end of her AFS classes and presentations, Ms. Phillips observed that the majority of the time her participants had begun to let their guard down: they came to realize that the experts/filmmakers were not propagandists but in fact were speaking freely, and that they were there to represent American artists/artistic endeavors rather than a U.S. government agenda. In Colombia, for instance, many of Ms. Phillips' participants were eagerly involved from the

[124] Though he has yet to participate in an AFS expedition, Mr. Jones previously traveled to Ecuador with his films as part of the ADS, teaching a master class, holding interviews, and doing Q&As in multiple cities. He found the experience very positive, with enthusiastic/appreciative responses from his audiences and strong turnouts at both the screenings and the class that he taught.

[125] Mr. Elliot likewise discussed how in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan—to which he traveled as part of the ADS—people were much more suspicious as a result of the socio-historical and cultural context (i.e. these areas were formerly under the influence of the Soviet Union).

start and became inspired almost immediately. One clear illustration of this transpired when she conducted a presentation about making and using films for social change: a group of Colombian ladies who had been working on promoting women's rights informed her that she had prompted them to think about what they could be doing with communication media to further their cause, not just in terms of long-form cinema but by using other methods such as cellphones.

What Ms. Phillips found especially valuable was how the AFS participants learned not only about documentary and independent cinema—which she herself lectured on—but also about fiction movies and working with larger budgets or with studios/networks, thereby receiving a more comprehensive understanding of *all* sides of the filmmaking world. Moreover, Ms. Phillips opined that programs like the ADS and AFS are important ways of opening up people's views of documentary in particular, from seeing it only in the 'traditional' way as a type of formal news piece to thinking about how they can use it to record their personal experiences from their *own* unique perspectives. In other words, Ms. Phillips felt that such programs show people that there are not only numerous methods for *making* films, but also a multitude of *appearances* which these films—like a documentary—can have.

Accompanied by the aforementioned Mr. Adams, both Mr. Morris and Mr. Roberts had also traveled to Cyprus for a week-long AFS workshop with novice filmmakers and filmmaking students (all in their twenties or thirties). Specifically, a cluster of five to six films was nominated for a series of screenings—not part of any preexisting festival—which were held in conjunction with workshops/classes taught by Mr. Morris and Mr. Roberts, at the end of which the participants screened films that they themselves had crafted for the public. Though Mr. Morris both presented and led discussions on the films, he asserted that the program was really about helping to facilitate and deepen the students' skills, a sentiment with which Mr. Roberts

agreed: the latter contended that participants benefitted the most from learning how to make a film, overcoming a ‘steep learning curve’ and taking a ‘big leap forward’.

Mr. Morris was in charge of the more ‘theoretical’ side of the program—discussing the documentary genre in general terms and using the AFS films to illustrate his points—while Mr. Roberts handled the more ‘practical’ side of the program by getting participants started in making their own projects (about which the former would later give them feedback). Mr. Morris explained that at the beginning of the week he showed films to the participants, giving a lecture on documentaries and their unique features while also leading discussions about the issues presented in the films. What he found—and which he told me he would not have predicted—was that the films were incredibly (and surprisingly) impactful for his audience. For example, *Undefeated* (2011)—which is about U.S. football—ended up being very moving for the people he worked with in Cyprus—both male and female, even without any prior experience in regard to the sport—and they discussed it at great length.

As a result of this unexpected discovery, Mr. Morris declared that he came to believe that art and film can possess a somewhat ‘universal’ quality, touching audiences in unanticipated ways and transcending cultural barriers. Likewise, the film *Rebirth* (2011)—about survivors of the 9/11 events—dealt with themes which the audience members in Cyprus could relate to, such as loss, sadness, and suffering. According to Mr. Roberts this was an extremely affecting film, which led to what Mr. Morris called a very ‘real’ conversation between their participants and the filmmaker (via Skype) regarding the latter’s motivations and the movie’s content.

Overall, Mr. Morris saw this as a wonderful AFS experience with absolutely no downside, one which he felt had been quite well-received. The participants, he claimed, saw the program as a great opportunity to put everything else aside and completely immerse themselves

in a filmmaking 'boot camp' experience, making their own films which were screened at the end of the week for the general public. In doing so, Mr. Morris asserted, they were able to end the program with a sense of accomplishment and to feel like professional filmmakers, having had what he called a 'USC film experience' that they would likely never have had otherwise. For that reason Mr. Morris' experience was overwhelmingly positive vis-à-vis the AFS' foreign reception, since he felt that the program's films/activities had generated substantial interest and helped inspire conversations about—as well as acknowledgement of—issues and topics which people might not otherwise have been encouraged to speak about publically or privately.

Mr. Morris was also pleasantly surprised by the previously-alluded-to receptiveness that participants expressed towards films which he thought seemed 'too American'—like *Undefeated* (2011). For him this indicated that it was possible for people to 'make the leap'; in other words, to see the universality of these films and hence that of the different cultural/national situations. The experience also caused Mr. Morris to realize, he said, that people abroad already knew a great deal about the issues raised in the AFS films (e.g. 9/11, football) due to the dissemination of American popular culture, such as through television and music[126]. Mr. Roberts, however—though deeming the trip quite positive as well—felt that some of their participants did not necessarily absorb what was being presented, as many had previously seen films akin to the AFS ones (like Michael Moore's documentaries) and thus had prior exposure; moreover, only one or

[126] Mr. Elliot, who traveled to South Korea, found that with the exception of big Hollywood films, most of the students at the schools where he spoke were not very familiar with smaller American art house, independent, and documentary films. Yet he felt that the subject matter of the films which were shown—such as *Revenge of the Electric Car* (2011)—had great resonance with his South Korean participants. (In addition, Mr. Elliot had previously gone to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with the ADS, where he found that foreign participants—including local filmmakers and the general public—were indeed able to relate to the twenty films which were screened, often as part of 'mini festivals'.) Mr. Elliot had also made a reel of film clips of his *own* documentaries, and this was received in different ways: some South Korean participants commented on the difficulty of being a documentarian professionally, while others expressed their desire to make such films and to attend film schools in the U.S.

two participants had tried to remain in touch with him, which he felt indicated less investment in both the program and the general experience[127].

The dissimilarities between Ms. Phillips' experiences; those of Mr. Morris and Mr. Roberts in Cyprus; as well as those of Mr. Adams, Ms. Cole, Mr. Shaw, and Ms. Burton in Mexico; illustrate how the implementation of the AFS is specific to a particular place, event, and audience: this makes the program very different in one location as opposed to another, depending on local needs or interests (as determined by the participating DOS posts). This phenomenon is even more apparent when examining Ms. Zwick's experience in China, where, she emphasized, *everyone*—including herself—was very cautious with regard to what they said or did. In her lectures, workshops, and roundtable discussions, for instance, Ms. Zwick noted that she had to completely avoid anything which might sound radical: rather, in order to forge dialogues with her AFS participants—who (living in a volatile area of China) appeared relatively fearful—Ms. Zwick needed to be inviting and not elitist, employing an inquisitive style while explicitly demonstrating respect.

In fact, Ms. Zwick found her on-the-ground experience in China to be quite distinct from what she was expecting based on the AFS' training: for example, over a period of nine days in China she engaged in only two events with the filmmakers (moderating and setting up some contacts). The majority of the time, personnel at the U.S. post employed her expertise as a scholar of new/transmedia, having her give multiple lectures and classes on this topic at several universities—to large audiences of students and faculty—as they thought it worked well with the needs of local communities in the area to which she had been sent[128]. This made her slightly

[127] As compared with his experience in Cyprus, Mr. Roberts found that participants from countries like El Salvador and Kazakhstan were much more interested in staying in contact with him.

[128] As Ms. Zwick observed during our interview, questions of new media are at the crux of civil society issues in China.

uncomfortable, since she felt the AFS had not trained her for this, and at some of her speaking engagements no DOS officials were even allowed to attend; moreover, though the Chinese government had cleared her to speak in a university setting, it did not do so for the government-sponsored film festival[129] which was being held.

Setting Ms. Zwick's experience even further apart was the fact that the DOS post in China arranged many clandestine meetings for her with supposedly 'dissident' filmmakers, scholars, and people involved in new media. This was partially due to the fact that the region to which she had been sent was especially prominent in civil society movements as well as in political (often pro-democracy) activities. Ms. Zwick felt that these were more 'unofficial' undertakings—despite being sanctioned by the DOS—as she was to a certain extent 'redeployed' by the post in China in somewhat different ways from what had originally been proposed. Nevertheless, she enjoyed being able to interact with those who attended the AFS film screenings (which were held at schools for smaller audiences) as well as her lectures/classes, workshops, and roundtables: she found the participants to be both engaged and inquisitive—though in a formal/careful way in the more public settings where they could not be sure as to who might be listening—as well as very taken with the film (which was about physical/mental disability), and interested in learning how they too might make such films.

In particular, Ms. Zwick found that the material on new media structures which she presented in her university lectures/classes resonated strongly with faculty and graduate students, as they said that these were of great interest throughout China and they saw them as a potential strategy which could be adapted in the Chinese context (especially with regard to civil society issues). Ms. Zwick concluded that her audience members seemed to like these new media ideas

[129] Ms. Zwick noted that there are two kinds of film festivals in China: (1) government sanctioned ones, like that which she attended (and found to be quite propagandistic); and (2) independent festivals where underground, radical, and/or pro-democracy films are shown.

because they were not militant but rather *inviting*, engendering dialogues and possibly acting as a 'work-around'—in other words, they are more feasible, unlike producing an expensive feature documentary[130]; they are sustainable in the long term; they deal with small issues in a big way; and they are designed to bring about discourse rather than to be antagonistic. Overall—despite the differences in their experiences (and notwithstanding the intensity of her own)—akin to my other interlocutors Ms. Zwick found her involvement in the AFS program to have been very exciting and valuable.

II. Objectives of the Program & Those Involved

According to Mr. Adams, the overarching objectives of the AFS film and activities selection/approval process in terms of representing the U.S. abroad—at least on USC's side of the program—has to do with helping communities around the world better understand the power of documentary cinema in relation to the possibility of telling stories from within their own societies. Even though the films which are selected for the showcase represent facets of American society that may be specific to the U.S., Mr. Adams explained to me that the work which can be achieved through this program is nevertheless important in terms of encouraging and mobilizing young filmmakers/their communities to tell stories *about* themselves as well as *for* themselves.

It was Mr. Adams' hope that the AFS would allow people to see American society's diversity, and would therefore enrich their understanding of various aspects of life in the U.S.; that it would facilitate recognition of the universality of certain struggles (e.g. violence and its prevention in both Monterrey and Chicago); and that the use of documentaries would help bring

[130] As Ms. Zwick observed, people in China who can make feature length documentaries tend to be those who are backed by the national government, and are often seen as part of political 'cadres'. Consequently, the underground documentary movement employs social and new media, and their cinematic products are on a much smaller scale.

people together through a sense of 'global identity'. What he personally hoped to achieve was predominantly the same as the program's goals, but also included a commitment to promoting foreign films in the U.S.—such as finding films abroad to screen at USC—as well as an interest in visiting places involved in contemporary political events in order to witness changes and garner better insights vis-à-vis international phenomena.

Mr. Shaw's understanding of the AFS' goals was quite similar to that of Mr. Adams: he said that the general desire was to have some type of impact on a topic of significance for a particular country/region, like the urban violence related to drugs and gangs in Northern Mexico. The film *The Interrupters* (2011), for example, offered an opportunity to work with local groups actively pursuing this issue and to do outreach in schools, thereby raising awareness of the context of violence in the U.S. and how Americans are trying to address it. One of the most important features of this objective, Mr. Shaw asserted, was to present the *reality* of the issues which the U.S. government and the American public are struggling to resolve, even if the films are not very flattering. Doing so, he contended, shows that the U.S. is a relatively free and open society with regard to acknowledging and displaying its problems publically. This candidness, Mr. Shaw observed, is seen as one of the nation's strengths, especially in countries where freedom of expression/the press is lacking. Such critical portrayals would thus be eye-opening, not only in terms of the difficulties being faced and the solutions being implemented in the U.S., but also with regard to the American government's more open/free attitude and its laws pertaining to the media and/or the press.

In contrast, Ms. Cole's description of the program's goals was slightly different from those of Mr. Adams and Mr. Shaw: she emphasized that the AFS' main objective is to promote cultural diplomacy via media by screening American films and by providing people with hands-

on experiences (such as making their own documentaries or talking to experts from the U.S.). Her view of the situation was that she and the other AFS experts were supposed to act as 'cultural emissaries' abroad—representing the U.S. government, American society, and the nation's film (particularly documentary) community—specifically by sharing their knowledge and experience with foreign publics. Yet Ms. Cole also asserted that this was a two-way process, wherein the AFS experts were themselves intended to gain something from the endeavor: traveling with the program was an opportunity for them to be exposed to different perspectives and to meet with people from around the world who are likewise involved in filmmaking.

Furthermore, as in her professional activities—she travels the globe in order to enlist and/or fund international filmmakers, as well as to raise the profile of her organization—Ms. Cole felt that the purpose of her role as an expert with the AFS was quite similar: in other words, to tell the world about the program, to help engender an international film community, and to give people resources should they be in need of any (including information, such as advice on cinematography or financing). During her trip to Mexico with the AFS, for instance, Ms. Cole found that limited distribution is a significant obstacle for many filmmakers since documentaries are not shown on television and rarely get theatrical releases; as a result, their creators are forced to rely primarily on festivals. In spite of this situation, Ms. Cole was able to give her program participants recommendations regarding ways in which they might be able to disseminate their films in other countries[131].

Akin to Mr. Adams, Ms. Cole thoroughly enjoyed traveling abroad, especially seeing 'how things work' in a foreign country, meeting new people, and finding ways to help them if possible. Mexico was one place with which she was not already familiar, and she therefore took

[131] Though Mr. Elliot likewise found that the filmmakers he met with had issues vis-à-vis funding/distribution, most were focused on their home market in South Korea rather than exporting to the U.S. or to the international marketplace.

advantage of the chance to take a trip there. Accordingly, for Ms. Cole this was not only a personal opportunity both to go to a nation she had not yet been to and to acquire new information from the AFS' cross-cultural exchange which she could incorporate into her own work/life, but also an occasion to give back to others in the form of knowledge (i.e. by sharing her expertise with them).

Unlike Ms. Cole—as well as Mr. Adams and Mr. Shaw—Mr. Morris accentuated the fact that there is no *single* agenda for the AFS program. He asserted that whether as organizers, experts, or team members, those involved go abroad simply as citizens and cultural envoys, who (though they may symbolize the country to a certain extent) are *not* representing any U.S. policies and thus do not have to feel like they need to explain anything. Rather, Mr. Morris insisted, they travel to other societies with an interest in listening, learning, interacting, and sharing. They are really trying to foster person-to-person dialogues/connections and to forge ongoing relationships or mentorships—such as between young filmmakers and more experienced ones—even as they are leading pedagogically-oriented workshops/classes.

While Mr. Morris admitted that these are labor-intensive goals—which will not necessarily be fulfilled in all cases—he still felt that such activities could be beneficial in finding out what individuals want to know and what they have to share, as well as in breaking down stereotypes/preconceptions (both those of people overseas and of the AFS affiliates who go abroad). Very often, he noted, those implementing the program end up learning much more than they themselves are actually imparting. Mr. Morris said that he personally appreciated the opportunities which the program has given him, such as being able to 'network' with a variety of filmmakers (including the renowned Les Blank); to blur the line between theory and practice; as well as to find out about new films which are being made.

Mr. Roberts reiterated and further elaborated on the points made by Mr. Morris, affirming the multi-layered nature of the AFS' objectives. One of the primary ones, he asserted, was to both teach *and* learn; in other words, for those creating, organizing, and realizing the program to learn as much as they teach and to be enriched to the same extent that they are trying to enrich others. What the AFS is trying to do, he said, is to offer a window into American cultural expression with an emphasis on the nation's diversity and U.S. society's ability/willingness to self-critique. Rather than reflecting the mainstream discourse emanating from commercial films, music, etc., the AFS, its activities, and the films which it showcases are strongly independent both attitudinally and thematically. Mr. Roberts therefore saw the AFS as a program designed to demonstrate the *heterogeneity* of American cultural output—particularly as expressed in independent documentaries—and the reduced amount of censorship/propaganda in the U.S.

Though he acknowledged that the program's overarching goals might be somewhat inclined towards 'winning hearts and minds', Mr. Roberts believed that it was more important to illustrate such concepts as freedom of speech, thereby empowering people to think/speak freely while also convincing them of their potential as filmmakers. In addition, he felt—as someone born in another country who now represents the U.S. as a type of 'cultural ambassador'—that such cultural exchange was part of his very being. This was a point he made with his foreign audiences as well (and which frequently grabbed their attention), since it further emphasizes American diversity. For his part, Mr. Roberts said that he enjoyed raising the visibility of film projects (including his own) with audiences who would not ordinarily get a chance to see them—or with whom he would not normally have the occasion to interact—as well as being able to create intercultural dialogues (such as between Turkish and Greek participants in Cyprus).

Compared to some of my preceding interlocutors' opinions and experiences, Ms. Burton, Ms. Lopez, and Ms. Gutiérrez were able to shed additional light on the specific goals of the *DOS* itself—and on those of its posts located in Mexico—with regard to participating in the AFS program. In terms of the broader DOS, Ms. Burton noted that the general objective was to employ American 'culture' and the arts (including films) as a means of communicating with foreign publics about U.S. society. Ms. Lopez and Ms. Gutiérrez likewise confirmed that the use of cinema as part of the DOS' public diplomacy efforts was intended as a way of sharing American 'cultural' and social values[132], in addition to facilitating mutual understanding between different countries (since misinterpretations/misperceptions may exist on *all* sides of a particular debate or issue).

In relation to her own post, Ms. Burton asserted that the primary diplomatic aim was to improve security on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, and involvement with the AFS could help contribute to that goal. For instance, screening and discussing *The Interrupters* (2011) revealed some of the difficulties faced in a city like Chicago[133], in particular by showing how the members of a non-profit organization were trying to reduce violence on the streets. This led to a dialogue about what the Chicago situation has in common with that in Monterrey, as well as how the two are different; what the impacts of violence and prevention programs are on youths; how programs like this begin and develop; as well as what efforts are currently being made and/or could be made in Mexico.

[132] According to Ms. Lopez and Ms. Gutiérrez, such values include respect for human rights and addressing abuses; taking responsibility and/or acting to do something about social issues (like violence); protecting journalists (e.g. from politicians' harassment or from being killed by organized crime); freedom of expression; as well as the necessity of fighting/struggling for what one wants (i.e. not giving up and chasing one's dreams). Ms. Gutiérrez commented that while such values might be seen as very 'American', they are simultaneously also quite 'Mexican': she felt that this encourages young people (especially at-risk youth) by showing them what they themselves can do to change their situations and that they are not alone—their troubles are in fact shared by others in the U.S.

[133] Ms. Burton observed that most participants had heard of Chicago, as there is a large Mexican population in that city.

The overall objective was thus to address a shared issue and—in doing so—to strengthen relationships with those who are also working on it in Mexico[134]. Ms. Burton said that the organizers hoped participants (both American and Mexican) would come away with the sense that these two societies face common challenges and can learn from each other regarding how to deal with such problems, thereby increasing support for mutual cooperation in this area. As Ms. Burton noted, in Mexico the U.S. is frequently seen as the place from which guns are arriving and to which drugs are departing, generating a less-than-positive view of/attitude toward the country's northern neighbor. However, if people take *both* sides into account—observing that the U.S. suffers from violence as well—then their perspectives may change and they may realize that American and Mexican societies (as well as their governments) will only be able to succeed by working together on these issues.

III. Benefitting (?) People & Diplomatic Relations

With regard to whether the AFS has already benefited or will possibly benefit diplomatic relations, Mr. Adams felt that the program demonstrates to the nations/societies where it travels that the U.S. government is interested in promoting collaborative initiatives within their communities: the AFS reflects this support through its events/activities, as well as by working with local organizations (such as NGOs and schools) in order to realize them. Moreover, he noted that the program tries to help people recount their *own* narratives through film: it encourages them—even in countries where they might be afraid to tell such stories, or where the national government does not support documentary filmmaking—by showing them that there *is* a way to make their stories known. Mr. Adams therefore believed that these types of initiatives

[134] Ms. Gutiérrez similarly asserted that by showing *real* problems with *real* solutions—rather than a 'fairy tale' about the U.S. (e.g. that it is a land of luxury where people shop all the time)—the program can help people in *both* countries better relate to and connect with one another. In particular, Ms. Gutiérrez felt that by screening independent films, especially documentaries, the AFS can reveal aspects of American society which foreign participants might not have been exposed to otherwise.

help to develop cross-cultural relationships among cinematic communities, as well as between the American government and foreign publics[135].

Ms. Cole likewise thought that the AFS program has potential in terms of benefiting diplomatic relations. Based on her own experience traveling to Mexico, for example, Ms. Cole realized that she was carrying 'a lot of baggage' with regard to her perceptions of Monterrey: in fact, she said that the discrepancy between what she had read/seen in the American media (including Monterrey as a 'narco-capital') and what she actually experienced while there was astounding[136]. For instance, although she was given security protocols to follow by the U.S. Consulate upon her arrival—a curfew, no public cellphone use, etc.—Ms. Cole (unlike Mr. Shaw, her travel companion) did not feel that the violence which had been so publicized in the U.S. was really present, since people were going to work as per usual and happy families with children abounded. Thus rather than being scared or feeling threatened, Ms. Cole enjoyed getting to know the diverse individuals she encountered and learning about their perspectives on current events in Mexico (such as the new President's election).

Ms. Cole observed that such an experience was very different from that which the U.S. media tends to present with regard to Monterrey in particular and Mexico in general: the media, she recognized, substantially influences Americans' images of others, just as it had influenced

[135] Ms. Davis also thought the AFS program had many potential benefits for diplomatic relations, as she believed that people's culture is a primary influence with regard to how they understand other societies: using media (i.e. films) to stimulate cross-cultural communication/conversation and to encourage people to think about their own ideas/beliefs might therefore help engender change by broadening people's understanding of one another through person-to-person interactions. Moreover, Ms. Davis saw the AFS (and other similar types of exchange programs) as attempting to address a two-sided problem: not just that people *abroad* often have misconceptions with regard to U.S. society, but that *Americans* often know little or nothing about societies around the world. By fostering a different kind of relationship with diverse foreign audiences, Ms. Davis felt that the AFS and programs like it could help expand understanding both at home and abroad, not only about the U.S. government and the American people, but also about filmmaking (e.g. the difficulties of finding funding, the passion/commitment needed to complete and distribute one's film).

[136] Mr. Jones likewise believed that it always helps for people to come into contact with actual Americans—rather than to simply read or hear about them—since having real people involved can present a different, often more positive image of the nation. Furthermore, Mr. Jones asserted that whenever the U.S. is shown/perceived in a better light this can only be of help to diplomatic relations, as it counters some of the negative conceptions which foreign publics may have. Yet he felt that while the AFS could positively benefit its participants and the U.S., precisely what the program's outcomes would be was difficult to determine.

her own. Accordingly, she began to realize how much Americans need a better—i.e. a more thorough/accurate—understanding of places like Monterrey, and that this would be one of her tasks as a 'cultural emissary'[137] of the AFS. It was not simply about taking her knowledge to Mexico but about bringing knowledge *back* as well, hence in terms of diplomatic relations she viewed the program as being for both foreign participants/recipients *and* those involved in its organization/implementation. In particular, Ms. Cole felt that the AFS gave the latter greater first-hand experience with the world as a whole, which they could then bring back to the U.S.—including, for example, her own altered impressions of Monterrey. She therefore felt that the AFS program has the potential to change how the U.S. is seen internationally, as well as how Americans themselves see the world.

Nevertheless, Ms. Cole did not think that a single film screening could necessarily 'change hearts and minds'[138]; it was only in the long-run that she believed this type of program could have some effect. She even suggested showing a series of films—rather than just one—over a number of weeks, in addition to proposing that the AFS go beyond simply matching films to locations based on topical similarities (e.g. violence/its prevention as seen in *The Interrupters* and in Monterrey). Yet Ms. Cole also conceded that a certain amount of synchronicity between

[137] Similarly, Mr. Elliot noted that in general, most of the people he met with—students (including film students), professors/faculty, filmmakers, etc.—were more familiar with the U.S. and with American films than people in the U.S. are with South Korea and its films, but that some of their ideas about the U.S., Americans, and documentary filmmaking were unrealistic.

[138] Mr. Elliot was of a slightly different mind, citing the recent *Samsara* (2011) as one instance in which a documentarian was able to create content that could be enlightening worldwide. In fact, he saw programs like the AFS and the ADS as having tremendous benefits for a variety of reasons: (1) they allow people around the world to interact with 'everyday' Americans, helping reduce glamorization of the U.S. abroad (such as through Hollywood celebrities) and offering a better sense of the nation's societal realities (e.g. its problems and issues); (2) they provide a way of disabusing film students and potential filmmakers of unrealistic ideas with regard to this type of career, providing such individuals with more information as well as aiding them in deciding if they really want to pursue it; and (3) having Americans go abroad and interact with people—shaking their hands, giving lectures, taking photos with them, etc.—can help show that the U.S. government and its citizens are not necessarily 'demons' (Mr. Elliot' terminological choice), thereby dispelling some of the negative beliefs which may be held about the U.S. Moreover, he asserted that while the AFS' reception(s) might be difficult to measure—and while it may not change diplomatic relations directly—the program is still important in that it is developing person-to-person relationships cross-culturally (such as how he still hears from students in South Korea via Facebook) which can affect individual lives—not only those of foreign participants but those of AFS experts and filmmakers as well—through the exchange of ideas and information.

the films/activities and communities' particular situations *is* important in terms of the AFS' relevance for and ability to relate to those it engages[139].

Following a similar train of thought as Mr. Adams and Ms. Cole, for Mr. Morris the program's importance in terms of U.S. diplomatic relations stemmed from the fact that those involved are neither 'selling' nor 'preaching' anything. Rather, they are traveling to different countries as part of the AFS in order to work with people as *collaborators*, and consequently the program's films/activities present an opportunity to engage with and generate relationships with others instead of propagandizing certain perspectives or policies. For instance, Mr. Morris has remained in contact with several former participants through Facebook, thereby maintaining the connections which were forged (just as Ms. Phillips and Ms. Cole have done as well).

Both Mr. Morris and Mr. Roberts also asserted that the AFS could potentially be of benefit for relations *within* a particular nation, such as between Turkish and Greek individuals in Cyprus[140]. For example, right next to where the program was held in Cyprus there were signs of the earlier conflict—including a barbed wire fence with soldiers driving nearby—and Mr. Morris observed that the Greeks and Turks did not seem to 'know each other' anymore, since neither group spoke the other's language yet both spoke English. However, when the AFS participants broke up into groups to do their film projects, Mr. Morris noted that despite ongoing antipathies there was still some crossover in their composition: several Turks and Greeks actually worked together. For Mr. Morris, this illustrated how film can reach across historical, political, social, or cultural boundaries and, as a result, how the AFS can facilitate relations on multiple levels.

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[139] For instance, the film *We Still Live Here: Âs Nutayuneân* (2010) about Native Americans was screened by AFS teams in Brazil and Bosnia-Herzegovina: audiences in the former could relate to the film's themes of indigenous issues (including linguistic/cultural survival) and historical colonialism, while those in the latter could identify with such topics as resentment over crimes committed against one's ancestors as well as social or linguistic issues/tensions that can arise in multi-ethnic societies (Makepeace 2012).

[140] Mr. Roberts noted, however, that while the pairing of Greek and Turkish AFS participants could be seen as the overcoming of current barriers—i.e. ones resulting from the prior conflict between these two groups—those who signed up for the program were already fairly open-minded people.

Furthermore, Mr. Roberts felt that the overall benefit of the program—not solely with regard to Cyprus—depends on what the experts, filmmakers, organizers, and participants all bring to it; in other words, their particular mindsets, beliefs, and prejudices. He maintained that the AFS has the potential to be a 'bias-breaking' experience, helping to destabilize the stereotypes people may have of others. In fact, of the many participants with whom he has worked, he noted that the majority came away excited and often surprised, saying things like 'I never thought/knew XYZ about the U.S.' For instance, participating in the AFS may expose people for the first time to the paradox of films which are critical of American society—including its race issues, the debates over same-sex marriage, etc.—being disseminated by the U.S. government itself. While they might already have experienced a movie which is critical of people in power/their actions, it is nevertheless the *government* which is sending the AFS filmmakers abroad and having them show these films—especially in nations with censorship, many audience members cannot believe that these movies were made, let alone allowed to be shown overseas.

This was something which Mr. Roberts believed could 'turn minds', yet he also insisted that while the potential impact of the AFS may seem substantial, follow-up is even more important, such as by having participating filmmakers make themselves available to participants via email or Facebook; having them encourage and engage with the latter; as well as having them help former/current participants with their own projects. It is these kinds of people-to-people interaction—which the AFS exemplifies—that Mr. Roberts found most effective in terms of communicating diplomatically with other societies: relations on a person-to-person level, he observed, were often much more successful in convincing foreign publics (i.e. 'resetting' hearts and minds) than trying to persuade them through formal/impersonal government channels and

campaigns. By establishing a friendship with someone locally, he asserted, that person becomes a cultural diplomat of sorts and has the potential to be a positive influence on their own social circle, and possibly the broader community. At the very least, Mr. Roberts believed that the AFS could offer people abroad considerable enjoyment, as well as a fresh view of the U.S. government and American society that would not be afforded to them otherwise.

Ms. Phillips' thoughts regarding the potential benefits of the AFS were very much in line with those of Mr. Roberts. Not only did she assert that the program is a crucial way of breaking down stereotypes about the U.S. government and American society, she also believed that it is a way of giving people a 'taste' of the nation's freedom of expression (e.g. free speech), something which is a privilege when one goes to countries like Burma. The U.S. filmmakers, for instance, did not need to ask for permission to make their films, as compared to the Burmese filmmakers who do. Ms. Phillips felt that participants could take heart in and inspiration from the courage of the AFS filmmakers who make movies which are critical of American society/government, thereby becoming inspired to tell their *own* stories in a similar fashion. In addition, by depicting various struggles in the U.S., how the nation is not perfect, as well as how there is both self-criticism and consciousness of these problems, a new side of the country can be revealed[141]. During her own travels, Ms. Phillips had found that participants particularly appreciated the self-criticism and how people are trying to work on/resolve issues in the U.S.: they were both surprised and impressed by these aspects.

Lastly, Ms. Phillips contended that programs such as the AFS allow individuals who have never before touched a camera to immerse themselves in filmmaking, or for those already interested to form cinematic communities as they come together and learn more about it. She

[141] Ms. Phillips noted that in general, Americans are not viewed abroad as being very 'cultural'—unlike the French or Spanish for example. Programs such as the AFS can thus enhance people's views of U.S. society as being about more than just money, work, and/or learning English: the showcase can reveal other facets, break down stereotypes, and deepen foreign understandings.

herself had seen this take place in countries like Burma—where it is difficult to connect or network—and in Paraguay—where participants formed a co-op. In fact, Ms. Phillips saw film as a 'universal language', one which could draw people together cross-culturally through their desire to use cinema—especially documentaries—as a way of bringing about change.

She therefore felt that the program allows filmmakers and those interested in film to *share* their passions, to hear about one another's obstacles and the solutions which are being attempted—thus exposing people to new ideas, new types of film, and new views of American and foreign filmmaking—as well as to learn more regarding each other's cultures/societies (thereby humanizing one another) and how they navigate these as filmmakers. Moreover, in relation to herself and the possibility of enhancing diplomatic ties—particularly cultural/public or 'people-to-people' diplomacy relations—Ms. Phillips felt that her participation in the ADS and the AFS have been revolutionary experiences, allowing her to go places and meet with people she never thought she would, often dispelling their notions of the 'American filmmaker' as being a white male.

Some of my interlocutors felt that it was still a bit too early in the AFS' ongoing development to begin considering questions regarding the consequences of the program's foreign engagements. Mr. Adams in particular noted that even now, the AFS' implementers are continuing to conduct follow-up in the various locations where the program has been deployed, since part of the AFS organizers'/DOS officials' primary goal is to obtain a *measurable* sense of this diplomatic endeavor's (potentially-lasting) reverberations among its participants—such as the conversations/dialogues which are being generated or maintained. Specifically, he asserted,

the project's coordinators are trying to obtain data and measure reactions to the AFS[142] by reconnecting with the local community organizers who were involved.

Similarly, Mr. Shaw thought that while carrying out such a diplomatic program would certainly not hurt cross-cultural relations, it was hard to know precisely what outcomes it might have. For instance, he noted that the screenings of *The Interrupters* which he had attended were generally at schools or with members of the general population: accordingly, these individuals were unlikely to have much influence on bilateral relations between the U.S. and Mexico (in other words, they were not showing the film to or holding discussions with policy-/decision-makers). Although Mr. Shaw believed those who participated in the AFS had enjoyed the program and were engaged by it, and while they may have left saying that they learned a great deal about the violence in Chicago, he was unsure as to what his different audiences had *really* taken away from the film and activities: based on what he had observed, for many of the participants it was not as though he was informing them of something completely new which they had never thought about/tried before. Mr. Shaw also feared that once the program ended—and he and the other AFS team members/experts had left—that the participants had 'moved on' as well, despite their substantial interest and engagement at the time.

Ms. Zwick and Mr. Morris (despite the latter's aforementioned positivity vis-à-vis the AFS) were of a similar mind, specifically in terms of the fact that they did not think one could really hypothesize or make generalizations about the outcomes of the AFS—such as any impacts due to the program's reception(s)—since the particulars of each event/activity (e.g. the time, place, audience) seemed to greatly affect people's responses. For example, the AFS' ability to engage participants might be stronger when it is implemented in one location for a longer period

[142] The AFS is employing an external company that utilizes surveys in order to conduct this follow-up process. (I was unable to learn the name of the company, despite various inquiries.)

of time—like it was in Cyprus—rather than when it is quickly moved from one place to the next or is simply included in a larger film festival where the audience may be less invested (such as the Monterrey International Film Festival). In the case of Cyprus, for example, the participants had all *applied* to be in the program and wanted to be there: many made sacrifices in order to participate (e.g. taking time off of work), seeing it as a rare opportunity both to be exposed to filmmaking/documentary film 'culture' and to have the experience of making a film themselves; as a result, Mr. Morris felt that he had really been able to engage with the participants.

Though Ms. Zwick felt likewise vis-à-vis hypothesizing/generalizing the AFS' outcomes, her reasoning was distinct in that she believed there was simply *no way* of assessing either how people were benefitting from their participation in the program, or what their responses to the AFS were. She argued that when in another country it is too difficult to know if one has gotten through to anyone, to know what they are thinking, and to understand their interpretation of what they have seen/experienced. Yet she still felt that the lectures, workshops, and roundtables she was involved in had afforded new possibilities to her Chinese participants. She asserted that it opened up a space where they could discuss approaches for using new media, as well as how the latter relates to social, political, and cultural issues; in short, it gave them the opportunity to engage in dialogues and address human rights issues, despite the high-stakes context. However, Ms. Zwick also thought that it was problematic and less-than-effective to put forward American models for how to utilize new/transmedia, as these did not necessarily fit with the epistemology of Chinese society.

She thus encouraged AFS team members to be more self-reflexive and open to their particular contexts. Some of the questions she was asked by her participants, for instance, were extremely context-specific, including why American journals only ever want them to be negative

about their national government; what misconceptions Americans hold regarding the Chinese; and what students in the U.S. think about Chinese films. Even prior training—like that which she received at the AFS orientation—Ms. Zwick contended, could impose an unexamined ideological privileging of the 'American standard', something which participants did not seem to appreciate as many people in China complained to her that Americans often visit just to tell them what they should do. Nevertheless—despite their (generally) U.S.-centric paradigms—she noted that the filmmakers with whom she traveled still seemed to come away with their 'minds blown', and although Facebook being blocked has made it difficult for Ms. Zwick to remain in contact with her AFS participants in China, she felt that whenever one can foster such cross-cultural communication it can have an enduring impact on people's lives. Consequently, as a whole she found it to be a positive learning experience for both sides—team members and participants alike—one which could *possibly* (though she was a bit doubtful) have constructive diplomatic results.

As can plainly be seen, for the most part all of my AFS interlocutors were unable to comment in any concrete way on the program's actual outcomes abroad: as both Mr. Morris and Ms. Cole stated (a sentiment which seemed to apply to the rest), they did not feel that they had a clear idea of the bigger picture—such as ongoing responses to the program or its possible influence—primarily because they had only been involved with a single trip as part of the AFS (if that). In addition, Ms. Cole informed me that she had not yet heard from the program's organizers about any official reports on the matter (including information from the outsourced follow-up surveys), and none of my other interlocutors had any knowledge of these either—this was despite the fact that *all* of them had been in agreement concerning the necessity of conducting such follow-ups with the participating communities, as well as the importance of performing long-term studies on reactions to the program and its potential impacts.

Nevertheless, Ms. Cole was one of the few who *did* attempt to convey some sense of the AFS' on-the-ground effects, though quite a bit of this was speculative since she was not certain as to whether her AFS participants had actually made the connection between the events/ activities they engaged in and the program itself (i.e. she was seen as more of a 'guest lecturer'). Yet while Ms. Cole was unsure as to whether or how the students she worked with in Mexico had incorporated what they learned through the program into their schoolwork and personal or professional lives, she still contended that one of the program's tangible diplomatic achievements—as well as evidence of its ongoing positive impact—was simply the fact that her former students wanted to stay in contact via Facebook. (She observed that as yet none had asked her for cinematic advice, suggestions, or references, but rather seemed to want to be friends.)

Interestingly, this same lack of definitive answers combined with somewhat-nebulous surmises regarding the AFS' actual outcomes was also prevalent among my DOS interlocutors. Ms. Burton, for example, contended that the program's possible benefits were manifold, both for participants and for diplomatic relations. With regard to the former, Ms. Burton noted that the AFS is an incredible opportunity for meeting and working with talented people in film on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, whether as part of hands-on workshops or screenings/panels. Furthermore, for participants this may be the first time they have the chance to meet a 'real' or 'regular' American; in other words, someone other than a U.S. government official, a person with whom they could identify/connect, and whose work resonates with them—possibly helping to change their views of American society in more positive ways.

Ms. Burton thus saw the AFS as having the potential to make *unspecified* differences in people's lives through its compelling films and its outreach to individuals like established/ aspiring filmmakers, as well as through the ideas/possible solutions it offers concerning how to

address—and hopefully resolve—contemporary social issues (i.e. showing them how Americans or the U.S. government have worked on these, and presenting them with tactics to try in their own work). However the biggest benefit, she asserted, was simply exposure to a side of the U.S., its people, and American society, with which they would otherwise not have come into contact or been aware. While this last point certainly seemed likely, Ms. Burton did not provide me with any clear-cut examples to support her statement, and I eventually came to the conclusion that I would need to uncover stronger evidence of the AFS' impacts (or lack thereof) myself during my own reception analysis.

Akin to Ms. Burton, Ms. Lopez and Ms. Gutiérrez likewise provided me with scant data but plenty of speculation. Ms. Lopez saw the AFS program as having the potential to reach out to those who might not normally see such films (due to their cost or to people's remote locations); she also asserted that cinema—particularly documentaries—can teach these audiences about other societies, novel ideas, and unfamiliar experiences, thereby offering them different opinions/ perspectives with which to shape or even remake their own. In a similar vein, Ms. Gutiérrez felt that this type of program has the potential to influence 'the narrative' with regard to foreign relations, such as by depicting the U.S. government as an entity which is helping to build people-to-people relations—facilitating networks not only between the U.S. and Mexican governments, but also among local NGOs, filmmakers, and the participants themselves—as well as strong/ resilient communities, not just as a faceless financier and military entity.

With regard to diplomatic relations, Ms. Burton similarly noted that the program gives 'participants' from the U.S.—that is, the AFS experts and team members—a greater appreciation for what is being done to address social issues internationally (as was indeed corroborated by several of my AFS interlocutors), like the violence prevention efforts in Monterrey. Over the

long term, she believed that the AFS could help improve bilateral relationships and people-to-people ties[143], while in the short term she saw potential benefits at more 'local' levels, including greater U.S.-Mexico cooperation vis-à-vis border security. For instance, she asserted that having Americans travel as part of the AFS to Northern Mexico (e.g. Monterrey) can help subvert preconceived stereotypes—on the part of *both* American and Mexican participants—as well as strengthen relationships with communities living there—including filmmakers, state and local officials, the lay public, and non-profit groups—given that not very many Americans tend to visit this region due to the violence. (While she had no specific proof to support this claim, Ms. Burton's assertion was intriguing, and I decided to further investigate its validity while conducting my own reception study.)

Consequently, Ms. Burton argued that the AFS program allows the U.S. government to reaffirm old ties and generate new ones without seeming like a 'big brother' coming in and taking over (i.e. without seeming imperialistic and/or colonial), since it involves *sharing* ideas, films, and knowledge with foreign publics on an even footing and as equal partners. Overall, she viewed the AFS as promoting what in public diplomacy is called 'mutual understanding': through their involvement—in whatever form—both the Americans and the foreign people who participate in the program should obtain firsthand up-to-date information about—as well as a better understanding of—each other and their distinct societies.

Nevertheless, Ms. Burton thought that the program worked best on a *smaller* scale, bringing together individuals who did not originally think they had much (if anything) in common through the promotion of cross-cultural similarities: she acknowledged, for example, that the AFS would not necessarily be able to remedy U.S. policy disparities vis-à-vis Pakistan.

[143] Such as through the notion that the U.S. and other countries share many of the same challenges or goals, and that they can help address these by working together.

Ms. Lopez's view of the matter also followed this train of thought, and in fact she was much more cynical about the program's capacity to ultimately enhance diplomatic relations. While Ms. Lopez saw film as potentially instructive/transformative, she asserted that this does not necessarily mean that screenings, discussions, and workshops/classes can actually influence relations between national governments.

Furthermore, Ms. Lopez observed that many Mexican films (both fiction and nonfiction) are simply copies of the 'good guys vs. bad guys' Hollywood scenario, often making light of very serious issues—such as the drug situation in Mexico—which the AFS is trying to address. Yet she still felt that this program and others comparable to it could possibly have impacts at the immediate audience level, helping to rectify misperceptions by looking at *all* sides of a particular issue (like the U.S.-Mexico border), and presenting something different or outside of the Hollywood mainstream: in other words, revealing previously unknown facets of American society, such as real people facing real challenges.

CHAPTER 11

❖ Field Site: Monterrey, Mexico

My initial journey to Monterrey, Mexico, took place during the summer of 2013 when I traveled to the city for a month in order to assess potential research locations and develop contacts among the AFS' former participants, including—as previously mentioned—ones from the Monterrey International Film Festival; the Centro de las Artes; the Escuela Adolfo Prieto – Taller de Experimentación Plástica; the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales de Nuevo León; local NGO Nacidos para Triunfar; and the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León – Facultad de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano. In addition, as I had already initiated email and phone communications earlier in 2013 with the Universidad de Monterrey—which is where the Director of the Monterrey International Film Festival also works—I was able to meet with my institutional contacts during this time in Mexico in order to better facilitate my subsequent reception surveys and in-depth ethnographic study.

I. The Beginning: Trials & Tribulations

I had just arrived in Mexico, at the General Mariano Escobedo International Airport in Monterrey. The air was hot and humid, and I had unfortunately learned that the shuttle to San Pedro Garza García—a suburb located somewhat on the outskirts of Monterrey—which I had intended to take did not normally travel there on Sundays. However, I was told that I could pay the driver of today's shuttle (which was going to downtown Monterrey) to drop me off at the San Pedro station anyway. Such was the beginning of my month-long pilot study in Monterrey: a mix of unexpected problems and unlikely solutions arose throughout my stay, from equipment breakdowns and repairs to unanswered emails or phone calls with prospective interviewees,

followed by out-of-the-blue lunch invitations from another group of my potential interlocutors. Suffice it to say, the experience was an adventure...

Meeting me in San Pedro Garza García was a former participant in the 2012 AFS with whom I had been in contact for several months—and who will be referred to as the Professor. He had graciously agreed not only to be interviewed, but also to help put me in communication with other participating individuals and organizations. Furthermore, given his involvement in overseeing the Monterrey International Film Festival, the Professor had recommended that I attend the August 2013 Festival (despite the AFS' lack of presence there that year) in order to get a better sense of what had previously taken place. Such kindness and generosity helped assuage my fears that the research I was conducting would not be successful—or, worse still, would be dismissed out of hand by my interlocutors; that I was not experienced or knowledgeable enough as an anthropologist to be undertaking this type of project; and in general, a sense of loneliness/ isolation at being a stranger in a foreign land. However, after being in Monterrey for a few days, I had not only thoroughly explored my new environment but also felt confident in my Spanish fluency and communication skills, as well as more in control of the situation.

II. Reaching Out: By Land, By Phone, By Email...

Though I had already been quite successful in terms of contacting potential interlocutors in Monterrey while doing fieldwork in Los Angeles, for several of them I encountered significant problems, particularly with regard to email. I nevertheless persisted and attempted to reach them by phone, yet this too often proved to be a bit of a challenge. Consequently, during my first week in Monterrey I set out to actually get through to and (if possible) set up meetings/interviews with these hard-to-reach people, vowing that if need be I would simply show up and ask to speak with them. One difficulty I ran into concerning this approach occurred vis-à-vis the Instituto

Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales de Nuevo León and the Centro de las Artes: the Directors of both organizations informed me that the AFS activities had indeed taken place at these two sites, but they claimed that neither they nor their staff members had played a part in any of the screenings, classes, or workshops directly (nor had they interacted with the program's participants). Moreover, despite my inquiries as to how they *had* in fact been involved, I was consistently re-directed to people whom I had already contacted, either at the Monterrey International Film Festival or at Nacidos para Triunfar—fortunately, these individuals were much more responsive and accommodating.

Despite such setbacks, I again tried calling all of the numbers that I had previously attempted from the U.S. but which had not gone through, and was delighted to discover that I could now contact the administrative staff members at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL)—specifically those in the Facultad de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano, Ms. Ortiz and Ms. Fernández—who had been involved in the 2012 AFS program. These ladies were even kind enough to provide me with a new email address for the Coordinator at the Escuela Adolfo Prieto (as the one I had tried earlier was not functioning). Accordingly, I decided that when I went to visit the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, I would also stop by both the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales de Nuevo León and the Centro de las Artes (both of which are in the general area of the university) in order to see if I could learn anything more about the 2012 AFS program from those actually working 'on the ground' than I had from their Directors.

Although there was some initial skepticism and a lack of understanding on the part of those I talked with at UANL, through extensive phone conversations about my proposed research and the AFS program I was able to make some headway with regard to conducting interviews/

surveys with former participants (i.e. students, faculty, and staff members). However, after enduring increasingly evasive back-and-forth communications, I realized that my contacts were giving me the run-around, so I decided to visit the school in person in order get my research underway. Despite such persistence, my efforts continued to be stymied by the staff of the Facultad de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano, who prevented me from either interviewing or giving questionnaires to those who had participated in the 2012 AFS program.

Unfortunately, my expeditions to the Parque Fundidora and its surrounding environs—where the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales de Nuevo León and the Centro de las Artes are both located—likewise fell short of my initial expectations, revealing no new information and offering no additional insights. Nevertheless, all of these ostensibly *negative* interactions, rebuffs, and on-the-ground excursions ended up having significantly *positive* outcomes: through them I learned that the contacts I had made at the Universidad de Monterrey, the Monterrey International Film Festival, and Nacidos para Triunfar were in fact able to shed much more light on the AFS events/activities which had taken place in these different locations (e.g. at UANL) than the individuals actually in charge of them.

In addition to forging ahead with my doctoral research, I also had the opportunity to expand my institutional affiliations, specifically at the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM). Three days after my arrival in Mexico, for example, I was invited to have lunch with the Chair of the Professor's department, with whom I had a fascinating conversation regarding academia and other topics, such as global dietary health problems[144]. The meeting went so well that the Chair

[144] I was also later invited by the Professor to attend a reception for the Monterrey International Film Festival hosted by the U.S. Consulate, as the U.S. was the guest country at the 2013 Festival. Though the AFS was not involved with the 2013 Festival, its objective of increasing mutual understanding between the U.S. and other countries was a noticeable theme at the reception: for instance, when the Professor addressed the crowd, he expressed his gratitude towards the U.S. for helping to support the Festival and for providing it with independent films not normally shown in Mexico (i.e. non-Hollywood products) which revealed different facets of American society. Similarly, the U.S. Consul General himself gave a speech in which he expressed the U.S.' pleasure in helping to sponsor the Festival—which he described as an 'exchange of culture via film' that could increase cross-

invited me to come back to UDEM in the future to teach a class on communications or media reception while I finished my doctoral research in Monterrey. Completely overwhelmed by this generous and unexpected offer, I promised to let her know what my plans would be once I had secured additional research funding and completed my qualifying examinations[145]. To my further amazement—and extreme gratitude—the Professor and his staff also helped me figure out the best methods of transportation for traveling to my other research sites throughout Monterrey. It was an amazing day, filling me with appreciation for the situation I found myself in, as well as hope that the rest of my pilot study would proceed just as successfully.

This sense of optimism was born out over the course of my research, despite the occasional setback and some disappointments (as discussed above). During my second week of fieldwork, for instance, the Professor introduced me (via email) to a doctoral student who was working at UDEM, someone who—like myself—was interested in the relationship/intersection between media and communication, however her focus was specifically with regard to the 'criminal imaginaries' of children in Monterrey. Though slightly outside the scope of my own research, I was invited to sit in as a silent observer on one of the undergraduate classes she was teaching that semester at UDEM, concerning the topic of mass communication.

While I am relatively well-acquainted with various aspects of the literature on communications—especially that which pertains to intercultural, international, and cross-cultural

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cultural understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico—and also emphasized the international appeal of the ten American films selected for the 2013 Festival, whose topics (he said) could be identified with/related to by people around the world (e.g. family, youth, violence). In keeping with this theme of cross-cultural accessibility and similarity, the Consul General went on to discuss the importance of 2013 as the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, asserting that everyone dreams of such ideals as happiness, freedom, and equality, before showing a short film—created by the DOS—which strongly and quite visibly promoted the same subject. As an observer I found this slightly heavy-handed, and I noted that both the Professor and the rest of the local audience members seemed somewhat uneasy during the Consul General's presentation.

[145] As it turned out I was unable to accept the Chair's invitation, since the focus of my study began to lean ever more towards the AFS' implementation and reception vis-à-vis Nacidos para Triunfar: I therefore could not stay (or teach) at UDEM because it was located too far away from the NGO—my principal research site in Monterrey.

communication—I nevertheless found the class to be quite interesting and informative. It not only provided a useful review of what I already knew, but also highlighted additional theories (related to mass communication) that I was not as familiar with, and it included a discussion regarding the significance of communication research as well as the use of statistical analysis in such studies. Furthermore, the doctoral student offered to help me in any way she could, such as by showing me around or introducing me to professors at another university, since in addition to UDEM she was also working at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in the school's Centro de Investigación en Comunicación e Información. Such a welcoming and supportive attitude made quite a difference, for although I did not need to make any contacts at that particular school, simply having a sense of camaraderie with another doctoral student while abroad reinforced my confidence[146].

III. Interviewing a Variety of 2012 AFS Participants

Though there were some difficulties in scheduling interviews during my summer 2013 month-long pilot study, those former AFS participants with whom I was able to speak were very forthcoming and helpful. For example, in one of my initial meetings—which was structured as a group interview—my two interlocutors spent over an hour with me while we discussed their experiences as part of the AFS. These interviewees—Ms. Sánchez (an academic at UANL) and the supervisor of a local NGO (Nacidos para Triunfar), whom I shall refer to as the Director—had, together, been involved in working with this particular non-profit organization, which attempts to resolve gang-related issues, particularly those involving youth violence.

[146] In fact, she even asked me to give a talk/guest lecture on my doctoral research, both to her class at UDEM and at the Instituto Tecnológico. However, as this trip to Monterrey was only my initial pilot study and I had not yet gathered very much data—nor analyzed that which I had obtained—I was forced to decline her request.

Both college-educated individuals, Ms. Sánchez and the Director had been open to collaborating with the AFS because the workshops/classes and film which were being offered coincided with their respective efforts to reduce violence, addiction, and health risk factors among adolescent (ex-)gang members in Monterrey. The two had initially been approached by representatives from the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey with regard to participating in the AFS, and they were extremely interested in the program's goals: as the Director noted, he thought it would be an educational experience for *both* sides (i.e. for both the participating Americans and Mexicans who were to be involved).

Their interest was also due to their own objectives: Ms. Sánchez wanted to use film as a means of changing behaviors, specifically those connected to youths in gangs which put them at risk of violence and/or of endangering their health (e.g. sexual or drug-related behaviors). The Director likewise thought that participation in the program—especially with regard to viewing *The Interrupters* and conversing with its director—would be a beneficial experience for the NGO's members (and one which might lead to valuable contacts in the U.S.), since Nacidos para Triunfar and the film's central characters from CeaseFire were both working towards similar goals of non-violence/violence prevention.

Though the Director's impression of the AFS was upheld by his experience, Ms. Sánchez found it a bit different from what she had originally thought. Although she felt that it was a positive project to be involved in, Ms. Sánchez asserted that it could be better focused on issues *specific* to groups in Mexico—like ones more salient to Nacidos para Triunfar—rather than concerning such a broad social theme as 'violence'. Despite this slight disagreement between the two, *both* Ms. Sánchez and the Director had their perspectives of the U.S. and of American society somewhat altered as a result of their participation. The latter stated that he had learned

much more about (1) the level of gang-related violence in the U.S.; (2) what the government and lay public are trying to do with regard to issues of violence; and (3) the types of programs that American society has for attempting to address this problem. Meanwhile, Ms. Sánchez conceded that although she initially thought of the U.S. government as being fairly self-interested, working unilaterally to resolve trans-border problems, the AFS had shown her that it was in fact aware of the necessity of involving the Mexican government and its citizens in developing solutions. Nevertheless, she still felt there were inconsistencies between the U.S. government's actions to prevent violence and its policies vis-à-vis weapons (e.g. lax gun control, the right to bear arms).

Interestingly, though Ms. Sánchez and the Director participated in slightly different activities, their overall experiences ended up being quite similar. Ms. Sánchez was involved in focus groups which examined the message(s) and potential impact(s) of the program, as well as whether it might prove to be an effective method for preventing/reducing gang-related violence and health-risk factors. The Director worked with Nacidos para Triunfar more directly, showing former gang members the film *The Interrupters* and holding a panel discussion/Q&A with its filmmaker[147]. Yet both situations elicited positive reactions: the NGO's Director, for instance, observed that participants had been very impressed by how the film's protagonists were attempting to reduce gang-related violence, and that they exhibited an increased awareness regarding how this problem is faced on both sides of the border. Likewise, Ms. Sánchez commented on the parallels between efforts being made in Monterrey—such as by Nacidos para Triunfar—and those of the people in the film, highlighting the fact that it was well-received and even seen as a possible tool for educating the public about such issues and their potential solutions. However, although Ms. Sánchez generally liked the program and thought it was a

[147] Cristóbal (a pseudonym)—one of my interlocutors from the NGO, whose experience will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 13—was also a panelist alongside the Director and the AFS filmmaker, answering questions from the rest of the audience about his past as a gang member in Monterrey.

positive way of dealing with important social themes, she believed that films like *The Interrupters* should have more scientific facts at the end in order to lend them greater support.

Both Ms. Sánchez and the Director confirmed the favorable responses to the AFS of those who had been involved: inspiration with regard to trying to help at-risk youth was one, while others included an apparent reduction in the number of adolescents joining gangs as well as the appropriation of new techniques for solving issues of violence (e.g. 'interrupting' it, as in Chicago, rather than relying solely on 'prevention', as in Monterrey). Moreover, Ms. Sánchez and the Director indicated that they themselves had benefitted from their participation as well. The former felt better able to help youths change their risky behaviors, such as by implementing diverse educational programs for them; and the latter believed that it had helped him in his work with Nacidos para Triunfar by having a positive effect on the members who had participated, as well as by making them (and himself) aware of the fact that such violence is not a problem unique to Mexico.

Taken as a whole, Ms. Sánchez and the Director thought that the AFS had and would continue to aid/strengthen diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Mexico. Ms. Sánchez supported this idea because she believed that such exchanges between groups from different societies can help each side involved to work on a particular issue and derive solutions of benefit for them. The Director likewise championed it, asserting that since Mexico 'controls' the drugs and the U.S. 'controls' the guns, a program like the AFS can reveal the problems contributing to this situation on both sides of the border, thereby helping to facilitate relations by decreasing youth delinquency and increasing community programs.

When I finally had the chance to conduct an interview with the Professor—whose busy schedule prevented it up until the last week of my pilot study—we were joined by one of his

colleagues, Ms. Jiménez, who had participated in the 2012 AFS program through her involvement in that year's Monterrey International Film Festival. In fact, this group interview actually took place at one of the sites for the 2013 Monterrey International Film Festival, which was happening at the same time: I conducted the interview on a Sunday afternoon to avoid conflicting with the films which were being screened that day, and since my two interlocutors were happy to discuss their previous experiences with the AFS, the interview flew by quickly.

Interestingly, the Professor and Ms. Jiménez had somewhat dissimilar opinions of the AFS, which appeared to be due to their differing involvement in the program's implementation at the 2012 Monterrey International Film Festival, as well as because of their prior experiences (or lack thereof) with DOS diplomatic endeavors. Although both the Professor and Ms. Jiménez were initially contacted by envoys from the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey regarding the AFS—specifically concerning whether the movie *The Interrupters* could be added to the Festival's roster—and while both were excited at the prospect of having the selected AFS film's director present to answer questions, the Professor was the more optimistic of the two vis-à-vis the program's potential for benefitting its participants as well as diplomatic relations, while Ms. Jiménez was much more uncertain.

The Professor—having previously been involved in a Fulbright program—had prior knowledge of the DOS and experience working with this organization; in addition, he was more closely involved in terms of programming the AFS film as a special event for the 2012 Monterrey International Film Festival, screening it at the beginning of the Festival in the Cineteca Nuevo León. While neither he nor Ms. Jiménez was involved in selecting the film *The Interrupters*, the Professor not only helped set up the screening but also participated in the Q&A session afterwards. Ms. Jiménez, on the other hand, had no prior experience with DOS

diplomacy programs of any kind, and although she met with people from the U.S. Consulate and from the AFS to discuss including the film in the Festival beforehand, she did not actually see the film itself, nor did she attend the screening and the Q&A.

As a result, while Ms. Jiménez and the Professor's objectives were similar, their appreciation of the AFS program and of its actual or potential benefits differed. Both felt that it was important as a general principle to have directors present at local screenings of their films: thus having *The Interrupters* and its director fulfilled one of their primary goals for the Festival. Furthermore, the two believed that involving the AFS had given the Festival (and themselves) a closer connection with Monterrey's American Consulate, which led to the U.S. being chosen as the official guest country of the 2013 Monterrey International Film Festival [148]. Ms. Jiménez and the Professor asserted that participating in the AFS had helped open the door for more American cinema to be present in the Festival, including films that would not normally be shown in Mexico and which—akin to *The Interrupters*—touch on sensitive subjects (e.g. violence and responses to it, integration, at-risk youths, gangs, etc.)[149].

Yet while Ms. Jiménez only saw short-term benefits for participants and their communities, the Professor envisioned more long-term advantages, including ones regarding the improvement of U.S. diplomatic relations with Mexico. Ms. Jiménez believed that although the AFS film(s) can immediately impact those exposed by reflecting the latter's situations and/or

[148] To illustrate this stronger relationship, during a follow-up interview conducted in September 2014 the Professor described to me how the U.S. Consulate has remained closely involved in the activities/events of the Monterrey International Film Festival ever since the 2012 AFS program took place. Specifically, the U.S. Consulate has been providing the Festival with funding (i.e. small grants) so that its staff members can screen films in risky, underprivileged areas of Monterrey such as the neighborhood known as 'La Alianza'.

[149] Interestingly, however, this was not precisely what ended up happening: during our 2014 follow-up interview, the Professor explained how the American films which were now being included in the Festival—or even those being shown as part of its 'outreach' screenings in unsafe areas, under the auspices of the U.S. Consulate—needed to present a somewhat-more positive image of the U.S., and to avoid particularly delicate political/social topics (though slightly-less sensitive ones were acceptable). In the summer of 2014, for example, the U.S. Consulate moved to a new location in San Pedro Garza García, and those involved with the Monterrey International Film Festival were therefore too busy to select an American film to be shown. Consequently, the decision was left up to the Professor, but his choice—2013's *Upstream Color*, in which people's exploitation is a primary theme—was *not* met with the Consulate's approval after it was screened at the Festival.

providing them with solutions, such effects were fairly localized. She contended that it was unlikely the Mexican government was really very aware of the AFS in the first place, and that only people who actually saw the program's film(s) and talked with the director(s) would effectively benefit. As a result, this led to her suggestion that the AFS should amplify its efforts abroad by increasing the number of films shown, locations selected, and screenings held. Ms. Jiménez also felt that weighty social issues affecting both societies should be brought to the fore, especially those which would be most relevant to the current state of affairs (as *The Interrupters* was in terms of Monterrey's growing violence).

The Professor, meanwhile, saw not only the program's immediate value—like Ms. Jiménez he felt that the AFS was illustrating ideas relevant to contemporary Monterrey, ones which could affect participants' attitudes towards various social issues—but also more gradually-developing ones, such as how the program revealed another side of U.S. cinema which was interested in communicating ideas rather than just mindlessly entertaining audiences. Though he too noted how a public's dispersal following screenings might limit community benefits, the Professor nevertheless asserted the following: since the AFS is not an isolated effort on the DOS' part but one piece of a larger puzzle—i.e. of a bigger diplomatic project attempting to build positive relations and trust between the U.S. and other countries—this could have long-term advantages with regard to improving the relationship not only between the American Consulate and Monterrey, but also (over time) between the U.S. and the rest of Mexico.

Likewise, the Professor felt that his own *personal* opinions of the U.S. and of American society had shifted—not simply because of his collaboration with the Consulate as part of the AFS program, but also due to the fact that he had learned about how the U.S. federal government is using the AFS to try and generate a better understanding of itself and of American society in

Mexico. For instance, the Professor noted how *The Interrupters* helped illustrate ways in which the U.S. is like any other society dealing with social problems—it revealed the U.S. to be a nation with local communities (just like those in any other country) which are trying to take responsibility for solving them, despite their frequent lack of governmental aid.

Overall, both the Professor and Ms. Jiménez felt that following their participation in the AFS they had acquired a better understanding of the DOS' diplomatic efforts abroad, including those of the American Consulate in Monterrey—such as trying to transmit a film and convey its message across multiple regions. Ms. Jiménez also admitted to being (pleasantly) surprised that the U.S. government was interested in realizing such projects in Mexico, and she suggested that there were many other possible endeavors which could be implemented along similar lines as the AFS—she found the idea of 'exchanging culture' via film to be especially interesting.

The Professor observed that with *The Interrupters* in particular, not only was a different image of American society portrayed—one which was distinct from those disseminated by Hollywood—but the national government's interest in creating/promoting alternatives to violence was also clearly reflected. Yet at the same time, the Professor cautioned against one aspect of the AFS and other similar programs: he noted that such efforts are ideologically-oriented, and need to be carefully balanced between promoting 'American' ideals/values and respecting those of the society in which diplomatic activities are being conducted and/or films are being shown. For example, there needs to be greater awareness with regard to the fact that Mexican opinions concerning such topics as abortion and homosexuality are not necessarily the same as those of people in the U.S.

Unfortunately, except for the Professor himself—who is a filmmaker as well—I was completely prevented from accessing any of the other Mexican film directors who had

participated in the AFS program in 2012, not only during my pilot study in 2013 but also throughout my ethnographic fieldwork in 2014-2015. As many scholars have found—including the aforementioned Ortner (2013)—filmmaking communities can be difficult for 'outsiders' to enter and observe; this is often especially so for academic researchers if the filmmakers in question are not familiar with such intellectual endeavors vis-à-vis media. Nevertheless, the case study of Nacidos para Triunfar—which I assembled through interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation—serves as a window into the AFS' reception by a particular social group, allowing one to glean insights that may also be relevant to others. I hope to further explore these groups in my post-doctoral research, despite the difficulties I encountered with regard to accessing the program's participating filmmakers.

CHAPTER 12

I returned to Monterrey, Mexico during the summer of 2014 in order to conclude my doctoral fieldwork abroad, continuing my research and analysis into the start of 2015. Due in part to the difficulties which I had previously encountered with regard to interviewing local filmmakers who had participated in the 2012 AFS program—but more so as a result of my promising/intriguing 2013 interviews with Ms. Sánchez and the Director of Nacidos para Triunfar—I arrived this time determined to focus my efforts primarily on the NGO and its members, since it presented a more unique and complex case study.

Following my 2013 pilot study, I had remained in frequent contact with my interlocutors in Mexico—specifically those at UDEM (the Universidad de Monterrey), Nacidos para Triunfar, and the Monterrey International Film Festival. Though I encountered some technical problems as the end of the 2013-2014 academic year approached and I prepared to return to Mexico—in particular, the NGO's spam filters kept blocking my email messages—with the Director of Nacidos para Triunfar aiding me, at the start of June 2014 I was nevertheless able to schedule several interviews ahead of time and to set up visits/observations for the first few weeks of my research. Such good fortune continued once I had arrived, as I was consistently welcomed at and/ or invited to attend the NGO's weekly meetings, daily classes, and various events throughout the duration of my fieldwork.

❖ Introducing Nacidos para Triunfar (NPT)

The NGO examined in this dissertation, Nacidos para Triunfar, was founded in 2011 by ex-gang member Juan Pablo García Aguiñaga[150]. His objective in doing so was to motivate and

[150] The name of NPT's founder is a matter of public record, thus I have left it unchanged. Aguiñaga is also one of the creators (along with two others, Héctor Mario Pérez Villareal and César Gómez) of Asociación PJSC, A.C.—having helped develop its Raza Nuevo en Cristo program—and he is the cofounder of Bandas Unidas para el Bien as well. For almost two decades he has

train those youths who are involved with or are members of gangs vis-à-vis the process of reintegrating themselves into society through their studies, work, and family connections, thereby regaining "la esperanza de una vida digna y brindándoles las herramientas necessarias para lograla" (Aguiñaga 2011). In order to achieve this goal, Aguiñaga believes in promoting non-violence and peace among the youths that he works with—as well as among the diverse gangs themselves—to help prevent drug abuse and gang-related activities in their social, economic, and family environments, where such unsafe and anti-social behaviors may already be endemic. With the support of Líderes Unidos por la Paz, A.C.[151], Nacidos para Triunfar has brought to fruition a school for helping these adolescents/young adults—the Escuela de Formacíon para Líderes[152]—and enjoys a growing web presence through its Facebook community pages[153], Twitter feed, and official website.

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worked with youths involved in gangs as well as families plagued by drug addiction, giving conference talks and motivational speeches promoting the idea of a 'culture of peace'; the health and success of youths; as well as the prevention of drug addiction/ gang behavior among adolescents ("Acerca de NPT" *NPT*). For instance, on November 14th, 2014—during the latter portion of my fieldwork abroad—Aguiñaga gave a lecture at a criminology conference in Mexico City. Further examples of his dedication to the betterment of Mexican youths (particularly those in Monterrey) include the 2013 award which Aguiñaga personally received for his contribution to a city-wide health and safety program, as well as the entire NGO's involvement as a non-profit participant in the October 5th, 2014 "5K y 10K San Agustín – Correr es Vivir" race in San Pedro Garza García where NPT's members provided both runners and spectators with information about the NGO and its mission.

[151] A non-profit organization—or *asociación civil*—created in 2012 by Aguiñaga and Luis Bonales (the latter of whom is also the current President of Nacidos Para Triunfar), Líderes Unidos por la Paz, A.C. counts Nacidos para Triunfar as its primary program/initiative, through which it carries out drug- and gang-prevention activities (Aguiñaga 2013).

[152] The school's objective is to give such gang members the tools and skills they will need in order to reintegrate into society and lead the lives they want through classes/workshops on topics like respect; living responsibly (e.g. in terms of sexual relations); non-violence; and leadership ("Escuela de Líderes" *NPT*). As NPT's employees and volunteers—including Andrea, Gabriel, and Miguel (all pseudonyms), whose experiences will be discussed later on—explained to me at length, there are eight different classes/workshops offered, each of which concerns a different *valore* or value, such as spirituality; the importance of family; and those themes previously mentioned above; among others. Gabriel noted that for his part, living in accordance with these values had helped him establish a better relationship with his girlfriend (now wife): where in the past they would have fought dreadfully, at this point they can simply sit down to discuss matters with one another. This is a fitting example of how and why the NGO's Director originally came up with the themes/values for the Escuela de Líderes' classes/workshops: since the gangs themselves have their own (negatively-oriented) values—such as showing solidarity against the forces of government or engaging in 'an eye for an eye' retribution when slighted—he believed that by identifying these and then being exposed to new ones, (ex-)gang members could replace the former with more positive values—like non-violence—which would then help them to re-enter society at large.

[153] Not only does NPT try to ascertain people's ideas and reactions with regard to its programs by using social media, the NGO's members, followers (e.g. on Twitter and Facebook), and even interested strangers all respond in kind: some (like the latter) send online messages requesting that the NPT volunteers and employees come to their communities; others post comments thanking

In terms of how Nacidos para Triunfar—or NPT, as it is frequently referred to—interacts with these at-risk individuals offline, not only is there the training school/leadership program—which has seen eight graduating classes since 2012, and just recently concluded the classes/ workshops with its ninth 'generation' of students[154] (for a total of almost four hundred graduates)—but the program also reaches out through healthy-living activities like sports, entertaining outings on the weekends[155], as well as by putting on formal and informal talks, sometimes given by Aguiñaga himself. By becoming involved in such events, NPT's members have found that the participating at-risk youths *themselves* begin attempting to change their own surroundings, such as by painting murals instead of graffiti and restoring park areas for the program's various activities (e.g. removing trash or rubble, cutting the grass). Doing so has also enabled rival gang members to meet and work together, leading to the signing of over three years' worth of *Treguas de Paz* (truces or peace treaties)[156] among more than one hundred gangs from a variety of areas, and, hence, affording greater safety in places where the gangs' street fighting has abated.

When youths take part in the NPT school, they undergo a training process which endeavors to help them better understand their current circumstances, thus helping them to

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them for their help in changing (ex-)gang members' lives; and still more make observations about local media responses to the various NPT antiviolence and/or unity events which have taken place.

[154] The NGO's ninth generation of students completed the program and graduated from the Escuela de Líderes at the start of December 2014 (the graduation ceremony specifically took place over a four-day period, from the 8th to the 11th).

[155] Several such excursions took place during my 2014-2015 fieldwork, including a Sunday swimming trip on October 12th to the Río Ramos (located in Allende, a municipality south of Monterrey); as well as another Sunday expedition on November 9th to the Bioparque Estrella (one of Nuevo León's ecological parks, situated in the city of Montemorelos), during which time students from NPT's Escuela de Líderes—and other former/current gang members—were given the opportunity to explore.

[156] On July 25th, 2014, a Tregua de Paz event took place with twenty different gangs—including Clika 13, Crazy Lokos, Duendes, and Guerreros, among others—signing a truce document agreeing to a period of peace among them. NPT has included members of the signing gangs in its training program in the hope that by the end the graduates will be able to rejoin their families and either work or study with those businesses and institutions which are supporters of NPT (such as Grupo Senda, a transit company providing bus transportation throughout thirteen Mexican states and eleven American ones). Such Treguas frequently take place on Fridays and Saturdays (though they sometimes occur mid-week) in order to accommodate both the participants' and the moderators' schedules, and as part of these events the youths who are involved will normally paint a mural which symbolizes their commitment to living—at least for a time—in a state of peace and non-violence ("Eventos" *NPT*, "Inicio" *NPT*).

overcome environmental/situational hurdles, gradually reenter society, and achieve their full potential as "agentes de cambio positivo" ("Acerca de NPT" *NPT*). The idea is that all social sectors must work together—the government, the private sector, and civil society—in order to fix the drug, gang, and violence problems which are so prevalent among adolescents, and that the latter *themselves* can help to transform this environment as well. In fact, the vision for NPT is to expand the NGO's operation beyond Monterrey and the municipalities of Nuevo León into all of the different Mexican states, using its effective method of working directly with youths to continue addressing such issues on a national scale.

❖ Observing the NGO in Action: Taking Part in the Routine & the Unexpected

During the research which I conducted in 2014-2015, I had substantial opportunity to visit Nacidos para Triunfar's headquarters and to attend some of the NGO's special events (such as a Tregua de Paz), thereby familiarizing myself with the everyday activities of its employees and volunteers as well as with the more unpredictable planning sessions that took place. On a normal day, one or two NPT employees would manage the office from 9:00 AM or 10:00 AM until approximately 1:00 PM or 2:00 PM, at which time—frequently unaccompanied, but sometimes with additional NPT employees[157]—they would go to *la calle* (i.e. they would 'take to the streets') until 9:00 or 10:00 PM, talking with various gangs in different *colonias*[158] throughout Monterrey. Sometimes they would meet with individuals who had already signed a Tregua and/or participated in the Escuela de Líderes, while on other occasions they would converse with gangs who had yet to do so[159]: on one occasion, the NPT employees met with a

[157] Two of my interlocutors, Alberto and Natalia (both pseudonyms), were the NPT employees who regularly went out on such assignments; another of my interlocutors, the aforementioned Andrea, tended to remain behind to look after the office (though she did go out on occasion), while the Director of the NGO himself went out about once a week or so.

[158] This term refers to the communities—such as the neighborhoods—where gangs reside.

group of ex-gang members simply to play a friendly game of soccer and to catch up about what everyone had been doing lately.

Staff meetings regularly took place on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Saturdays, and they included all of the NGO's employees as well as any of the volunteers whose schedules allowed them to attend (separate meetings were sometimes arranged during weekday evenings for those who could not be present)[160]. As I soon came to learn, the Monday and Tuesday meetings—which took place from 11:00 AM (sometimes 12:00 PM) to 1:00 PM—represented planning sessions for the activities of the week, such as the classes/workshops which were to be taught at the leadership school(s) and other undertakings related to the Escuela de Líderes; which neighborhoods the NPT members would be reaching out to during the afternoons and evenings; fundraising possibilities for the NGO[161]; as well as the organization/coordination of upcoming Treguas de Paz. Before and after these meetings NPT's employees were generally involved in a variety of other endeavors, from updating the NGO's Facebook page and working on its finances (including paying bills, contacting potential donors, etc.) to answering public/press queries via phone or email.

Saturday meetings—usually from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM—comprised discussions of what had been accomplished during the week (out of the work plans which had been made on the

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[159] This activity of going to *la calle* and talking with the gang members of different *colonias* frequently leads to the recruitment of twenty to thirty new students for NPT's Escuela de Líderes.

[160] Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays tended to be much less intense for the NGO (unless a Tregua was scheduled to take place): usually only one or two of NPT's full-time employees—often Andrea or Lucía (another of my pseudonymous interlocutors)—would show up in order to clean out the office, replenish supplies (e.g. printer paper, pens), and check the NGO's phone messages/emails. Occasionally on these lighter days NPT's full-time employees—such as Andrea, Alberto, and Lucía—would take classes in order to help them better address specific topics with their students as part of the Escuela de Líderes' curriculum. These subjects have previously included how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases as well as preventing unwanted pregnancies (among other similarly-sensitive themes), and the classes—which, interestingly, are based on American courses designed for Latinos and Latinas in the U.S.—are generally held at a UANL facility in Monterrey, conducted over the course of several sessions.

[161] Potential donors are asked to visit NPT's headquarters, and they are offered the opportunity to see the NGO's efforts in action by accompanying its employees to *la calle* and/or by attending one of its events.

preceding Monday); considering the results of everything that had been achieved; as well as determining the next steps to be taken. In October 2014, for instance, I was invited to participate in one such meeting: two of my interlocutors (Natalia and Andrea)[162] discussed with the NGO's Director everything that had occurred at their respective classes/workshops during the previous week, including students' responses to the film that was shown (about the importance of family)—some distracted the others by talking—and how the recent inclement weather had severely reduced attendance. Likewise, earlier in September—following a Wednesday summit with the Monterrey police force regarding the possibility of holding a ground-breaking Tregua de Paz, one which would include both members of the police *and* (ex-)gang members[163]—the Director reported the outcome of his activities at the end of the week. Both his meeting and subsequent discussions had gone quite well as the police were very excited at the prospect of this type of assembly, particularly given their lack of outreach programs to interact with at-risk youth such as these; the Director himself felt that it was a 'perfect fit'.

This Tregua de Paz between the police force and the gangs of Monterrey was one of the special events which NPT would organize now and again, however other unexpected activities frequently fell into this category as well[164], such as the impromptu mid-week logistics meeting I

[162] Since the NGO's (ex-)gang members agreed to participate in my research on the condition of anonymity, all names have been changed to protect their identities.

[163] Unfortunately, I was not given permission to attend this particular meeting in person.

[164] To further illustrate this, one Monday during the allotted time for a regularly-scheduled meeting, two acquaintances of NPT's Director—both former members of local gangs—stopped by the NGO's headquarters to collect several tables as well as some silk-screening equipment, which they would be using as part of their own governmental program (they work with younger children as opposed to youths/adolescents). After hearing about my research—which we discussed at length as I and the NPT employees helped them move everything and then clean up afterwards—both men wanted to add some of their own ideas to the project (though they did not actually have time to be formally interviewed). One of the two asserted that the American people (and their government) appear to believe that the gangs, violence, and drugs found within the U.S. *all* come from 'the outside'—especially from Mexico—despite the lack of evidence supporting such a belief. Following this train of thought, both men also contended that American 'gringos' tend to blame everyone else—i.e. groups perceived (frequently despite reality) as 'other' or 'immigrants', including African Americans, Asian Americans, etc., as well as their respective gangs—for problems in the U.S. To paraphrase the first speaker's conclusion, he felt that they do so without taking into account the various social, economic, and political inequalities which have engendered a system of disenfranchisement coupled with white privilege. Moreover, he noted, when blaming Mexico and Mexican gangs specifically, both the American government and its people seem to ignore the fact that

found myself sitting in on one Tuesday soon after the start of my fieldwork in the summer of 2014. I had been personally invited by the NGO's Director to come and meet some of the NPT staff whom I had yet to encounter, and I was excited at the prospect of continuing my observations regarding how NPT's programs were being implemented and what (if any) AFS influences were to be discovered. Though I was led to believe that I would be observing another typical day at the NGO's headquarters, what I received instead was a more intimate look at NPT's internal relationships and planning processes, including a spontaneous pros-and-cons debate between the Director and his team concerning how best—and most tactfully—to convene traditionally antagonistic groups and mediate between them.

I had arrived at 10:00 AM when the NGO's office was due to open: it is a small, aged, two-room building—a surprise when I first saw it, as it was a much more humble setting[165] than I had expected to find from a renowned and well-publicized organization, whose extensive reach has touched hundreds of gang members throughout the different *colonias* of Monterrey, and beyond[166]. That Tuesday I was let into the building by NPT's office administrator Andrea (whom

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not only the demand for drugs in the U.S. but also the export of weapons from the latter to Central America (via Mexico) contribute to a series of ongoing and interconnected problems affecting *all* those countries involved, not just the U.S. Yet the Director's two associates conceded that even their *own* government has difficulty addressing the reality of the situation, often promoting the idea that there is 'no point' in trying to help or interact with such 'anti-government' gang members who simply 'cannot/will not change'.

[165] Despite its initially-unassuming appearance, over the course of my research I had the opportunity to observe the NGO's office be entirely transformed: not only was the interior repainted during the summer and fall of 2014, but toward the end of that year the Director also commissioned one of NPT's student members to paint a (profile-raising) mural on the building's exterior street-facing wall, an endeavor which lasted until the start of 2015.

[166] As an example, throughout the duration of my fieldwork I saw a variety of prominently-aired newscasts pertaining to NPT's efforts vis-à-vis the reduction of gang violence in Monterrey: a video clip from one such program can be accessed at http://tv.milenio.com/monterrey/Nacidos_para_Triunfar-Organizacion-fundacion-prevencion-pandillas-monterrey_3_344395592.html. Please see the bibliographic entry "Organización Nacidos para Triunfar..." for more details. In these reports, the NGO and its Director were hailed as 'game-changing' and 'transformative', helping to enhance security in Monterrey communities through the multiple peace treaties which NPT has organized among antagonistic gangs. For instance, one news program interviewed a former student of the NGO's Escuela de Líderes who had completely turned his life around, transforming from being a gang member into an aspiring chef. NPT's endeavors have also been featured in several documentaries, such as *Yo Lo Creo* (2012) and *Gandhi en México, Una Mirada a la Noviolencia* (2014): a five-minute vignette from the first film vividly portrays the NGO's and its Director's attempts to prevent gang violence in Monterrey, while a seven-minute segment from the second film depicts some of NPT's earliest successes, such as the NGO's July 26th, 2011 Tregua de Paz. On occasion, Mexico's Ministry of Public Education (i.e. the Secretaría de Educación Pública) has even requested NPT's assistance. In October 2014, for example, the

I interviewed later in my research), and she unexpectedly decided to give me a comprehensive overview of the NGO—including information which I already knew, as well as details that I would soon come to learn for myself during the course of my fieldwork—before the rest of the employees and volunteers, as well as the Director himself, arrived.

She explained that NPT has helped nine 'generations' of gang members through its Escuela de Formacíon para Líderes, all of whom have undergone approximately two to three months' worth of classes/workshops: each of these focuses on a different theme or 'value' out of a total of eight such topics (e.g. non-violence) and is conducted over the course of a week[167], during which time an informative/inspirational video will also be screened, one that is unique to its particular class/workshop[168]. In addition, every class/workshop is conducted for two hours in the evening—normally from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM or 9:00 PM to 11:00 PM, after the day is over (i.e. work or school) for the participating youths[169]—seven days a week, for one full week. The

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NGO's Director was asked in two separate instances to travel to Saltillo (the capital of the Mexican state of Coahuila)—and was then asked to return for a third time in November 2014—in order to address the city's high school students regarding his experiences as a former gang member in order to avert potential drug use, violent behavior, and (possibly) eventual gang membership among these youths.

[167] Students receive textbooks with detailed sections regarding the themes and values of the classes/workshops, as well as concerning how to maintain a healthy lifestyle (e.g. by reducing one's alcohol intake). Additional information on these topics—including detailed explanations and examples—is presented to them by NPT staff members via PowerPoints, and they are occasionally given short quizzes in order to test their knowledge of the subject at hand. The students are also given commemorative shirts to celebrate both their participation in the Escuela de Líderes and the start of their new post-gang lives. (Both NPT's employees and its students are expected to wear these shirts while out and about, in order to reaffirm their commitment to a wholesome, non-violent way of life as well as to promote the NGO's efforts among its intended audience.)

[168] Despite the apparent similarity between the AFS' use of cinema and that of NPT, this resemblance is actually coincidental: the NGO began including films as part of its classes/workshops early on in 2011—following its inception—and did not participate in the AFS program until 2012. The reason for incorporating them, as explained to me by NPT's Director, was because the visual arts in general and movies in particular were thought to have a more powerful impact in transmitting messages—such as the Escuela de Líderes' values—and adding them to the classes/workshops facilitated more profound discussions among the NGO's students. The criteria used in selecting these films are as follows: (1) they must relate to at least one of the Escuela de Líderes' eight themes/values—including the importance of family and education, being accountable for one's own actions, etc.; (2) they must be directly applicable to a particular week's classes/workshops—that is, they must apply to at least one week out of the NPT program's total duration of two to three months (i.e. eight to twelve weeks); and (3) they must be in Spanish, so that the students can understand their content completely. Interestingly, while the movies may all be in Spanish, only American films (and a single one from Italy) have thus far been shown, such as *The Blind Side* (2009)—or *Un Sueño Posible* in Spanish—and *Precious* (2009)—also known as *Preciosa*.

[169] During my fieldwork—more specifically, towards the start of October 2014—both Andrea and one of my other interlocutors, Natalia, were undergoing additional training with NPT's Director in order to improve their pedagogical skills, and I was allowed to sit in on one of their sessions with him. The Director follows a system which he said is applicable to all forms of oration—

current ninth generation[170], Andrea said, consists of two distinct gangs out of the twenty who signed the July 2014 Tregua de Paz; consequently, two different leadership schools have been set up, one for each of the gangs in their respective communities[171].

To illustrate what she was telling me, Andrea played a recent news clip showing the NGO's Director going out into different communities—along with various NPT volunteers and employees—in order to bring the Bronx and the Rapers (two rival gangs) together and initiate peace talks[172]. She then described to me how at least some of the NGO's members generally go out every day between 2:00 PM and 9:00 PM or 10:00 PM to the different neighborhoods where gangs are located with the intention of trying to talk with them, especially with those whom they have yet to achieve Treguas de Paz. Andrea explained how once finished with the two-to-three-month program, the participating ex-gang members are given an official ceremony/reception in recognition of their efforts and their graduation from the school. NPT then helps them to find jobs or even scholarships should they want to continue their education, as another of my

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including public speaking and/or communicating a message, not simply teaching—specifically in terms of the following three aspects: (1) knowing one's audience—in this case current and former gang members—both as a broader social group and as individual actors (because of this he warned Andrea and Natalia to expect diverse personalities and, consequently, unique questions/concerns); (2) speaking from the heart—that is, speaking with compassion and enthusiasm; and (3) telling the truth, thus imparting the idea that one has endured similar experiences and can understand the situations which others are facing. In order to better structure their classes/workshops, the Director told Andrea and Natalia about what he himself tries to do: (1) grab the audience's attention with an impressive statement, thereby starting a dialogue among one's listeners with regard to the topic at hand (e.g. gang violence, drugs, etc.); (2) create a bridge from this opening prelude directly to (3) the content of the class/workshop, such as by asking about the audience members' weekend activities and progressing from there to the topic of making responsible life choices; (4) make sure that everyone understands the issues being discussed by breaking down any difficult or confusing topics as well as quickly recapping the subject matter at the end of each section; and (5) end the class/ workshop with a brief summation which brings together all of the themes at hand (e.g. the connections between poverty, adolescence, and potential gang membership). The Director then had Andrea and Natalia practice by standing at the front of the room while going through each of the steps delineated above: he mentioned to me that he would also be attending their classes that same night in order to verify exactly how they were actually implementing his system with the students themselves.

[170] It is labeled as 'current' since at that point in time the ninth generation students had yet to complete their studies and graduate.

[171] Since the classes/workshops which make up the NGO's Escuela de Líderes take place over only a few months—and given that the participating students tend to be (ex-)gang members from a variety of *colonias*, which may be far apart geographically—the locations of the NPT school(s) are generally transitory by nature, often utilizing existing public spaces such as community centers and sometimes occurring in private homes.

[172] This video can be accessed at http://noticieros.televisa.com/programas-punto-de-partida/1408/nacidos-triunfar/. Please see the "Nacidos para triunfar" bibliographic entry for more details.

interlocutors, Natalia, did: she is now finishing her bachelor's degree and anticipates pursuing a master's degree[173].

As more volunteers trickled in, I observed their interactions with each other and with Andrea. Three of them—two men and one woman—appeared more affluent than the other attendees, and I later learned that they came from a church group which had created its own parochial school, enabling this group to help youths and (ex-)gang members itself as well as allowing it to send volunteers to NPT who could assist the NGO as needed. None of the three whom I met wished to be interviewed[174], although the woman—Daniela—occasionally offered information which she thought I might be interested in hearing.

While all of the volunteers and employees seemed to appreciate the goals of NPT which they were helping to realize, there was a sense of trying to distance themselves from the reality of the gangs and from the violence all around them. As an example of this, one of the male volunteers—who had first-hand experience with these issues—joked as they all watched graphic clips about young girls and boys recruited into the gangs in their pre-teens, making light of the gravity of the situation. Such laughter and jesting seemed indicative of a certain amount of desensitization, and I found myself wondering whether the AFS' films and activities would have less impact as a result, not just in Monterrey or in other parts of Mexico but around the world as youths become inured to such violent environments[175].

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[173] Unfortunately, due to the incompatible time commitments required both by her job at NPT and by her schoolwork, in mid-October 2014 Natalia was forced to choose between them: she ultimately decided to terminate her employment at the NGO in order to focus on her education and complete her bachelor's degree, although with the intention of returning to work at NPT in the future. The classes which she had been teaching at the Escuela de Líderes were taken over by a former graduate of the school, while the rest of the NPT employees were left to figure out a new office schedule—this resulted in them having to close the office more often, especially in the mornings—and to find someone new who could work full-time (a replacement had yet to be hired by the end of my fieldwork).

[174] As Daniela explained to me, none of them felt that they had the background or 'experience' to be interviewed—unlike, for example, my interlocutors from among the NGO's employees, the majority of whom were former gang members.

[175] Despite this, everyone at NPT really seemed to believe in the work that they were doing: many volunteered after work or school, giving up their spare time in order to help make a difference in others' lives, just as for scores of them the NGO had

Similarly, as I watched the NPT staff going about the office, I realized that there was a great deal of media saturation to contend with as well: a constant flurry of activity on the internet (e.g. Facebook) and cell phones was not only part of their job description (such as in terms of publicity for the NGO), it was something they did even while chit-chatting on coffee breaks—not looking at one another, but at screens. Again, I wondered as to the impact of the AFS program on youths around the world who are perpetually stimulated by such media technology, and I began to posit that only if there was something truly *novel* about the films and workshops which the AFS offers—such as a topic that could really capture their attention or which tied in perfectly to the interests of the target audience—would any kind of long-term impression be made. The importance of this became clearer to me over the course of my fieldwork, as I interviewed both AFS participants and non-participants alike among the NGO's staff. Their memories of films, for instance, were clearest insofar as these related to their own lives, thereby holding their interest and making them reflect on their own experiences; as an example, many of the NPT ex-gang members found a great deal to identify with in *The Interrupters*.

The Director and his assistant Alejandra[176] arrived sometime around noon, as did another male volunteer, and without further ado they began an off-the-cuff meeting which concerned an event that I had not yet been told about (set for the end of the month[177]), one which was intended

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helped to make a difference in their own. Even the Director's two aforementioned ex-gang member acquaintances—who had visited the NGO one Monday, but did not actually work or volunteer there—asserted that NPT was the city's (and possibly even the nation's) best program by far in getting results through its classes/workshops, activities, and events.

[176] Alejandra—currently a full-time administrator at NPT—was one of the individuals who assisted with the NGO's initial development, as she was a close associate of its founder (Aguiñaga) prior to NPT's creation in 2011.

[177] It actually ended up taking place several months later—on December 16th, 2014—due to some logistical hurdles in coordinating the various groups that were set to attend the event. In fact, it was rescheduled a number of times between August and December of that year—from potential dates in late September and mid-October to possible ones in mid- to late November (or even early January)—though in the end a decision was made to hold the Tregua in mid-December at the Campo Militar (located near the municipalities of San Nicolás de los Garza and Escobedo in Monterrey). One issue in particular was that a few 'bad apples'—as Lucía described them to me—on the police force had been harassing various ex-gang members (who were also students in NPT's Escuela de Líderes), frightening not only those who were actually being threatened but also their associates in and amongst the various gangs, thus delaying the entire Tregua from taking place.

to bring together Monterrey police members and approximately fifteen gangs with whom NPT had previously engaged[178]. The goal was to initiate talks regarding police abusiveness with *all* youths—not just gang members—which, it was said, had the effect of throwing into question who the real delinquents are (somewhat akin to arrests for the possession of small amounts of marijuana in the U.S.). The overarching objective, as stated by the Director, was to generate a meeting between the local gangs and members of the police force in order to address both this aggressiveness[179] and the anti-police violence which occurs in retaliation, thereby potentially increasing the security of Monterrey's diverse communities.

Though there was some argument at first as to how the event should be organized in order to avoid ill will and possible hostilities between the two groups, all those present endorsed the idea of the Tregua on general principle, contending that this type of gang-police pacifistic endeavor had never been attempted before—possibly not even in the U.S. Everyone began throwing out ideas left and right regarding such aspects as seating arrangements (e.g. should the tables be seated with half police officers, half gang members, and one NPT mediator); how to lead a round-table discussion or dialogue about the issues, and then follow this with the signing of a Tregua de Paz; how to encourage all of the participants to engage in a big sports competition that would generate feelings of respect and sportsmanship rather than antagonism between the

[178] Interestingly, a U.S. Consulate representative came to the event as well—though I unfortunately did not get the opportunity to speak with them—and NPT's Director mentioned to me that following the NGO's participation in the AFS, not only had he himself been invited to visit Chicago in order to (in turn) pass on his experiences vis-à-vis reducing gang violence, but there had also been a great deal of interest in NPT's own programs (though unlike the Monterrey International Film Festival's experience, no financial sponsorship was involved). The Consulate had even sent DOS representatives—such as Zeenat Rahman, Secretary of State Kerry's Special Adviser on Global Youth Issues and Director of the Office of Global Youth Issues—to the graduation ceremonies for ex-gang members following their participation in the Escuela de Líderes. However, despite this ongoing interest, the Director (somewhat disapprovingly) noted that the U.S. Consulate was not yet ready to export the NGO's type of gang-prevention program to the U.S., or even to the city of Chicago where he had been invited. Rather, he had been told that such an action would only be undertaken (and funded) if he himself first worked for free for approximately ten months in the U.S. in order to provide additional results which would either demonstrate or disprove that such a program could work there as well. Lacking the travel funds to do so—let alone the money for all of the NPT team to come as well)—and needing passports/official documentation for everyone (which were taking a long time to acquire), the NGO's Director had decided to let this particular issue rest, at least for the time being.

[179] In fact, Escuela de Líderes students—all of whom are current or former gang members—occasionally do not attend their NPT classes/workshops if there is a police presence on the streets nearby because they are afraid of what might happen to them.

two groups (i.e. should the gang members and police force be on opposite sides or should there be mixed teams); and finally, they ended with suggestions for a reception afterwards, one which would include informal conversation amongst the participants as well as dining.

The delicacy involved in arranging these proceedings was reminiscent of how the AFS planners had described to me their intricate decision-making process. With both I noted that there was a substantial need to mediate between different groups, whether the latter were composed of police officers and gang members or of American filmmakers and audience participants from varying cultures. Moreover, both the NPT and AFS organizers employ every possible mode of communication in their efforts to elicit outside opinions—NPT, for example, used Facebook in order to ask (ex-)gang members what they would like to say to the police officers at the Tregua, and ended up including their answers in the program—as well as to put their respective events/activities together—the AFS, for instance, gains publicity through online news magazines, U.S. embassy webpages, and its own online site.

In the end, what was most apparent was that both the AFS and NPT are motivated by their desire to help others; to give people—especially youths, but also society at large—an answer/solution to the various issues of the day, such as the problem of gang-related violence. Yet while the AFS does indeed bring its films, filmmakers, and experts 'to the streets' (at least to some extent) in countries around the world, it does *not* do what NPT does, which is to *include* those 'from the streets' in its own events—such as by having them speak at conferences or teach classes/workshops at the NGO's Escuela de Líderes—empowering them *directly* by helping them be able to express themselves freely as part of the broader societies which have routinely excluded them.[180]

[180] For example, NPT's Director explained to me that this was one of the main reasons for having graduates from the NGO's school act as mediators at the police-gang Tregua, as well as because the former have a unique perspective on the situation due to

CHAPTER 13

❖ The NGO's Members: Their Immediate Receptions of & Ongoing Responses to the AFS

I encountered many such (ex-)gang members who were associated with NPT over the course of my fieldwork in Monterrey—occasionally as full-time employees, sometimes as volunteers—and as a general rule, almost all were graduates of the NPT school. Although some of those I interviewed had *not* participated in the 2012 AFS program, of these many had at least heard about the program from individuals who *had* in fact participated. In addition, most were able to offer substantial insights concerning their other media experiences—e.g. American films vs. local ones, international vs. national television coverage of gang violence, etc.—as well as regarding the social remittances which they had received; that is to say, what they had heard from their relatives and/or friends in the U.S.

I. AFS Participants

Alberto and Natalia—two full-time employees at NPT whom I met towards the beginning of my research—had both participated in the 2012 AFS program, and out of all of my interlocutors at the NGO who had done so, they were the ones who provided me with the most comprehensive accounts of their respective experiences. Alberto, the younger of the two, had grown up in Monterrey and fallen into the gangs early on, something which prevented him from advancing beyond a high school education. Somewhat shy at the outset of our interview, Alberto began to gradually open up as we talked about the links between what he had experienced as a participant in the 2012 AFS program—watching and discussing *The Interrupters*—and what he had endured as a gang member before joining NPT. The violence and danger of gang life were

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their own experiences. Furthermore, by convincing such gang members *themselves* to sign NPT's Treguas de Paz—and to (potentially) disband—the Director believed that there was hope with regard to weakening the larger cartels, which use the gangs for their own purposes.

what he highlighted the most, specifically in terms of how the film related to his past as a member of an aggressive gang in Monterrey, as well as with regard to how his present vocation with the NGO calls on him to return to similarly volatile communities and speak with current gang members there, urging them to sign the Treguas de Paz or to try NPT's Escuela de Líderes.

Nevertheless, Alberto found the AFS film's portrayal of gangs in Chicago to be quite different from the reality in Mexico. The screening that he attended took place at the American Consulate (in its Cultural Relations section), and was held not only for all those from NPT who could/wanted to attend, but also for other social justice and human rights organizations in the city of Monterrey, such as Promoción de Paz[181]. Like many of the other participants, Alberto had never taken part in this type of U.S. State Department-sponsored diplomacy program before, and he was initially unsure of what to expect. Yet as he viewed the film, Alberto began to identify with the topic at hand, despite the fact that he found the streets of Monterrey to be much more hostile and dangerous in terms of gang violence than those of Chicago. While there was not a great deal of time to discuss such issues with the filmmaker, he and the other (ex-)gang members in attendance nevertheless got a chance to talk about their own experiences as they were asked questions regarding what they had thought of the film and its relation to their own lives.

Though in retrospect Alberto could not think of a specific way in which his participation in the AFS program had or continued to benefit him, he said that he had found it an interesting if

[181] Alberto also invited several members from his former gang to attend with him, and Enrique—another of my interlocutors, whose interview comes later in this section—was acquainted with many of the participants from the other organizations whose work is similar to NPT's. Unfortunately, none of my requests to contact these friends/associates were met by my interlocutors—despite having initially offered to make such introductions, the excuse they ended up giving me was that there was 'no way' to contact these individuals after all—and I was therefore unable to interview these particular NPT and non-NPT members who had participated in the AFS. In addition, two other former AFS participants (Federico and Julio, both members of the NGO) were simply unwilling to contribute to my study, though they had originally expressed interest in talking with me: Julio declined my request to conduct an interview with him, while Federico failed to appear at any of our scheduled meetings.

somewhat less-than-practical event vis-à-vis its applications to his everyday life[182]. This raised the question of *who* the AFS is actually targeting (and *how* it is doing so) through its various screenings and activities, and I came to the realization that—particularly for a group of (ex-)gang members—it might have been more useful if they could have spoken with one of their Chicago counterparts from the film, rather than with the filmmaker and/or the AFS expert(s) whose backgrounds were not necessarily ones with which they could identify.

Alberto also noted that prior to participating in the AFS program, he already had some ideas of his own concerning gangs in the U.S.—ones which were based on the American films and television newscasts he had seen—and the perception he had come away with was one of great violence. Consequently, he had no trouble in accepting the idea of the Chicago gangs; moreover, he could identify not only with the gang members themselves and with their aggressive behavior (due to his former lifestyle), but also with the 'interrupters' who were trying to stop the violence and with the danger that they put themselves in to do so (as a result of his current NPT activities). Everything Alberto saw, he asserted, was something which he could relate to because he had 'lived it all', and had in fact done so from both sides.

From watching the film and participating in the Q&A afterwards, Alberto thought that the U.S. appeared to be a fairly violent and corrupt place, but one which is nevertheless attempting to achieve peace—just as, he contended, the similarly corrupt and violent Mexico is trying to do. While his perception of the U.S. and American society did not change following his experience with the AFS—if anything, he said his personal opinion of the U.S. as a dangerous country was more ingrained than ever—he felt that this was due in part to how the media affect people's impressions of other nations. As an example, he described how in Mexican newscasts the

[182] However, he did describe how even two years after his participation in the AFS program, the film's socially-aware theme regarding peace still applies to his life (especially in terms of his ongoing work with NPT).

country's gang-prevention efforts are generally depicted pessimistically, thus scaring audiences with one-sided portrayals of reality[183]. Overall, Alberto said that he thought a program like the AFS could really benefit from emulating groups like NPT, where classes/workshops (i.e. those on values) are employed to *reinforce* the various positive messages—including the importance of family, respect, etc.—which are brought up in the films that the NGO screens[184].

Natalia, like Alberto, had participated in the AFS program in 2012, however—unlike many of the interlocutors whom I interviewed over the course of my fieldwork—she had gone on to pursue a university-level education in Monterrey following her graduation from the NPT leadership school, and at the time of my fieldwork she was working on completing a bachelor's degree in psychology. Furthermore, Natalia had recently been to the U.S., and she thus had her own perspectives on American society based on experiences which were still fresh in her mind and which were her *own* rather than the product of information received second-hand. Akin to Alberto, Natalia had gone to the AFS event when NPT was invited by the U.S. Consulate in 2012, but unlike many of those I interviewed she had previously been involved in similar workshops and scholarship programs related to 'personal growth'—though not through the DOS, which sponsored the AFS[185].

What intrigued Natalia most about her experience with the AFS was that the film in particular demonstrated an efficient way of motivating gang members to reduce and/or avoid

[183] Alejandra's view was in agreement with this description, as she too noted that the media focus primarily on selling a particular 'story' to their audiences no matter what, even if it is inaccurately skewed in an overly-positive/-negative direction: giving such a (distorted) slant to the information which is presented therefore affects people's perceptions, she contended. Humberto—another of my NGO interlocutors and an AFS participant—felt similarly, and like Alberto, he too bemoaned the dearth of media coverage on positive topics—such as the victories achieved by anti-violence programs like NPT—which contrasts starkly with the excess attention given to negative ones.

[184] Humberto argued a similar point, emphasizing the need for such endeavors to take *local* programs and communities into account, particularly in terms of addressing their 'cultural values' (e.g. the significance of family bonds) which he felt might occasionally need to be reaffirmed in order to solve the specific issue(s) at hand.

[185] Enrique—also an AFS participant and NPT member—had likewise previously taken part in an international peace conference, though it was not affiliated with either the DOS or the AFS.

violent encounters with their rivals. Specifically, she respected the facility of communication and ease of interaction which the 'interrupters' in Chicago had with the gangs whose fights they were trying to end: this was something that they were trying to do at NPT, Natalia noted, and the employees/volunteers working at the NGO had observed similar reactions among gang members to such 'interruptions'. Seeing this type of cross-cultural parallel, Natalia said that she felt an increase in her motivation with regard to the gang-prevention work that she does at NPT.

Comparable to Alberto, both before and after her participation in the AFS program Natalia said that she viewed the U.S. as a very violent place, a perspective justified by the gangs which she already knew existed throughout the country—such as in Los Angeles and New York City—not just in Chicago which was the setting for *The Interrupters*. Yet she also acknowledged that the 'eye for an eye' mentality—i.e. the vengeful brutality of American gangs—was a trait shared by the members of Mexican gangs as well. Moreover, Natalia identified with the attempts being made in the U.S. to reduce gang violence—such as through 'interruptions' realized by people who come from *la calle* or 'the street'—seeing them as analogous to her own actions as part of NPT. In fact, she too had undergone her own type of 'interruption' when NPT first entered her life, helping her to find a way out of the world of drugs and violence of which she had become a part[186].

Natalia also spoke in a manner comparable to Alberto when she observed that everything portrayed in the AFS film—including the violence, alcoholism, and family problems; its themes of discrimination, social problems, and emotional investment; as well as all of the details she had learned about the U.S. via mass media and during her travels—could be related back to her own experiences living a gang-influenced existence in Monterrey. As an example, Natalia described an ongoing cycle in which the violence and danger seen in both the U.S. and in Mexico reinforce

[186] Though Natalia herself was not in a gang, her life and choices (e.g. doing drugs) were strongly influenced by their proximity.

one another in terms of their respective gangs' behaviors, traditions, and beliefs, with American gangs 'teaching' those in Mexico—and vice versa—as a consequence of their gang members' transnational migrations, as well as because of the international dissemination of media images and messages[187].

In particular, Natalia noted that media outlets in the U.S. and Mexico tend to portray the *other* country's gangs as being much worse than their own 'domestic' gangs, generating fear among the nation's respective societies about one another. The media thus not only influence people's perceptions of gangs both in their own and in other countries, Natalia stated, they also prey on the idea that audiences believe what they see, portraying negative aspects at the expense of the positive and presenting a distorted image of the gang situation at home and abroad. As a result, Natalia did not think one could rely on the media to help resolve such issues as gang violence: she felt that programs like the AFS needed to not only present films to those they were trying to reach, but to actually *socialize* and *interact* with these individuals over a longer period of time (just as NPT does with the various gangs in Monterrey).

Moreover, Natalia argued that changes needed to be made with regard to more deeply-rooted mindsets, such as those prompting the reactionary violence which is carried out by gang members in response to the abusiveness of the police force in Monterrey. Doing so would of course be difficult, she acknowledged, but could be accomplished through what she referred to as 'working on the self'[188]. In other words, Natalia asserted that programs like the AFS need to be designed in such a way as to help—not blame—(ex-)gang members, allowing them to re-discover values which they may once have held but have now forgotten, as well as to redefine

[187] Interestingly, though I did not get a chance to talk with this individual, one of the youths whose gang had signed a 'peace treaty' wore a shirt bearing the American flag, a symbol which tied in to what both the Director's ex-gang member associates and Natalia had said regarding a 'cycle' of gangs and gang violence reaching from the U.S. into Mexico, and vice versa (as well as all the way up from Central America into both countries and back again, though none of them emphasized this particular point).

[188] In her own case, Natalia explained to me, this had involved overcoming her depression and trying to become less aggressive.

who they are and what they want out of life, thereby achieving some measure of internal—and, hence, external—peace, just as NPT attempts to do with these individuals on a daily basis.

Enrique was another of my interlocutors who had participated in the AFS. A full-time employee at the NGO who teaches classes/workshops at its Escuela de Líderes, he was less detailed than Alberto and Natalia in describing his experience to me (as were several others), despite the fact that he was very enthusiastic about it[189]. Like them, Enrique had attended the AFS event as part of the delegation of members from NPT who were able to accept the invitation from the U.S. Consulate on behalf of the NGO. He had very much enjoyed the experience—in fact, he was quite surprised at the extent to which he had found it interesting—especially how it had afforded him the opportunity to meet people from 'all walks of life'. While he too had watched *The Interrupters* and participated in the subsequent Q&A forum, Enrique found himself identifying much more strongly with the experiences of the film's protagonists (such as their prior drug addictions)—ones which he had lived through as well—as opposed to their violence-prevention tactics.

Nevertheless, Enrique conceded that the overarching idea of being able to change one's life—and, as a result, being able to help others—reflected his own journey with NPT. He had previously been in a gang, and had only been able to extricate himself from the violence and destructive behavior of that lifestyle through his participation as a student in the NGO's Escuela de Líderes, where he is now working to try and return in kind all of the help which he received. With regard to these current efforts, Enrique found that one of the most powerful similarities he observed vis-à-vis the AFS film's themes/protagonists and NPT's endeavors was the process of actually *working with* (ex-)gang members. Specifically, he strongly identified with the fact that it

[189] Enrique described it as a beautiful and unique experience, one wherein he had the chance to meet his counterparts from a variety of different associations and fields, who were likewise engaging in anti-violence and/or gang-prevention endeavors.

is incredibly difficult to engage in such outreach, but that if one can get through to at least a few individuals then one has succeeded in effecting some small measure of change or progress, and that (in his opinion) makes the entire undertaking worthwhile[190].

Enrique's perception of the U.S. and American society was not significantly changed as a result of his participation in the AFS program—he still finds the country to be extraordinary (even using the term 'superior')[191] in terms of its political system, economic clout, and athletic programs, all of which he learned about through the media and social remittances (having never traveled there himself). However, his pre-existing knowledge of the nation's social issues/ problems was markedly intensified, particularly that of its racism, urban violence, and poverty. Enrique contended (not entirely accurately) that the type of racial discrimination depicted in *The Interrupters* would never be tolerated in Mexico, and he cited the use of the term 'wetbacks' in reference to Mexicans and Central Americans as evidence that such prejudice is much stronger in the U.S. (the latter of which does tend to be the case). Despite such increased awareness, he continued to view the country as an amazing place to which he dreamed of someday going.

Overall Enrique's assessment of the AFS was similar to Natalia's, especially in that he felt programs like the AFS should engage in long-term activities/events, including doing follow-ups with former participants to see how they are progressing. Though he believed presenting the films and holding Q&As was a significant part of such diplomatic endeavors, he did not think they could simply be left at that. Just as with NPT's efforts through the Treguas de Paz, the Escuela de Líderes classes/workshops, and its daily missions to *la calle*, Enrique asserted that

[190] Upon hearing this, I was instantly reminded of how the AFS also attempts to reach—and potentially change—at least a few 'hearts and minds' in order to (eventually) produce more-widespread changes.

[191] As an example, Enrique referred to how the U.S. government frequently tries to help other (often smaller-sized) societies, even if such interventions do not always succeed.

ongoing outreach is needed in order to ensure the success of those individuals whom one is trying to help: such an undertaking for positive change, he argued, cannot be a 'one-time thing'.

Humberto, a part-time volunteer at the NGO and one of the oldest of all my interlocutors, was in agreement with Enrique. Having attended the AFS screening/Q&A event at the Consulate along with his daughter—at the personal behest of NPT's Director, an old friend—and as a long-time municipal employee, Humberto was similarly aware of the need for permanent programs dedicated to achieving an improved future in such violence-plagued cities as Monterrey—especially through the provision of ongoing assistance to youths currently and/or previously involved in gang-related activities. Thus a diplomatic endeavor like the AFS, he contended, may be beneficial from a short-term perspective in terms of its focus on preventing violence, drug abuse, etc., but this emphasis—however strong—will not necessarily result in any *lasting* impacts (unlike NPT, he asserted, which conducts consistent daily outreach).

Despite such reservations, Humberto nonetheless found himself identifying quite strongly both with the themes of the film which was presented (*The Interrupters*) and with those of the AFS program itself, since these reflected his own motivations for volunteering at the NGO. Specifically, they paralleled his desire to help resolve the various social issues he had observed among Mexican youths, particularly young men. Not only as part of the latter's society but also as a fellow human being, Humberto felt that it was his duty to try and ensure that they follow an appropriate 'path' in life—in other words, one with morals and values (such as the importance of family) which would allow them to take better care of and have greater respect for themselves as well as their communities. It was this aspect of attempting to bring peace and order to a chaotic/dangerous situation which Humberto could most relate to, even though the CeaseFire members' tactics of 'interruption' were not ones generally employed by NPT (or even elsewhere in

Mexico), and notwithstanding the fact that the AFS' programmatic vision seemed (to him) to look less towards the future than that of the NGO.

While Humberto's perception of the U.S.—that of a country suffering from significant drug addiction among its youth, a problem which extends to the nation's adults as well—remained the same following his participation in the AFS program, his view nevertheless became further elaborated due to the experience. In particular, Humberto noted the extraordinary amount of violence which transpires in American society, something of which he had not previously been aware (either through his own visits to Texas or through stories from relatives and friends). He also became more cognizant of the high level of indifference which exists with regard to said violence—as well as with respect to other social issues (e.g. familial schisms)—describing this apathy or lack of concern as an 'it can be taken care of tomorrow' mentality. As a result of encountering this cultural disconnect—and in light of the myriad others which he felt could potentially arise—Humberto believed that diplomatic programs like the AFS need to be 'personalized' to a greater extent vis-à-vis the diverse societal milieus in which they are implemented. Such modification, he argued, would allow their primary messages to be better (or more thoroughly) understood, and enable the 'tools' that they offer to be used more realistically/ pertinently given a particular cultural group.

Another of my interlocutors, Cristóbal, was likewise a previous AFS participant as well as a former gang member who only volunteered on occasion at NPT (due to an extremely busy work schedule)[192]. However, distinct from Humberto, Cristóbal had also been a student at the

[192] The same was true for another of my interlocutors, Andrés, whose full-time job conducting machinery maintenance prevented him from being a reliable source of assistance at the NGO; as a result, his volunteer work for NPT was fairly sporadic. Akin to Cristóbal, Andrés was previously a student at the Escuela de Líderes, and he participated in the AFS program as one of the NPT members invited by the NGO's Director. However, unlike any of my other interlocutors, Andrés had *also* been involved with Raza Nuevo en Cristo, an organization similar to NPT which the latter's founder (Aguiñaga) actually helped to develop: resembling the NGO's anti-violence undertaking in Monterrey, Raza Nuevo en Cristo attempts to work with former gang members in different parts of Nuevo León as a way of reaching out to current ones.

NGO's Escuela de Líderes, following a youth spent in the company of Monterrey's various gangs and their diverse members. Due to his considerable involvement with them—as well as his extensive first-hand knowledge of gang-related violence—Cristóbal was given the opportunity to attend the U.S. Consulate's AFS event not simply as an invitee of NPT and its Director, but also as one of the panelists during the Q&A which followed the screening of *The Interrupters*. Such participation involved more than merely watching the film with the rest of the audience: Cristóbal—together with the NGO's Director and the filmmaker himself—was responsible for answering audience members' questions regarding his prior gang-related experiences as well.

Consequently, Cristóbal's perception of the AFS program and of his own participation in it was slightly different from those of his associates at the NGO: unlike my other interlocutors, he did not have any concrete suggestions for how the program could be improved[193]. Cristóbal felt that it had been a good experience overall, that his own role in the endeavor had gone smoothly, and that the efforts of the AFS to reduce and/or prevent gang violence were admirable (he believed it was a program which could help all those involved with this issue). Some of these sentiments, he acceded, had more to do with the fact that his life was much calmer and happier now than it had previously been—due to his attempts at living 'normally' with respect to his job,

[193] Andrés' reaction to his AFS experience was somewhat comparable to Cristóbal's in that the former did not *explicitly* suggest any alterations for the program; however, he nevertheless voiced several ideas with regard to enhancing the AFS in the form of *aspirations* which might someday be achieved, rather than as immediate changes to be made. For instance, like Cristóbal, Andrés extolled the program's efforts to bring peace to the gangs of Monterrey (as well as between their various members): he described his participation in the AFS as being interesting and incredible, specifically because it had addressed a social issue which he could personally relate to due to his former membership in a gang as well as his involvement in both its activities and its overall 'attitude' or mindset. Yet while Andrés praised the program and maintained that it should be implemented exactly as it is in the future, he also noted areas in which the AFS was lacking—though without actually criticizing the program itself. As an example of this, Andrés casually observed how NPT (unlike the AFS) had helped benefit him by changing his life in a variety of *measurable* or *tangible* ways, from attaining his current employment to acquiring economic/financial independence. Andrés also briefly remarked—in a manner comparable to Humberto—on how the discussion and tackling of such issues (e.g. urban violence, factors leading to youth involvement in gangs) should be *ongoing* rather than periodic or annual (like the AFS), noting his own wish to be able to engage in such consistent aid with the diverse gang members of Monterrey. As a final illustration of these indirect recommendations made by Andrés, he concluded our interview with a discussion of his belief that media influences—such as the messages and/or images promoted by the AFS' films—could be put to better use if employed on a broader scale: specifically, Andrés envisioned transmitting them across the entirety of Mexico in order to help a much larger number of people throughout the country as a whole; he also wanted to show Americans in the U.S. what everyday life—including that of current/ former gang members—is like in Mexico.

family, etc.—rather than to his actual view of the AFS and/or its impact on him personally. Cristóbal associated the topic of his panel participation with the distant past and did not see it as something which still needed to be dealt with[194], thus he felt that the AFS program had functioned suitably with regard to him/his situation, and he had no recommendations concerning its potential for helping anyone else; his peripheral involvement with NPT only reinforced such feelings of detachment.

Yet despite this ostensible impassiveness—and akin to his fellow NGO members—Cristóbal *did* take something away from his AFS experience, even though it did not cause him to criticize the program itself (as the others' experiences did for them). Like Alberto and Humberto, Cristóbal was similarly taken aback by the violence which exists in American society[195], though he cautioned that while the dangers of a city such as Chicago may be comparable to those of Monterrey, Mexico is still far more violent than the U.S. Cristóbal was also in agreement with Humberto in terms of looking at the AFS as just one way—specifically a short-term one—among many of trying to address/resolve the problem of gang violence.

Although the methods employed by the program were not necessarily those he himself would utilize, Cristóbal could still identify with the prevention tactics which were presented in the AFS' film, and he therefore saw the benefit in being exposed to other societies' means of tackling such issues. Furthermore, his perception of American society was altered in a manner

[194] Contrasting with this notion of distance/remoteness from one's sense of self, Andrés strongly identified with the themes and individuals portrayed in *The Interrupters*, despite how much time had passed since his involvement with Monterrey's gangs. As an example of this visceral response, Andrés described to me how many of the characters appeared to be incredibly similar to him and his former associates (and vice versa), so much so that he felt as though his life were being reflected back at him. This was particularly true when he witnessed their constant fighting (often with each other); the territoriality of gang members protecting their 'turf'; and the dangerous conflicts/rivalries which might—and frequently did—end in someone's death.

[195] Andrés—whose original view of the U.S. (having never been there himself) was that of a place where it would be 'bien chido' or 'bien padre' (i.e. cool or great) to visit—was likewise disconcerted by the amount of violence which transpires in American society, a total far greater than he had initially thought, especially with regard to the substantial use of weapons/firearms. Yet watching *The Interrupters* and participating in the AFS program not only enhanced Andrés' understanding of American violence, the experience also instilled in him the idea—and a sense of hope/gratitude—that there are people and organizations in the U.S. trying to address and prevent/resolve this problem, just like NPT (e.g. CeaseFire in Chicago).

comparable to Enrique's: though Cristóbal had never been to the U.S., his understanding of the country—based primarily on such factors as social remittances and media exposure—included an awareness of its social disparities, particularly with regard to racism/racial discrimination and socioeconomic inequality, and this cognizance was greatly intensified as a result of his participation in the AFS program (just as it was for Enrique).

II. Non-AFS Participants

One of my first non-AFS participant interviewees was the aforementioned Andrea, who had met the NGO's Director in March 2012 when he came to visit her community. She had been depressed, doing drugs, abusing alcohol, and neglecting her three daughters, when the Director convinced her gang (among fifteen to seventeen others) to sign a Tregua de Paz. He then offered her a place at the NPT leadership school, and Andrea decided to participate—she was a member of the NGO's first generation of students—leaving behind her previous life and changing her lifestyle in order to be able to better care for her children. With the Director's help she not only graduated from the NPT school, but was also able to complete her high school education[196]. Since finishing the NPT program she has been working as the secretary/de facto office manager for the NGO, having volunteered for a long time at the Treguas and the NPT classes/workshops before becoming a full-time employee towards the start of 2014, a position she said she loves.

[196] Lucía—the NGO's full-time employee in charge of procuring funds from local businesses to help support NPT—had likewise completed her education alongside Andrea. Though she was neither a former participant in the AFS program nor previously a student at NPT's Escuela de Líderes, Lucía had some useful insights regarding the NGO. She had come to work there about a month prior to our interview, having met NPT's Director five years beforehand as part of her work with the Mexican government: she told me that she had decided then and there that she wanted to work with him if and when the opportunity arose. Lucía noted that while her former occupation had similarly involved working with youths, she believed that the activities conducted by NPT are much more different and effective; furthermore, the latter makes her feel as though she is aiding people directly, and as a result, to some extent helping the country as well. The aforementioned Alejandra—also neither an AFS participant nor a former student of the Escuela de Líderes—agreed with this sentiment, noting that she too feels a sense of satisfaction in seeing how NPT's work (through its classes/workshops, conferences, etc.) has facilitated considerable changes in so many people's lives. Moreover, Alejandra asserted that her efforts as part of the NGO give her greater insight into the prior experiences of such individuals—including what they have gone through and the necessity of having a program like NPT which empowers them to leave gang life behind—especially those of her close acquaintances, like the NGO's founder Aguiñaga. She also felt that it had given her a better understanding of how to help her own children in the future; specifically, how to assist them in avoiding the risks associated with gang membership (e.g. drug addiction, exposure to violence).

Andrea—along with several of her colleagues at NPT—was unable to attend the AFS film events in 2012, however she heard about them from those who *were* present at the screening and Q&A which took place under the auspices of the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey. Though she had not seen the film which was shown at that time (*The Interrupters*), and thus did not have any personal response to the AFS screening, her description of her own activities prior to and as a part of NPT share numerous similarities with some of the themes that the AFS program was trying to promote in 2012. For example, akin to those ex-gang members in Chicago who have taken it upon themselves to fearlessly break up violence among rival groups, Andrea herself spends many afternoons and evenings going to different gang-plagued neighborhoods in order to talk with the gang members there about NPT's classes/workshops which could benefit them, and about the peace agreements they could potentially sign to make their communities safer and less violent. With a casual laugh she told me that—like the Chicago 'violence interrupters' she had heard about—she is not afraid of undertaking such activities, as her work in helping others brings her great pleasure.

Since Andrea had not had the chance to participate in the AFS program—nor had she ever been to the U.S. before—I decided to ask her about her perspective vis-à-vis American society based on the media content she had been exposed to, as well as what she had heard from others[197]. With regard to U.S. films, Andrea explained to me that in her opinion the majority do

[197] Interestingly, despite the fact that Andrea has family in Texas, she said that the little contact she has with them has given her almost no context with regard to understanding the U.S. and American society. Moreover, she does not feel that she can identify with the political themes in most U.S. films, further distancing the idea of 'America' from her everyday reality. In contrast, Alejandra—who also has relatives living in Texas—found that her family members' social remittances not only gave her a clear image of American society, but that their stories were closely linked to her own experiences in Mexico as well. As an example, she told me about how one of her cousins had taken her uncle (who was quite ill) to a hospital in the U.S.: despite a lack of insurance, the doctors and nurses tried to help him, and only after he was recovering did they discuss payment. Alejandra contrasted this incident to the difficult situation they would have found themselves in had the same predicament taken place within the Mexican healthcare system, asserting that the latter is somewhat worse in that it does not necessarily afford patients all of the same rights which they would have the benefit of retaining in the U.S. Having traveled to Texas herself, Alejandra said that everything she had heard about only became more real when seen through her own eyes, and notwithstanding the numerous issues faced in American society (e.g. poverty), she still felt that it was better off due to the fact that (in her opinion) the U.S. government makes at least some attempt to fix the country's social problems.

not present images or messages which generate awareness about the issues related to gangs and gang violence; rather, they depict brutality, gun fighting, drug use, etc. solely for the sake of entertainment or shock value. She felt that doing so obscures the true nature of these problems, such as the reasons why youths feel the need to join gangs in the first place (e.g. poverty, lack of familial support). As a contrast to the artificial 'reality' of these types of blockbusters, Andrea described to me the films that had been shown during her time as an NPT student, ones which could be used to bring awareness to—i.e. *sensibilizar*—their deviant young viewers with regard to positive values which could help them change their lives and leave the gangs behind: *Reto de Valientes* was one such movie, a 2011 American independent film (known as *Courageous* in English) which focused on the importance of family and honor.

Despite not having been a participant with the AFS, Andrea had a variety of suggestions for how such outreach programs—both in the U.S. and abroad—could be enhanced, based on her own NPT experiences. To begin with, she thought that going *to* the people one was trying to reach—conversing with them directly as the AFS did—was crucial. However, she thought that more interactive activities were necessary, such as how NPT brought police officers and gang members together through a sports competition. Moreover, she asserted that rather than just *telling* people about such issues as environmentalism, sexism, and democracy—which the AFS does, to some extent—it was important to first understand *why* people are in the particular situations that they are in, and *then* try to help them fix the problem(s) or provide whatever critical element(s) might be missing. Nevertheless, Andrea did agree that positive or negative images conveyed through the media, such as in the AFS films, could help shift perceptions to some degree, but she did not see this as the sole means of addressing topics like gang violence.

Miguel, another of my interviewees, was of a similar opinion, though he argued that the media—both in the U.S. and in Mexico—tend to focus on the most negative aspects of an issue and ignore the positive, such as how numerous Mexican television newscasts emphasize the resurgence of and violence among gangs in Monterrey, rather than highlighting the work being done by organizations such as NPT, which have been making a substantial difference in many communities[198]. As a former gang member who now works in an automotive repair shop and volunteers at NPT during his spare time, Miguel had followed a path comparable to Andrea's: he met the NGO's Director through a church group when the former came to visit Miguel's *colonia* and joined NPT's Escuela de Líderes after that, graduating and then going on to be one of the NGO's conference speakers (specifically giving talks about his life as a former gang member and drug user).

Akin to Andrea, Miguel felt that any program—including the AFS—which is trying to resolve a problematic social issue like gang violence, needs to pay close attention to those who are actually involved; in other words, to the (ex-)gang members themselves. According to Miguel's explanation of the situation, in Mexico there tends to be a great deal of exclusion with regard to (ex-)gang members, but it is only through a paradigm of inclusiveness that the problem can be adequately dealt with. To illustrate this argument, Miguel described how NPT had helped

[198] Gabriel—another of my NPT interlocutors, whose circumstances are described later in this section—also noted the potential influence of media on people's perceptions. However, he emphasized how both in Mexico and in the U.S., oftentimes films about gang members and drug traffickers glorify these lifestyles—showing them as being successful/wealthy—thereby enticing audience members and convincing them of the desirability of following such 'career paths'. As Gabriel observed, any film—from one about James Bond to an animated feature for children—has this potential power to influence/seduce. Lucía likewise contended that a group of people may love or hate another one based on the images/messages they receive through the media, because frequently people simply believe in and trust whatever they see on television or in films, whether positive of negative. As an example, she cited television programs—and sometimes networks—which lean (politically) in one direction or another, both in the U.S. and in Mexico, and how these will reflect and/or reinforce the beliefs of those who watch them regularly regardless of reality (e.g. CNN vs. FOX). Resembling Lucía, Cristóbal also made mention of how the media can influence perceptions by presenting ideas/arguments as the sole 'truth' or 'reality' which exists, noting that such media influence is especially successful when telling audiences what the latter already *want* to believe.

him turn his life around by focusing on him as an *individual* and his potential to take control of his own actions and future; it had assisted him in figuring out what he wanted to do with his life.

Miguel in turn has been able to help others by talking about his personal experiences and, in particular, by serving as an activist for (ex-)gang members, one who can shine a light on the dilemmas that they face. His argument, akin to Andrea's, was that a program like the AFS needs to go directly 'to the streets' in order to try and fix the problems that it wants to address; that it should focus more on *helping*[199]—by providing jobs, scholarships, and other opportunities, as NPT does—rather than simply striving to put an end to such issues as gang violence. In other words, Miguel maintained that these types of programs should be working to *prevent* social problems at their *source* rather than attempting to cure them after the fact.

Unlike Andrea however, Miguel had a somewhat more complicated view of the U.S. and of American society. While he too had not had the opportunity to participate in the 2012 AFS program—having joined NPT later on—Miguel had family in the U.S. whose descriptions of educational and economic opportunities made him believe that the American government supports its people in regard to such matters as schooling[200]. However, he had also been exposed to enough U.S. media to understand the various forms of inequality which exist—such as the discrimination against immigrants in places like Arizona, which angered him greatly, or the fact

[199] Lucía made a similar comment, asserting that the U.S. needs a program like NPT which focuses on at-risk youths in terms of helping them as *fellow human beings*, and which does so in such a way that the transformations which occur—both internally and externally—are real and lasting.

[200] Gabriel too saw the U.S. as providing opportunities (especially academic and athletic ones), but he also felt that the American government is much more strict in regulating its society than Mexico's administration is—particularly through the clarity of its communication methods—which he thought enabled greater control. Moreover, he contested various portrayals of everyday life in the American media, noting, for instance, that its depictions of jail belie the reality which he himself experienced while incarcerated in such correctional facilities in Mexico. For example, Gabriel jokingly dismissed the idea that tutors or police officers might try to help inmates; according to him, when someone is condemned they are on their own. Despite this—and notwithstanding the racism his cousins living in the U.S. had told him about—Gabriel thought that life (specifically with regard to its harsh economic realities) was likely to at least be somewhat better there, with greater governmental support. Having traveled to the U.S. briefly as a child, Gabriel seemed to be attracted by the idea of returning, though with a family to take care of in Monterrey he kept his interest muted.

that stigmas are attached to current and former gang members, similar to those which they experience in Mexico.

Despite this similarity between the two countries, Miguel nevertheless said that he felt more alienated by the unequal laws and prejudiced behaviors which he had observed in the U.S. through American media outlets than he did regarding any exclusion he had experienced as an ex-gang member in Mexico. This raises the question as to whether the AFS (and other diplomatic programs like it) can indeed make progress in breaking down cultural barriers and in uniting international societies—vis-à-vis shared social goals and/or mutual global issues—in the face of the never-ending onslaught of American films, television, radio, etc., which paint a far different picture for the world to see.

Like Miguel, Gabriel was also a volunteer at NPT, and he too had met its Director when the NGO reached out to his gang in order to realize a Tregua de Paz. As part of this peace agreement Gabriel joined the Escuela de Líderes, graduating in 2013 and working ever since as a waiter (while also volunteering at NPT). Describing his past to me, Gabriel explained how the NGO's Director had managed to disentangle him from his previous life as a gang member, taking him away from all of the violence and drugs which had surrounded him. Gabriel's gratitude toward NPT extended beyond this, since the program had also helped him find a job after his graduation from the leadership school[201]. Moreover, his continuing involvement now allows him to help others by giving talks concerning his experiences—as well as about how the NGO affected his life—at conferences with police officers, academics from various universities, diplomats, and other (ex-)gang members.

[201] Although NPT helped Gabriel continue his high school education as well, unlike Andrea (and Lucía), he was unable to finish his studies due to the fact that he got married and needed to focus on his family.

Though Gabriel's relationship with the NGO developed after the 2012 AFS program had already taken place, his understanding of how such outreach can and should function was quite perceptive, just as Andrea's and Miguel's had been. Like Miguel, Gabriel thought that the starting point should be those directly involved with whatever issue is being addressed, thus while in the case of global warming one might enlist climatologists, in terms of gang violence one would recruit ex-gang members to go out into the communities and tackle the problem (just as NPT does). In doing so, Gabriel asserted, those sent to communicate and interact with the intended targets of such outreach would be better received, such as how the NGO's ex-gang members can more effectively get through to individuals currently involved in gang activities because of the fact that they share a similar background. The former are therefore able to impart their own experiences to the latter, who in turn can better identify with them than they could with either a filmmaker or an academic (like the AFS experts, for example)[202].

[202] To some extent, Gabriel also saw this relationship as working in both directions: while he helps youths still entangled in the violence/destructive behavior of the gangs to realize how they might leave that life behind—using his own experience as an example—he simultaneously keeps learning from the variety of mistakes that they have made and/or are continuing to make, discovering how to avoid these himself and potentially how to help others do so as well.

CHAPTER 14

While conducting this research, I posited that the results would help clarify how perceptions of American society abroad—as being imperialistic, admirable, untrustworthy, efficient, etc.—shape people's receptivity to ideas about the U.S. and to diplomatic interactions with its national government. I also advanced the idea that my study could help illustrate ways in which current on-the-ground impressions shift (or why they persist) due to such outreach, and what this may mean with respect to cultivating international relationships/transforming attitudes towards the U.S. through diplomacy efforts like the American Film Showcase.

Although *existing* perceptions—resulting from people's individual experiences, media narratives/images which they have been exposed to, and social remittances that they have received—did indeed influence participants' receptions of the AFS, the program *itself* nevertheless managed to have an impact with regard to their understanding of public/cultural diplomacy[203]. However, on account of the differing agentic projects and positions which were involved—in other words, the somewhat domineering stance of the AFS organizers/ implementers vs. the fairly resistive attitude of the program's participants (especially members of NPT)—the effectiveness of the soft power strategies employed to achieve the DOS' diplomatic goals was noticeably reduced[204]. The following sections further examine these results, while also considering their potential implications.

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[203] Ms. Sánchez, for instance, did not initially view DOS diplomacy efforts as anything other than self-oriented, unilaterally-implemented projects. However, following her participation in the AFS program Ms. Sánchez's opinion shifted somewhat, in that she now felt the U.S. government *was* aware of the fact that it needs to involve people from other societies in its endeavors abroad. Similarly, the Professor and Ms. Jiménez underwent a shift in their personal beliefs about American society as a result of their experiences—for example, Ms. Jiménez was pleasantly surprised to find that such cross-cultural collaborations were of interest to the U.S. government—and they both also asserted that they had acquired a more comprehensive understanding of American diplomatic efforts, especially those being implemented within their own city by the U.S. Consulate.

[204] This dilution was made most evident by the incisive comments/suggestions offered by my interlocutors. Ms. Sánchez, for example, criticized the AFS' lack of focus on issues of specific interest to its local audiences, arguing that too broad a theme (such as 'violence' or 'the environment') would be of little to no benefit for those participating in the program's activities. Likewise, Ms. Jiménez felt that only those themes most relevant to *both* societies (i.e. the U.S. and the AFS' host nation, which in this case was Mexico) should be brought to the fore, and—having noted the improbability of the program garnering national

❖ Overall Reception of the American Film Showcase & Broader Outcomes of the AFS Experience(s)

I. In Terms of the NPT Members' Reactions, Subsequent Activities, & Resulting Perceptions of U.S. Society

In discussing the overall reception of the AFS—particularly its broader outcomes with respect to the NGO (Nacidos para Triunfar) that was specifically targeted by this diplomatic program—one must be aware of the fact that power plays a central role in the reactions and perceptions of those involved. This is due to several elements, including the dynamic in Mexico (and in many parts of the world) where people often desire yet simultaneously reject American cultural products—since they are frequently seen as being indicative of covert U.S. hegemony, as was discussed earlier in this study—as well as the DOS' act of bringing a diplomacy program into Mexico in the first place, which can potentially be interpreted as an overt display of power (if not to some extent a form of imperialism).

In order to remain attentive to this larger context, the interviews and questionnaires I conducted included not only those who had participated in the AFS (both self-selected and otherwise), but also individuals who had *not* participated—whether they declined to; did not have the opportunity to do so; or were involved only in a very limited fashion, such as through knowledge of the program obtained via other participants. With these latter groups, I asked them about their other media experiences—i.e. newscasts; television programs; international, national, or local blockbusters/flops and any lesser-known films; etc.—in an attempt to determine if/how

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attention in the countries which it visits—she also recommended that the AFS screenings/events be expanded to additional locations in order to increase public awareness. This was something which Andrés hinted at as well in his comments regarding the potential influence of media—like that of the AFS films—when implemented on a larger scale. Even the Professor—who was one of my most optimistic interlocutors with regard to the program's potential for building a stronger U.S.-Mexico relationship—observed that such diplomatic efforts run the risk of becoming ideological propaganda unless they are somewhat restrained in their 'promotional campaigns' as well as structured in a manner which defers (at least for the most part) to the beliefs of their hosts. This point was also reiterated by Humberto, whose work with NPT and experience with the AFS helped him to realize the importance of having diplomatic programs (like the latter) respectfully address or include *local* ideas, values, and knowledge in whatever societal contexts they may be carried out.

the AFS might be related to these additional media practices, as well as to the images/ messages—and hence, the perceptions—generated by them. Social remittances—that is to say, information and ideas which people had learned/acquired from their relatives or friends in the U.S.—were also a crucial component in trying to understand this.

The broader outcomes of the AFS' interactions with the members of NPT both validate and contradict what the coordinators of the former believed would be its potential reception and impact abroad. In terms of challenging their assumptions, as demonstrated by my interviews with the NGO's members—both those who participated in the program and those who did not—the organization's activities have not significantly changed as a result of its participation in the AFS: the types of classes/workshops employed by the Escuela de Líderes have remained the same, as has NPT's implementation of the Treguas de Paz in order to achieve its overarching goal of producing greater security throughout Monterrey's various *colonias*/communities. In addition, the NGO's employees and volunteers did not seem to feel that their perceptions of the U.S. and of American society had been altered in any appreciable way, either as a result of the AFS or due to their exposure to international media and social remittances.

Yet in talking to and observing NPT's members, what I discovered *has* changed to a great extent is the *intensity* of their perceptions as well as the *strength* of each individual's motivation concerning their work at Nacidos para Triunfar. Both Alberto and Cristóbal, for instance, had some exposure to American media prior to their participation in the AFS program, and while their overall views of the U.S. as a violent place were not supplanted by ones of peacefulness after seeing *The Interrupters*, talking with the filmmaker, and participating in the Q&A; they did indeed shift, as the brutality and danger in places like Chicago became increasingly real (for Alberto) and significant (for Cristóbal) following their AFS experiences. In other words, Alberto

and Cristóbal's perceptions of the U.S. became those of a nation considerably more violent than they had previously known or even conceived of[205]; just as, for example, Enrique's slim awareness of the deep-seated racism which exists throughout American society developed into a much more profound understanding of the situation[206]. (This latter change occurred for Cristóbal as well, not only in terms of American racial discrimination but also with regard to the many *other* forms of inequality which exist.)

Similarly, Daniela's impressions regarding the U.S. and American society—though she did not participate in the AFS—had not remained untouched, but were actually strengthened through various experiences with media (including popular American films) and through the social remittances which she received from her family members living in the U.S. While Daniela felt that some aspects seemed appealing, she declared that she had no interest in ever visiting the country herself because (in her opinion) there was greater beauty, life, and tradition to be found in Mexico than in its northern neighbor.[207] Her exposure to American films and to the stories of her relatives reinforced this perspective, intensifying her aversion to the U.S.

In a comparable manner, Natalia's perception of her *own* efforts to reduce gang violence in Monterrey as a member of NPT was affected due to her involvement with the AFS. As a former program participant, Natalia felt that the AFS had not only motivated her to continue

[205] This occurred for Andrés and Humberto as well, though for the latter this was not only in terms of the U.S.' high levels of violence, but also with regard to American indifference/apathy toward such violence and other social crises.

[206] Enrique specifically observed that his experience had prompted him to think about the fact that despite how people look and act—whatever their physical or cultural differences may be—they are nevertheless all human beings. He said that he had recognized how one *cannot* separate oneself from others as being 'better' than them, and that *no* individual is more or less valuable than anyone else.

[207] Lucía described her perception of the U.S. similarly, based on her own visits to Florida and her experiences with American-related media: she saw society in the U.S. as being extremely organized and very 'cold', as compared to what she felt was the 'warmth' and friendliness of Mexican society. (Alejandra likewise described the former as a country of 'rule followers' and the latter as a nation of 'impish' law-benders—like those who frequently/willfully disregard traffic signs/lights.) Furthermore, Lucía asserted that while the U.S. appears to be a strong, nearly-invincible nation—based on both international and American media portrayals of the country—there is an exaggerated sense of self-importance as well as a vengeful 'eye-for-an-eye' mentality which lurk beneath the surface, becoming more apparent in situations like the American government's unilateral decision to start a conflict in Iraq.

helping gang members through her work at the NGO, but that it had also increased her original desire to provide such assistance. The AFS film and Q&A, she said, had reinforced her belief in what she was doing, as well as in the ongoing endeavors of all those who are employed/ volunteering at NPT. Furthermore, Natalia asserted that her participation in the program had taught her that anything can be accomplished if one's desire to do it is strong enough and if one puts one's mind to it. She herself had managed to transform who she was—both her internal sense of self and her external behaviors/equanimity—through the NGO's help, an experience akin to what she observed the Chicago 'interrupters' doing in the AFS film. Seeing this resemblance had encouraged her to stay strong, reminding her to stick with her chosen course in life whenever she felt like giving up.

Even NPT's activities—though seemingly unaffected on the surface—had been changed as a result of the NGO's interactions with the AFS, just as its Director had initially told me (despite being in a much less obvious manner than I originally expected). Primarily, these modifications had to do with how the program was *received*: rather than accepting at face value the AFS' mission as a U.S. diplomacy effort 'helping' other countries to address global issues, NPT's members—including the Director—responded with both pride in their own anti-gang work and dismay at the apparent deficiencies in their American counterparts. This was made clear to me through my observations as well as the ideas which were suggested by the NGO's employees and volunteers. All of them commented at one point or another over the course of my fieldwork with regard to how programs in the U.S. might pattern themselves after *NPT's* gang-prevention activities—such as by setting up schools/workshops or by providing employment/

educational opportunities for ex-gang members—and, as a result, emulate the NGO's successes as well[208].

Consequently, the types of changes I observed were not in terms of 'content', per se, but in terms of 'context'. Rather than simply imitating the type of interruption strategies presented in the AFS film—which, to a lesser extent, were already 'tools' in the NGO's repertoire—and instead of believing that what was being shown was somehow better than NPT's existing program, the Director (along with his employees and volunteers) strove to *expand* the NGO's scope as well as to develop *loftier* goals, but did so *without* changing the actual substance of its activities/events. As an example of this development, one has only to look at how they have been organizing larger and more extensive Treguas de Paz, not only among increasing numbers of gangs throughout Monterrey, but also between entire societal groups, such as the local gangs and the police force in December 2014[209].

Taken as a whole, NPT's Director was the one who most eloquently put into words the general response to the AFS, as well as the perceptions which the NGO's members held of the U.S. and of American society. Over the course of my study he stated several times that while films like *The Interrupters* shed light on the problem of gang violence, it is the message of *prevention* promoted by such films which really matters. Time and again the Director asserted that such preventative work (or deterrence)—whether conducted in the style of the Chicago

[208] Enrique, for instance, saw a fundamental similarity between programs like NPT and CeaseFire (i.e. the NGO which was highlighted in *The Interrupters*) in terms of their step-by-step processes for trying to generate social change. Accordingly, despite the fact that their methods differ with regard to how they are implemented—and although the Monterrey-based NGO's techniques were deemed more effective by my interlocutors, including Enrique himself—he nevertheless noted that because their *overarching goals* are analogous, NPT's American counterparts could therefore be improved.

[209] A similar (but smaller) event took place on January 15th, 2015, between members of Monterrey's police force and two gangs located in 'La Alianza', a *colonia* noted for its substantial violence. NPT arranged for a closed meeting between these groups at one of the city's auditoriums, where they could get to know—and understand—each other, as well as discuss the reasons underlying their actions (e.g. retaliatory or punitive acts). The gangs and the police came to an agreement after seven hours of discourse, forging a truce (signed on January 16th) in which the former pledged to stop committing crimes and the latter promised to better respect security protocols.

‘interrupters’ or in that of Monterrey’s NPT—is necessary; and although he conceded that he had learned much about the gang situation in the U.S., he felt that what the NGO’s participation in the AFS really demonstrated was how much impact a program like NPT could have *on the U.S.*, rather than the other way around. In fact, the Director argued that the NGO itself should be exported to places like Chicago, where its leadership school and post-graduation opportunities could enhance existing gang-prevention efforts, whether governmental or not (e.g. the U.S. government’s anti-gang task forces or the CeaseFire members’ endeavors in *The Interrupters*).

What one may ultimately conclude is that the American organizers’ predominant objective for the AFS—to improve foreign relations—takes a somewhat naïve view of the situation, specifically in terms of how the screening of films and the organization of events (such as classes/workshops, Q&As, etc.) are thought to be able to ‘magically’ improve cross-cultural communication and understanding. Looking at how the program’s participants in Monterrey, Mexico received and appropriated—or, as in nearly every instance, *criticized*—the information and ‘tools’ which were being provided to them through the AFS’ films/activities, it is clear that the former did not necessarily need (or want) what was being offered to them—at least not in the way presumed by the program’s organizers—having their own ideas instead as to what could be gleaned (or not) from their participation.

Rather than indiscriminately adopting/incorporating all of the aims, beliefs, and practices which were proffered by this cultural diplomatic initiative into their own work and objectives, the people I spoke with had received the AFS as a demonstration of the competency and success that *their* local program (NPT) had exhibited and was continuing to display in resolving the issue of gang violence—the exact problem with which the AFS had come to try and ‘help’ them. To my interlocutors, this not only indicated a certain amount of condescension on the part of the

DOS, but also a lack of practicality and efficacy in terms of what the AFS hoped to accomplish: it was evidence that the *U.S.* could benefit from the knowledge/experience of their own 'humble' NGO in Monterrey, Mexico, instead of the other way around.

Notwithstanding this relatively critical response, and despite the fact that many of my interlocutors—both former AFS participants and those who had not participated—had formulated their ideas about American society more as a result of "the saturation of broadcasting from or about the United States, [such] exchange participants can still function as important channels for information transfer to wider communities" (Scott-Smith 2009:53). This is because they can pass on *other* information about diplomatic programs—including the AFS—to people in their social groups, from describing how they had the opportunity to converse with an American filmmaker as equals during a Q&A, to reminiscing about how a film screening reinforced their sometimes-fragile motivation with regard to their current vocation (such as how *The Interrupters* helped strengthen Natalia's belief in the importance of her efforts at NPT)[210].

Consequently, these positive impressions will be imparted to other members of the community, even if there were some aspects of the experience which participants thought could have been improved. This is true for one simple reason: "to the extent that the important identities (e.g., cultural or gender) of the intercultural communicators have been positively addressed and sensitively dealt with, they will experience interaction satisfaction" (Ting-Toomey 1999:265). In this case—based on what I learned from my interviews, surveys, and participant observation—it is the former which occurred, thus instead of negativity there were *positive* comments about people's interest in the AFS, as well as *constructive* criticism of the program.

[210] Humberto's account offered corroboration for this phenomenon, as he noted that both he and his daughter had imparted their opinions of the AFS experience to other family members (e.g. spouses, grandchildren), who in turn had discussed it with friends and acquaintances, creating a situation in which social interactions served as conduits for AFS information to disperse within the broader community of Monterrey.

II. In Terms of U.S. Society's Image Abroad, Cultural Diplomacy Programs, & International Relations

There have been many suggestions over the years concerning how the American government can—or should—improve its relationship-building measures in order to achieve more positive reactions abroad vis-à-vis American diplomatic endeavors. In other words, with programs like the AFS, it has frequently been argued that such efforts should work "not just to develop relationships but to ensure that the experiences which people take away are positive and that there is follow-up [after]" (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing 2002:18).

Studies have shown, for instance, that receiving benefits and/or rewards for participating in cross-cultural communications/interactions is a "major factor encouraging favorable trait attributions" (Brislin 1981:164) by those involved, whereas the absence of such incentives frequently leads to the opposite—that is, to the attribution of negative traits. Accordingly, projects aimed at relationship building and/or improving the image of American society in potentially unreceptive situations need to focus more on the self-interests and experiences of those being engaged, both as *individuals* and as part of larger *social groups*—unlike the AFS, which focused mainly on the latter—in order to influence these in constructive ways (Stephan & Stephan 2002).

One of the most challenging recommendations—yet which may be the most beneficial in the long run—is that of *completely* transforming relations with national governments as well as their citizens in places where American actions/foreign policies have led to increasing hostility. To do so, scholars have asserted that diplomatic endeavors must be more aware of both existing public (i.e. media) and private (i.e. personal) frames—as well as the associations between them—which influence how societies are projected/perceived, since recognizing and comparing

such frames "will provide the means for reframing the host country's images, and promoting the [*sic*] better understandings and relations between countries" (Li & Chitty 2009:6).

Furthermore, it has also been suggested that people on *both* sides of such diplomatic projects—the 'senders' as well as the 'receivers'—need to: "(a) learn about the experiences of the other; (b) honestly examine [their] own group including recognizing [the] group's contributions to the problem; (c) recognize and empathize with the experiences of the other group; and (d) learn new cooperative and promoted behaviors" (Ellis & Maoz 2012:161). An especially problematic aspect connected with this idea is that one must "alter perceptions of the relative power, status, and goal incompatibility of countries in relation to one another" (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005:42), since these aspects are not only extremely influential but also well-established.

Other possible approaches include presenting information in a less (seemingly) evaluative or biased manner; generating stronger cross-cultural identification(s); expanding target audiences to include a more diverse array of people; appearing less superficial/more sincere; and having relevant authorities' support—governmental or otherwise—as well as that of local communities, *prior to* embarking on diplomatic endeavors abroad (Alexander, Levin, & Henry 2005, Stephan & Stephan 2002). Proposing such ideas is in no way meant to imply that the U.S. government is not already actively trying to improve its foreign relations; it may even be trying to do so using some of the aforementioned methods. Researchers offering these suggestions—including myself, by means of this dissertation—are simply interested in facilitating cross-cultural communication and enriching foreign relationships so that there may be less international conflict and a greater (shared) sense of identification with one another; in other words, an enhanced sense of/belief in people's common humanity (Stephan & Stephan 2002).

❖ Drawing Some Conclusions: Interpreting the Study's Findings

In coming to conclusions about a study such as this, it is necessary to avoid taking one's data, observations, and results at face value. Instead, one must critically analyze what is actually being seen, including such elements as "the co-existence of multiple programs, uncoordinated and possibly contradictory; the expectations generated by programs of improvement...and the inevitable gap between what programs promise, and what they achieve" (Li 2007:277). In addition, scholars have to be aware of their *own* perspectives, as "[no] space, person or social configuration is a tabula rasa, a clean slate awaiting inscription" (Li 2007:279).

My own experiences in the field support these statements. At the very beginning of my research, I was besieged by frightening preconceptions of Monterrey based on media images as well as the fears that these instilled in my friends, family, and colleagues, many of whom warned me about my chosen field site's potential dangers. Despite the kernels of truth underlying such misperceptions, when I arrived there were no thieves, kidnappers, or murderers awaiting me. Over the course of my fieldwork I realized that while these worries were not entirely unfounded, they could just as well have been applied to my hometown of Oakland, California, where I only ever thought of such dangers as 'background noise'; they were merely stitches in the fabric making up the broader tapestry of that environment.

Ultimately, I came to see that the pervasive media-based imagery and ideas which I had been exposed to before departing from the U.S. had greatly influenced my initial impressions of Monterrey (as had the list of warnings issued to me by the American Consulate). In fact, they had completely obscured the reality of life in that city, which I only came to recognize and appreciate once I had arrived and experienced it for myself. Thus in the end, it was the experience of being in, living in, and conducting research in Monterrey which shaped my

eventual understanding/perception of the city and its reputation. This was reminiscent of how AFS participants' interactions with actual Americans tended to influence their perceptions of the U.S. and their receptions of the program itself to a greater extent than simple exposure to films and media images/messages could do on their own—whether these were government-based or originated in Hollywood.

Overall, the question driving this dissertation was not only *why* the AFS (i.e. its films and activities) is received and perceived in particular ways, but also *how* both the 'American' and 'Mexican' sides of the program—that is to say, the people involved in its production/realization as well as those receiving/perceiving it—are influenced by their respective socio-historical contexts. Specifically, I explored how the AFS was implemented and received/perceived in Monterrey, Mexico in relation to the theoretical issues of how perceptions and receptions of media (especially film) are influenced by people's 'mindsets'/'cultural lenses' and their socio-historical contexts, as well as by the communicative presentations of such media. By engaging with interlocutors on both sides not only as individuals but also as embodiments of larger cultural beliefs, values, history, etc., this type of ethnographic research is not interested in people's personal opinions for their own sake, but for what these can reveal about—and how they can be used to understand—the broader socio-historical/cultural contexts (in this study, that meant the contexts related to Mexican receptions and perceptions of U.S. diplomatic endeavors).

With regard to how the texts and theories which I drew upon played out 'on the ground', there were generally some discrepancies between how concepts were *proposed* (or supposed) to operate and how they actually *did* function. In terms of 'soft power', for instance, the reality differed somewhat from how the concept has been—and generally continues to be—theorized. To illustrate this situation, one need only look at an example from the fieldwork that I conducted

in 2013: at the reception which I attended for the Monterrey International Film Festival, there were significant (though subtle) indications that the Mexican guests who were in attendance found the U.S. Consul General's speech and the DOS film on Martin Luther King Jr.'s 50th Anniversary to be heavy-handed in emphasizing both Mexico's ties *to* the U.S. and the 'universality' of *American* values. Consequently, rather than being 'attracted', people seemed somewhat 'turned off'.

However, the same concept played out differently in dissimilar contexts: at the 2012 Monterrey International Film Festival, for example, the Professor (who is also in charge of organizing the event), his staff members, and the audience were all very excited by the 'cultural exchange' which occurred under the auspices of the AFS and the U.S. Consulate. To be more precise, they were quite pleased to have had the director of *The Interrupters* present so that he could answer questions and talk about his film as well as his filmmaking experience. The director's presence and his interactions with the festivalgoers, they noted, greatly enhanced the screening with regard to people's perceptions of the film and of how its scenarios were similar to the situation in Monterrey. Thus in the form of a cultural/public diplomacy endeavor which encouraged *dialogue*—rather than a unidirectional speech lacking any exchange of ideas—the concept of 'soft power' became more tangible and better reflected the 'attractiveness' that has been associated with it by theorists.

Similarly, the texts and theories I employed regarding reception and cross-cultural communication played out in diverse ways, such as how my contacts in Mexico had fairly *unique*/*individual* responses to the program—though ones which were nevertheless influenced to some extent by their larger social context(s), including, for instance, previous experiences as part of gang constituencies—but were targeted by the DOS/AFS as being part of *uniform* social

groups. This was made evident in how an official at the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey stated that one of the post's goals was to reach out to the city's general 'filmmaking community'—with whom the Consulate had yet to build ties—through the AFS' participation in the 2012 Monterrey International Film Festival.

❖ How This Project Can Contribute to (Cultural) Anthropology

There are several ways in which my doctoral research can contribute to the anthropological discipline, opening up not only an empirical subject but also some theoretical areas that have not traditionally been thought about, like the idea of nations as 'actors'. Although more a view stemming from political science, this perspective could potentially be applied in the field of anthropology as well in order to enhance understanding of such concepts as 'soft' power when analyzing the (overt or covert) social, political, and economic relationships which exist between different cultures worldwide.

While my dissertation presents a creative approach to examining American (inter)actions regarding Mexico (and, perhaps, other nations as well)—such as what a diplomatic program like the AFS can reveal not only about the U.S.' international relationships, but also about people's perceptions of the U.S. government and American society abroad—one cannot naïvely assume that this method will somehow allow the reparation of cross-cultural relations or communication which have been damaged. The AFS may, in some instances, be generating actual dialogues, but in looking at individual situations—or another U.S. diplomatic program altogether—one might have to acknowledge the possibility (or the reality) that the American government is in fact 'steamrolling' other countries.

Setting this caveat aside to return to the study's possible contributions, over the course of my research I did not encounter any other anthropological work that specifically examined the

reception of media-based diplomacy endeavors abroad, nor any that ethnographically analyzed the on-the-ground conversations which such endeavors generate in relation to both their socio-historical contexts *and* participants' individual perceptions. Accordingly, by conducting an ethnographic analysis of the American Film Showcase's reception in Monterrey, Mexico[211], and by paying attention to the ways in which people's impressions of the U.S. shift and/or why they persist, I have explored a substantially understudied topic; what Didier Fassin (2013) has evocatively called a 'black hole'. Moreover, my research engages in what João Biehl (2013) has described as 'cross-pollination' between ethnographic realities and theoretical perspectives, such as by revealing how the concept of 'soft power' actually functions given the particular contexts in which it is employed, as well as how it is strategized and put into practice in today's globalized world.

In addition, this project adds to the relatively few anthropological studies which have 'studied up': since the initial calls for anthropologists to do so, not a great deal of research has been conducted in this regard, especially with governmental organizations. By examining the DOS' Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' as well as USC's School of Cinematic Arts' practices and procedures related to the production/assembly of the AFS, I have engaged in 'studying up' with both a government agency *and* an educational institution. Furthermore, by including the program's participants, I extended the study's range not only *up* but also *down*: looking at the AFS from these two distinct yet related perspectives—that of the DOS officials and AFS experts ('up'), as well as that of the AFS participants ('down')—enhanced my analysis of the program's assembly and reception(s).

[211] Also of note is the fact that this study investigates a topic which is not customarily explored in scholarly examinations of Mexico (as opposed to the more typical *indígena* research); that there is fairly minimal ethnographic data on how NGOs actually work; and that Monterrey itself is a city which has not incited a great deal of academic scrutiny.

Of course, as was previously mentioned, there were some difficulties in studying up, particularly with regard to access. However, this became another area to which my project can contribute, as it demonstrates the utility of employing interdisciplinary strategies—that is to say, the value of 'polymorphous engagement' (Gusterson 1997)—especially when conducting anthropological studies where any high-ranking interlocutors may attempt to make themselves unavailable. For instance, my project successfully engaged in 'eclectic' data collection, which involved reading news articles; examining official documents; attending formal and informal events; as well as conducting fieldwork by phone, email, and social media when necessary.

This improvisational approach—while not typical of ethnographic research—is one which I first encountered in Ortner's most recent work *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (2013)[212], where she combined 'interface ethnography' with in-person as well as published interviews in order to access the U.S.' often-inaccessible independent-filmmaking community[213]. Moreover, she treated these various interviews, ordinary talks or conversations, and her fieldnotes as 'texts' which she proceeded to dissect and interpret in order to get 'inside' the world of American independent cinema.

This is similar to what I did in my own research so as to surmount the difficulties of access—particularly with respect to the DOS—and to better understand people's distinctive ways of thinking about the U.S. government and American society through the accounts of their experiences with the AFS. By drawing on Ortner's methodology in using a combination of data sources—such as in-person and published interviews, attending public forums, as well as

[212] In a similar vein, Gupta has argued that anthropologists should "rethink the relationship between bodily presence and the generation of ethnographic data" (Gupta 1995:376,377), since as part of his own research he has previously had to combine fieldwork with the analysis of cultural texts (e.g. newspapers). Doing so is simply another methodological practice which is available to and can be readily employed by anthropologists.

[213] I too ran into this difficulty in my attempt to study reception among the Mexican filmmakers who had participated in the AFS: the only one I was able to interview and with whom I could actually conduct (some) participant observation was the Professor.

conducting ‘textual analyses’ of fieldnotes and of interlocutors’ personal accounts—this dissertation helps demonstrate the effectiveness of (and also supports the use of) such an approach in anthropological media research, especially with regard to the study of media reception (like that of the AFS in Monterrey).

Furthermore, my investigation attempts to address the problems with anthropological studies of media which focus on the idea of practice as *practices* or *activities*—such as those in Bräuchler and Postill’s aforementioned edited volume—rather than in terms of their larger social structures. Accordingly, through its analysis of the AFS’ assembly and of participant responses to the program—which follows the second framework—my research may potentially enhance the application of a practice theory framework to the study of media production and reception. For instance, in looking at the AFS’ appropriation by its participants, I focused on the latter’s intentionality/agency—or their pursuit of individual ‘projects’ vis-à-vis their participation in the AFS—as well as on how they are simultaneously constrained by their Bourdieusian *habitus*; in other words, by the historical and current dispositions which they have internalized.

Overall, the contributions that my doctoral research can make to the field of anthropology are methodological and theoretical, as well as practical. With regard to anthropological theory, this study examines an area which has not previously been considered by anthropologists: the nexus between power (specifically soft power), diplomacy, and reception analysis. While scholars have looked at these topics individually, the AFS presented the unique opportunity to analyze and understand their increasingly-prevalent convergence. Methodologically, my work can contribute to the idea of studying up; and it also demonstrates the benefits of employing a multi-method, ethnographic, practice-based approach to media research, especially reception studies. Concerning its more practical or applied implications, this project’s examination of the

AFS' reception has the potential to help increase understanding of how other societies perceive the U.S., the nation's governmental policies and diplomatic efforts overseas, as well as the American people.

❖ Implications & Future Research

As illustrated by this study, scholarly examinations of perception and reception have a valuable role to play in the fields of international communications and foreign relations due to the fact that such research "[attempts] to understand how texts and artworks are consumed in order to act with more knowledge in political situations, to change, where necessary, or where possible, the consumption of cultural products" (Staiger 1992:11) or even their production. More importantly, these types of investigations have the potential to function "as a tool for understanding meaning as produced historically and socially by individuals" (Staiger 1992:96) within their particular political, economic, and social contexts.

Such work is therefore *necessary* in today's increasingly interconnected world, where media images/messages—both 'mass' and of government derivation—shape societies' cross-cultural perceptions and, hence, their international relationships. While it is futile to expect complete international acceptance or tolerance, national governments can no longer afford to be indifferent to—or ignore the opinions of—other countries and cultures. Negative perceptions by foreign peoples can lead to the loss of allies, increased numbers of enemies, and reduced 'moral' authority; all of which the U.S. administration has recently experienced in terms of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (Brooks 2006).

As a more specific example, the American government often makes influential policy decisions which impact other nations/societies, and media messages—both domestic and foreign—"are a significant source of information and impressions about such peoples. One may be

legitimately concerned as to the origin and nature of beliefs about relatively unfamiliar social groups, beliefs that may well inform consequential decisions" (Slater 1990:340). One of the primary implications of such potential (mis)information and (mis)representation is that "those who inform and educate, incidentally or purposefully, through the powerful image of the media need themselves to be informed" (Gardels & Medavoy 2009:137). Consequently, U.S. diplomatic efforts—like those sponsored by the DOS, which supervises the AFS—"should be given the mission not only of informing the world about America, but of informing the American public, starting with Hollywood, about the world out there" (Gardels & Medavoy 2009:136).

Overall, this dissertation addresses key intellectual and practical concerns in the fields of international relations/diplomacy, media anthropology, and film reception/audience analysis, including: (1) issues of 'soft' power; (2) diplomacy as cultural and/or media imperialism based on perception vs. intent; (3) effective cross-cultural communications or dialogues; and (4) the benefits/drawbacks of an ethnographic, practice-based approach to media research. By focusing on these topics, I have attempted to reframe several theoretical dichotomies which prevented prior analyses from taking into account the multi-dimensional nature of diplomatic programs and their distribution of information/products. My study illustrates how these involve *both* coercion and persuasion; elicit *diverse* reactions based on specific cultural/socio-historical contexts; and can not only *stimulate* but may in fact also *hinder* cross-cultural communication/understanding (van Elteren 2006, Melissen 2005, Evans 2004, Nye Jr. 2004).

Furthermore, I have attempted to show how socio-historical and media-based perceptions —e.g. concerning power and imperialism—can affect U.S.-Mexico diplomatic interactions, as well as Mexican audiences' receptivity to ideas about the U.S. In so doing, this study has endeavored to reveal ways in which impressions of American society and government are *more*

or *less* disposed to being swayed by U.S. diplomatic efforts overseas, like the AFS. If Americans —not simply politicians and academics but laypeople as well, especially those charged with developing such programs—better understood the perceptions of groups and individuals targeted by U.S. diplomatic projects/foreign policies, these could be modified/deployed more effectively.

My dissertation is intended as one small stepping stone on the path to achieving such an outcome, specifically by shedding light on *both* the implementation as well as the reception of diplomatically-sponsored American media (e.g. films), thereby potentially establishing a foundation for improving U.S. foreign endeavors—and, hence, relations—based on cultural insights and mutual respect. It is hoped that future work based on this study's analysis of the AFS will promote the creation of more culturally-aware, dialogue-based, education- and engagement-oriented programs; ones which will strive not only to inform the American public about *how* U.S. society is regarded around the world, but also *why*.

As international contentions and distorted, media-based perceptions become increasingly prevalent worldwide, further research exploring the relationship between diplomatic efforts and cinematic representations/reception(s) could benefit communication initiatives around the globe. Societies are becoming ever more interconnected and media-saturated, thus any negative images or impressions they have of each other might lead to serious misunderstandings and conflicts. Though these issues are not easily resolved, the ongoing pursuit of such topics will yield a body of research which could have widespread impacts—both at home and abroad—by generating greater cross-cultural knowledge and, as a result, improving understanding. Consequently, studying the employment, reception(s), perception(s), as well as the potential implications of film with respect to diplomacy and foreign relations is not simply a question of academic interest; rather, it has become an essential concern for our contemporary existence.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Filmography

Courageous. 2011. Director Alex Kendrick. Executive Producers/Producers/Associate Producers Michael Catt, Larry Frenzel, Terry Hemmings, Stephen Kendrick, Jim McBride, Dennis Wiemer. (U.S.)

Don't Stop Believin': Everyman's Journey. 2012. Director Ramona S. Diaz. Executive Producers Ramona S. Diaz, Capella Fahoome, Joshua A. Green. (U.S.)

Food, Inc. 2008. Director Robert Kenner. Executive Producers/Producers Robert Kenner, Elise Pearlstein, William Pohlad, Robin Schorr, Jeff Skoll, Diane Weyermann. (U.S.)

Gandhi en México, Una Mirada a la Noviolencia. 2014. Director Sonia Bazzeato Deotto. Producer Patricia Aguilar Mendizábal. (Mexico)

GasLand. 2010. Director Josh Fox. Producers Trish Adlesic, Josh Fox, Molly Gandour. (U.S.)

Inocente. 2012. Directors Sean Fine, Andrea Nix. Producers Sean Fine, Albie Hecht, Yael Melamede, Emanuel Michael, Andrea Nix. (U.S.)

Lives Worth Living. 2011. Director Eric Neudel. Producers/Associate Producers Alison Gilkey, Eric Neudel. (U.S.)

Precious. 2009. Director Lee Daniels. Executive Producers/Producers/Associate Producers Lisa Cortés, Lee Daniels, Tom Heller, Asger Hussain, Gary Magness, Tyler Perry, Andrew Sforzini, Simone Sheffield, Sarah Siegel-Magness, Oprah Winfrey. (U.S.)

Real Women Have Curves. 2002. Director Patricia Cardoso. Producers Effie Brown, George LaVoo. (U.S.)

Rebirth. 2011. Director James Whitaker. Producers David Solomon, James Whitaker. (U.S.)

Revenge of the Electric Car. 2011. Director Chris Paine. Executive Producers/Producers/ Associate Producers Jessie Deeter, Stefano Durdic, Robert G. Gilbertson, Sara Hutchinson, P.G. Morgan. (U.S.)

Samsara. 2011. Director Ron Fricke. Producers/Associate Producers J.C. Earle, Mark Magidson, Michael Neale. (Germany)

The Blind Side. 2009. Director John Lee Hancock. Executive Producers/Producers Timothy M. Bourne, Broderick Johnson, Andrew A. Kosove, Gil Netter, Molly Smith, Erwin Stoff. (U.S.)

The Godfather. 1972. Director Francis Ford Coppola. Producers Robert Evans, Gray Frederickson, Albert S. Ruddy. (U.S.)

The Interrupters. 2011. Director Steve James. Senior/Executive Producers Raney Aronson-Rath, David Fanning, Sally Jo Fifer. (U.S.)

Undefeated. 2011. Directors Daniel Lindsay, T.J. Martin. Executive Producers/Producers Sean Combs, Paolo Coppola, Ed Cunningham, Michele Farinola, Seth Gordon, Neeraj Kohli, Daniel Lindsay, Jillian Longnecker, Rich Middlemas, Chris Miller, Nigel Sinclair, Glen Zipper, Ralph Zipper. (U.S.)

Upstream Color. 2013. Director Shane Carruth. Executive Producers/Producers Shane Carruth, Scott Douglass, Casey Gooden, Brent Goodman, Ben LeClair. (U.S.)

We Still Live Here: Âs Nutayuneân. 2010. Director Anne Makepeace. Producers Anne Makepeace, Elizabeth Perry, Jonathan Perry, Jennifer Weston. (U.S.)

Yo Lo Creo. 2012. Director Los Pando. Producer Maru García, Los Pando, Tisa Pando, Leopoldo Valdés. (Mexico)

Appendix B: Information Sheets/Consent Forms

I. DOS Officials

University of California, Los Angeles

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET / CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy:
Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time

Principal Investigator Jessica Peters (M.A.) and Faculty Sponsor Yunxiang Yan (Ph.D.) from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are or have been involved in the Department of State's (DOS) oversight of the American Film Showcase (AFS), such as by reviewing or confirming the program's films. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is designed to examine how the AFS uses films as a form of diplomatic outreach in foreign countries. It specifically focuses on how international audiences receive and interpret the program's films and workshops/classes, as well as the different ways in which the program promotes cross-cultural communication and understanding.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Allow the researcher to ask yourself and other previous/current DOS officials involved questions about your decision-making criteria with regard to the AFS.
- Participate in several one-on-one interviews regarding the DOS' involvement with the AFS, such as its final review/confirmation of the AFS film lineup. To be conducted via email, phone, or Skype.
- Participate in a follow-up interview within a month or two of the AFS season's conclusion, by phone, email, or Skype.
- Questions in the interviews will address:
    - How you and your fellow officials select the final AFS films and why you confirm the particular ones you do.
    - Why each is chosen to be screened in a specific country or region.
    - How you think foreign audiences will receive and interpret the AFS films and workshops/classes.
    - What specific objectives you hope to achieve through this program.
    - Overall, how you expect it to benefit foreign audiences and/or diplomatic relations.
- Interviews may be audio-recorded or video-recorded, as applicable.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take (at most) a total of about thirty minutes to an hour per interview. Overall participation in the study will last roughly one year, since there will be an interval of several months between the initial interviews and the follow-up interviews. In addition, the information that you provide will be stored (confidentially) for future use by the PI and/or the research team.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may provide broader benefits: they may offer valuable insights into the advantages and drawbacks of this type of diplomacy. They may help to enrich the AFS program, such as by revealing potential topics for future showcases that are more specific to the desires and social or cultural environments of international participants. They may also promote additional education- and engagement-oriented partnerships between the DOS and other universities in addition to USC. Overall, the results may help to improve foreign relations between the U.S. and other nations by promoting cross-cultural knowledge, communication, and understanding.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the following: the use of nonspecific code names for interviewees (such as 'John Smith') and the omission of identifiable features in the researcher's notes that could potentially link you to specific data elements. All data will be stored in a secure computer file on the researcher's laptop, which itself is password protected: no one will have access to the laptop or the file except the researcher herself (Jessica Peters). All participants will be asked to keep what is said during interviews between themselves and the researcher only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- If you decide to discontinue your participation in the study, please contact the researcher (Jessica Peters) immediately.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you.

- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Jessica Peters (Principal Investigator) at (310) 592-1709 or jmp89@ucla.edu.
  By mail: 765 Weyburn Place #425
  Los Angeles, CA 90024

  Yunxiang Yan (Faculty Sponsor) at (310) 267-4336 or yan@anthro.ucla.edu.

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
  11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

II. AFS Organizers

University of California, Los Angeles

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET / CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy:
Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time

Principal Investigator Jessica Peters (M.A.) and Faculty Sponsor Yunxiang Yan (Ph.D.) from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are or have previously been involved in the organization/coordination of the American Film Showcase (AFS). Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is designed to examine how the AFS uses films as a form of diplomatic outreach in foreign countries. It specifically focuses on how international audiences receive and interpret the program's films and workshops/classes, as well as the different ways in which the program promotes cross-cultural communication and understanding.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Allow the researcher to ask yourself and other previous or current AFS organizers/ coordinators questions about assembling the program.
- Participate in several one-on-one interviews regarding the organization and realization of the AFS program. To be conducted at the University of Southern California's (USC) School of Cinematic Arts; at a more convenient location of your choosing; or via email, phone, or Skype if in-person interviews are not feasible.
- Participate in a follow-up interview within a month or two of the AFS season's conclusion, by phone, email, or Skype.
- Questions in the interviews will address:
    - How and why you and your fellow organizers came to be a part of the AFS program.
    - How you and your fellow organizers choose the AFS experts and why you decide on the particular people you do.
    - How you think foreign audiences will receive and interpret the AFS films and workshops/ classes.
    - What specific objectives you hope to achieve through this program.
    - Overall, how you expect it to benefit foreign audiences and/or diplomatic relations.
- Interviews may be audio-recorded or video-recorded, as applicable.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take (at most) a total of about thirty minutes to an hour per interview. Overall participation in the study will last roughly one year, since there will be an interval of several months between the initial interviews regarding the selection process and the follow-up interviews. In addition, the information that you provide will be stored (confidentially) for future use by the PI and/or the research team.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may provide broader benefits: they may offer valuable insights into the advantages and drawbacks of this type of diplomacy. They may help to enrich the AFS program, such as by revealing potential topics for future showcases that are more specific to the desires and social or cultural environments of international participants. They may also promote additional education- and engagement-oriented partnerships between the U.S. Government and other universities in addition to USC. Overall, the results may help to improve foreign relations between the U.S. and other nations by promoting cross-cultural knowledge, communication, and understanding.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the following: the use of nonspecific code names for interviewees (such as 'John Smith') and the omission of identifiable features in the researcher's notes that could potentially link you to specific data elements. All data will be stored in a secure computer file on the researcher's laptop, which itself is password protected: no one will have access to the laptop or the file except the researcher herself (Jessica Peters). All participants will be asked to keep what is said during interviews between themselves and the researcher only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- If you decide to discontinue your participation in the study, please contact the researcher (Jessica Peters) immediately.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you.

- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Jessica Peters (Principal Investigator) at (310) 592-1709 or jmp89@ucla.edu.
  By mail: 765 Weyburn Place #425
  Los Angeles, CA 90024

  Yunxiang Yan (Faculty Sponsor) at (310) 267-4336 or yan@anthro.ucla.edu.

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

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  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

III. AFS Experts

University of California, Los Angeles

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET / CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy:
Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time

Principal Investigator Jessica Peters (M.A.) and Faculty Sponsor Yunxiang Yan (Ph.D.) from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are or have previously been one of the American Film Showcase (AFS) experts selecting films for the program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is designed to examine how the AFS uses films as a form of diplomatic outreach in foreign countries. It specifically focuses on how international audiences receive and interpret the program's films and workshops/classes, as well as the different ways in which the program promotes cross-cultural communication and understanding.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Allow the researcher to ask yourself and other previous/current experts questions regarding your decision-making criteria.
- Participate in several one-on-one interviews, to be conducted at the University of Southern California's (USC) School of Cinematic Arts; at a more convenient location of your choosing; or via email, phone, or Skype if in-person interviews are not feasible.
- Participate in a follow-up interview within a month or two of the AFS season's conclusion, by phone, email, or Skype.
- Questions in the interviews will address:
    - How you and your fellow experts choose the AFS films and why you decide to select the particular ones you do.
    - How you think foreign audiences will receive and interpret the AFS films and workshops/ classes.
    - What specific goals you hope to achieve through this program.
    - Overall, how you expect it to benefit foreign audiences and/or diplomatic relations.
- Interviews may be audio-recorded or video-recorded, as applicable.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take (at most) a total of about thirty minutes to an hour per interview. Overall participation in the study will last roughly one year, since there will be an interval of several months between the initial interviews regarding the selection process and the follow-up interviews. In addition, the information that you provide will be stored (confidentially) for future use by the PI and/or the research team.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may provide broader benefits: they may offer valuable insights into the advantages and drawbacks of this type of diplomacy. They may help to enrich the AFS program, such as by revealing potential topics for future showcases that are more specific to the desires and social or cultural environments of international participants. They may also promote additional education- and engagement-oriented partnerships between the U.S. Government and other universities in addition to USC. Overall, the results may help to improve foreign relations between the U.S. and other nations by promoting cross-cultural knowledge, communication, and understanding.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the following: the use of nonspecific code names for interviewees (such as 'John Smith') and the omission of identifiable features in the researcher's notes that could potentially link you to specific data elements. All data will be stored in a secure computer file on the researcher's laptop, which itself is password protected: no one will have access to the laptop or the file except the researcher herself (Jessica Peters). All participants will be asked to keep what is said during interviews between themselves and the researcher only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- If you decide to discontinue your participation in the study, please contact the researcher (Jessica Peters) immediately.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you.

- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Jessica Peters (Principal Investigator) at (310) 592-1709 or jmp89@ucla.edu.
  By mail: 765 Weyburn Place #425
  Los Angeles, CA 90024

  Yunxiang Yan (Faculty Sponsor) at (310) 267-4336 or yan@anthro.ucla.edu.

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
  11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

IV. AFS Team Members

University of California, Los Angeles

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET / CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

American Cinema as Cultural Diplomacy:
Seeking International Understanding One Film at a Time

Principal Investigator Jessica Peters (M.A.) and Faculty Sponsor Yunxiang Yan (Ph.D.) from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are currently or have previously been sent abroad by the American Film Showcase (AFS) as part of one of the AFS teams. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is designed to examine how the AFS uses films as a form of diplomatic outreach in foreign countries. It specifically focuses on how international audiences receive and interpret the program's films and workshops/classes, as well as the different ways in which the program promotes cross-cultural communication and understanding.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Allow the researcher to ask yourself and other previous/current team members questions about your experiences as part of the AFS program.
- Participate in several one-on-one interviews regarding your participation in the AFS program; to be conducted at a location of your choosing or via email, phone, or Skype if in-person interviews are not feasible.
- Participate in a follow-up interview within a month or two of the AFS season's conclusion, by phone, email, or Skype.
- Questions in the interviews will address:
    - Specifically for filmmakers: how you intend (or intended) to depict American society in your film, and how you feel the audience's interpretation compares or contrasts (or compared/contrasted) with your vision.
    - For all AFS team members: whether or not the audience's response matches (or matched) your expectations; if you feel that the program helped spark dialogue or debate on social issues; what goals you hope to achieve (or hoped to achieve) by participating in the AFS program; and how you think the latter can benefit or has benefited foreign audiences and/or diplomatic relations.
- Interviews may be audio-recorded or video-recorded, as applicable.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take (at most) a total of about thirty minutes to an hour per interview. Overall participation in the study will last roughly one year, since there will be an interval of several months between the initial interviews regarding the selection process and the follow-up interviews. In addition, the information that you provide will be stored (confidentially) for future use by the PI and/or the research team.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may provide broader benefits: they may offer valuable insights into the advantages and drawbacks of this type of diplomacy. They may help to enrich the AFS program, such as by revealing potential topics for future showcases that are more specific to the desires and social or cultural environments of international participants. They may also promote additional education- and engagement-oriented partnerships between the U.S. Government and other universities in addition to USC. Overall, the results may help to improve foreign relations between the U.S. and other nations by promoting cross-cultural knowledge, communication, and understanding.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the following: the use of nonspecific code names for interviewees (such as 'John Smith') and the omission of identifiable features in the researcher's notes that could potentially link you to specific data elements. All data will be stored in a secure computer file on the researcher's laptop, which itself is password protected: no one will have access to the laptop or the file except the researcher herself (Jessica Peters). All participants will be asked to keep what is said during interviews between themselves and the researcher only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- If you decide to discontinue your participation in the study, please contact the researcher (Jessica Peters) immediately.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you.

- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Jessica Peters (Principal Investigator) at (310) 592-1709 or jmp89@ucla.edu.
  By mail: 765 Weyburn Place #425
  Los Angeles, CA 90024

  Yunxiang Yan (Faculty Sponsor) at (310) 267-4336 or yan@anthro.ucla.edu.

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

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  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

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SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

V. AFS Participants

Universidad de California a Los Ángeles

INFORMACIÓN SOBRE EL ESTUDIO / CONSENTIMIENTO A PARTICIPAR EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN

El Cine Estadounidense Utilizado como Diplomacia Cultural: Buscando Comprensión y Armonía Internacional Una Película a la Vez

Investigadora Principal Jessica Peters (M.A.) y Patrocinadora Profesoral Yunxiang Yan (Ph.D.) del Departamento de Antropología en la Universidad de California a Los Ángeles (UCLA) están realizando un estudio de investigación.

Usted fue seleccionado(a) como un(a) candidato(a) posible en este estudio porque es o ya fue un(a) participante internacional en el Escaparate Cinemático Estadounidense (en inglés: el American Film Showcase o el AFS). Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria.

¿Porque están haciendo este estudio?

Este estudio está diseñado para examinar como el AFS utiliza las películas como una forma de diplomacia en países extranjeros. Específicamente, el estudio se concentra en como las audiencias internacionales reciben e interpretan las películas y los clases/talleres del programa, y también las maneras diferentes que utiliza el programa para promover la comunicación y la comprensión transcultural.

¿Qué sucederá si yo decido de participar en este estudio de investigación?

Si usted ofrece a participar en este estudio, la investigadora le pedirá de hacer las siguientes cosas:

- Si está participando en el AFS ahora: participe en una entrevista uno a uno después de la proyección cinemática del AFS, realizado en el mismo lugar donde ocurrió la proyección o en un lugar más conveniente de su elección.
- Si no está participando en el AFS ahora: participe en una entrevista uno a uno sobre su experiencia en el pasado con una proyección del AFS, realizado en el lugar de su elección.
- Si está participando en el AFS ahora: participe en una entrevista uno a uno después de uno de los talleres o clases del AFS, realizado en el mismo lugar donde ocurrió el clase/taller o en un lugar más conveniente de su elección.
- Si no está participando en el AFS ahora: participe en una entrevista uno a uno sobre su experiencia en el pasado con uno de los talleres o clases del AFS, realizado en el lugar de su elección.
- Rellene un cuestionario sobre su experiencia en general como participante en el programa AFS, a completar y devolver a la investigadora dentro de 24 horas (si no está participando ahora) o después del último clase/taller o la última proyección en que participó (si está participando ahora).

- Participe en una entrevista complementaria algunos meses después de las entrevistas iniciales y/o su participación en el programa AFS, por teléfono, por correo electrónico, o por Skype.
- Preguntas en las entrevistas y el cuestionario abordarán su comprensión/ apreciación de la sociedad Estadounidense (como estuvo representada en la película del AFS), cuál fue su impresión de los Estados Unidos, y si piensa que el programa AFS fue beneficioso para usted (si la respuesta es "sí", describirá como fue beneficioso).
    - Especificamente para los participantes queines son cineastas también: Participe en un análisis etnográfico después del Escaparate del AFS. El análisis durará un año y estudiará los impactos en desarrollo del AFS sobre usted (por ej. su impresión de los Estados Unidos, su trabajo) y miembros de su comunidad (incluyendo personas quienes no participaban en el programa AFS).
- Las entrevistas pueden ser grabadas (o en audio o en video), como aplicable.

¿Para cuánto tiempo seré en el estudio de investigación?

Participación en las entrevistas durará (a lo más) treinta minutos hasta una hora por cada una, y el cuestionario durará veinte minutos o menos. La duración del estudio será aproximadamente dos años porque habrá algunos meses entre las entrevistas iniciales durante el Escaparate, las entrevistas complementarias, y el análisis etnográfico subsiguiente (que durará más o menos un año). Además, la información que proporciona a la investigadora será guardada (confidencialmente) para futuros estudios realizados por la investigadora y/o el equipo de investigación.

¿Hay algún riesgo o incomodidad potencial en este estudio que debería esperar?

No hay ningunos riesgos o incomodidades esperados en este estudio.

¿Hay algún beneficio potencial si decido de participar?

Usted no beneficiará directamente de su participación en este estudio de investigación.

Los resultados de este estudio podrían proveer beneficios más amplios: podrían ofrecer realizaciones valiosas sobre las ventajas y las desventajas de este tipo de diplomacia. Podrían enriquecer el programa AFS, tal como asegurar que los escaparates en el futuro estén más pertinentes para los participantes internacionales. Los resultados podrían también ayudar las tentativas del gobierno a mejorar relaciones entre los Estados Unidos y otros países, por medio de promover (1) los conocimientos, (2) la comunicación, y (3) la comprensión transculturales.

¿Mantendrán ustedes confidencial la información sobre yo y sobre mi participación en este estudio?

Sí. Cualquiera información obtenida en este estudio y que podría identificar usted será mantenida confidencial. Será revelada solo con su permiso o si es necesario según la ley. La confidencialidad será mantenida por medio do lo siguiente: (1) los cuestionarios serán completamente confidenciales, (2) la investigadora utilizará nombres de código no específicos para los/las entrevistados(as), y (3) las notas de la investigadora suprimirán características identificables que podrían revelar una conexión entre usted y los datos específicos del estudio. Todos los datos serán guardados en un archivo seguro en el portátil de la investigadora. El portátil es protegido con contraseña: nadie tendrá acceso al archive o al portátil salvo la investigador (Jessica Peters). Se los pedirá a todos los participantes mantener lo que está discutido durante las entrevistas confidencial, y solo entre ellos y la investigadora. Sin embargo, la confidencialidad completa no puede ser garantizada.

¿Cuáles son mis derechos si participo en este estudio?

- Puede decidir si quiere participar o no en este estudio, y puede retirar su consentimiento y suspender su participación en cualquier momento.
- Si decide suspender su participación en este estudio, por favor contacte la investigadora (Jessica Peters) inmediatamente.
- Cualquiera decisión que tome, no habrá ninguna sanción.
- Puede negarse a responder a cualquieras preguntas que no quiere contestar y todavía seguir siendo como participante en el estudio.

¿Con quién puedo ponerme en contacto si tengo alguna pregunta?

- **El equipo de investigación:**
  Si tiene alguna pregunta, algún comentario, o alguna preocupación sobre la investigación, puede ponerse en contacto con alguien del equipo de investigación. Por favor, contacte:

  Jessica Peters (Investigadora Principal). Por teléfono: (310) 592-1709, por correo electrónico: jmp89@ucla.edu, o por correo: 765 Weyburn Place #425
  Los Angeles, CA 90024

  Yunxiang Yan (Patrocinadora Profesoral). Por teléfono: (310) 267-4336 o por correo electrónico: yan@anthro.ucla.edu.

- **UCLA Oficina del Programa por la Protección de Participantes en las Investigaciones en Seres Humanos (OHRPP):**
  Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos durante su participación en este estudio, o si tiene alguna preocupación o sugerencia y quiere hablar con alguien aparte del equipo de investigación sobre el estudio, por favor llame el OHRPP por teléfono: (310) 825-7122, o contáctelo por correo:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

Le dará una copia de esta información para guardar en sus registros personales.

FIRMA DEL / DE LA PARTICIPANTE EN EL ESTUDIO

_____
Nombre del/de la Participante

_____ _____
Firma del/de la Participante Fecha

FIRMA DE LA PERSONA OBTENIENDO EL CONSENTIMIENTO

_____ _____
Nombre de la Persona Obteniendo el Consentimiento Número de Contacto

_____ _____
Firma de la Persona Obteniendo el Consentimiento Fecha

Appendix C: Questionnaire / Survey

I. Sample Questionnaire / Survey for AFS Foreign Participants

Cuestionario para los Participantes Internacionales

- *Información Estadística General*

1) Edad:
2) Sexo:
3) Nacionalidad:
4) Estado civil:
5) Nivel educativo:
6) Ocupación:
7) ¿Ha visitado los Estados Unidos anteriormente? Trace un círculo alrededor de: **Sí** / **No**
8) Correo electrónico *(para las entrevistas complementarias)*:

- *Preguntas sobre el AFS y el DOS*

1) ¿Cómo ha aprendido usted acerca del Escaparate Cinemático Estadounidense (en inglés: el American Film Showcase o el AFS)?

2) ¿Ya ha participado en el programa AFS? Trace un círculo alrededor de: **Sí** / **No**
   a. Si la respuesta es "sí", describa su experiencia.

   b. Si la respuesta es "no", explique porque decidió participar en el programa ahora.

3) ¿Conoce alguien quien ha participado anteriormente en el programa AFS? Si la respuesta es "sí", ¿estaría usted dispuesto(a) a transmitir información sobre esta investigación a estos(as) antiguos(as) participantes, en caso de que estén interesados(as) en participar?

Por favor, contacte la Investigadora Principal si usted es interesado(a) al hacerlo.

4) ¿Ha participado usted en otros programas diplomáticos financiados por el Departamento de Estado de los Estados Unidos? *(Si la respuesta es "sí", manifieste cual programa.)*

5) ¿Cómo está relacionado el programa AFS a su vida? ¿Está relacionado a su trabajo, sus pasatiempos, etcétera?

6) ¿De qué manera piensa que su participación en el programa AFS le ha beneficiado o le va a beneficiar?

➢ *Preguntas sobre las Películas y los Clases/Talleres del AFS*

1) ¿Cuál fue su apreciación o su comprensión personal de los Estados Unidos o de la sociedad Estadounidense antes de participar en este programa?

2) ¿Qué película del AFS miró usted?

   a. ¿Podía usted identificar con algunos aspectos de la película? ¿Los cuáles?

   b. ¿Con los cuáles no podía identificar usted, y por qué?

   c. ¿Qué temas sociales abordaba la película?

d. ¿Cómo fueron retratados los Estados Unidos y la sociedad Estadounidense en esta película?

3) ¿En qué clases/talleres del AFS participaba?

a. ¿De qué se trataban los clases/talleres?

b. ¿Utilizará lo que usted ha aprendido? Trace un círculo alrededor de: **Sí** / **No**

(Si la respuesta es "sí", describa brevemente como/de qué manera piensa utilizarlo.)

4) ¿Ha cambiado su apreciación o su comprensión personal de los Estados Unidos y de la sociedad Estadounidense a causa de su participación en el programa AFS (es decir, su participación en la proyección cinemática y los clases/talleres del AFS)?

Trace un círculo alrededor de: **Sí** / **No**

(Si la respuesta es "sí", describa brevemente cómo ha cambiado.)

5) ¿Tiene algunas sugerencias para películas y clases/talleres que el AFS podría poner en práctica en su país en el futuro?

Appendix D: Photos

I. AFS Events & Activities in Monterrey[214]

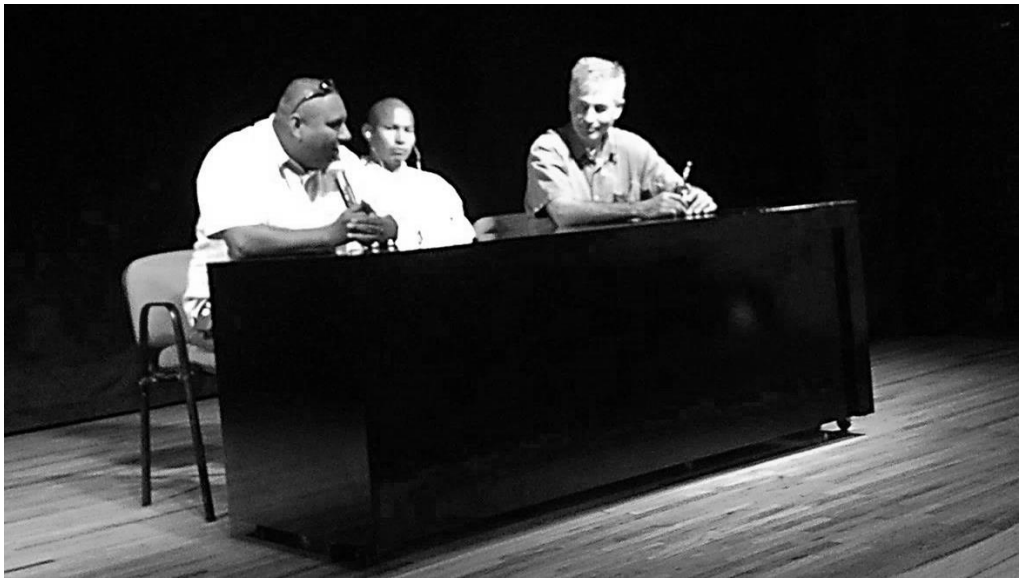
Q&A following a screening of "The Interrupters" at the Monterrey International Film Festival (2012).

Discussion panel with one of the AFS filmmakers at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León's Facultad de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano (2012).

[214] The four photos in this section are courtesy of the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey.

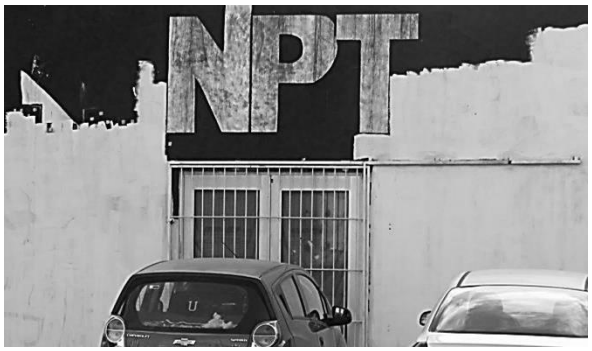
Filmmaking workshop being led by an AFS expert – furthest to the right (2012).

Panel discussion on the subject of gang-related experiences and prevention with the Director of Nacidos para Triunfar (seated far left), NGO member Cristóbal (seated in the center), and one of the AFS filmmakers (seated far right), following a screening of "The Interrupters" (2012).



II. Nacidos para Triunfar (NPT)

Exterior shots of the NGO's Monterrey-based headquarters before (above) and after (below) the realization of its 2014-2015 mural representation.



NPT volunteers and employees working in the NGO's main office (2014).

III. Monterrey International Film Festival

Official poster for the festival displayed in Monterrey's Parque Fundidora, where many of the festival's film screenings take place (2013).

Reception for the festival hosted by the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey (2013).

IV. Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL)

UANL's Facultad de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano (2013).

V. Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM)

University residences for exchange students and foreign scholars (2013).

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