A certain type of social actor, the *cacique*, takes center stage in what Jeffrey W. Rubin describes as the study of “the national implications of regional conflicts and practices” in Mexico. In this research, one of the recurring themes concerns the protagonism of bosses who exercise control as brokers and middlemen occupying key positions within the national mosaic of Mexico’s regional cultures. These actors are often described as audacious figures who operate exchange networks based on highly personalized relationships, reciprocity, tribute, cultural forms of patriarchal authority and the use of physical violence and exclusion. Perceptions of their historical roles in the formation of nation-states tend to be negative. They are commonly viewed as atavisms and even the well-established terms used to identify these leaders and their organizations — *cacique, cacicazgo* — evoke notions of syncretic forms from past traditions that have persisted to challenge and distort an emerging modernity.

Nevertheless, a series of studies in the last fifteen years that reconsider the relationship between state formation and *cacicazgos* has called into question some common assumptions about the nature of *cacicazgos* and their marked continuity. Claudio Lomnitz-Adler’s doctoral thesis (later published as *Exits from the Labyrinth*, 1992), was perhaps the starting point of these reconsiderations, while a recent meeting organized by Wil Pansters and Alan Knight at Oxford University in September 2002 brought together anthropologists, sociologists and historians to discuss the state of this question. In the ten years between the publication of Lomnitz-Adler’s seminal book and the Oxford meeting, several important works emerged, perhaps two of the most significant of which are the analysis of the networks of political intermediation that became visible during the neoliberal reform of the state (John Gledhill, 1998), and an analytical essay that synthesizes recent studies of the relation between *caciquismo* and everyday forms of state formation by Jeffrey W. Rubin (1997). The Thematic Section of this issue (coordinated on this occasion by Salvador Maldonado, who participated in a panel at the aforementioned Oxford meeting), constitutes an effort to present stud-
ies that reflect different approaches in this critical reexamination of the phenomenon of *caciquismo*.

The section begins with a work of historical synthesis in which the conditions sustaining the dynamic processes that led to the emergence of *cacicazgos* through several centuries of Mexican and colonial history are examined. Here, Ramón Buve approaches the problem of *caciquismo* and its association with long-lasting inequalities by considering, for example, Arj Oweneel’s arguments related to the formation of “*Republicas de Indios*” in the colonial period and, then, the efforts to construct a single Republic (or constitutional monarchy) after independence. He presents evidence indicating that a personalistic, exclusive form of exercising power was, in fact, a rational principle congruent with the control of village commons and with forms of resistance in the colonial period and was further capable of creative adaptations to the changing conditions characteristic of the post-colonial Mexican State.

A second interesting approach to the reexamination of this phenomenon is based on inquiries into the effects of the neoliberal reforms of the last two decades on *caciquismo* in Mexico. John Gledhill presents an analysis in this vein in an essay written at the end of the second year of Zedillo’s government, which is reproduced here with an epilogue that deals with more recent changes. Gledhill questions those arguments that see *caciquismo* as a phenomenon that results from the national government’s limited regional reach, and directs his own analysis towards a characterization of the power of Mexico’s elite and the forms of disguise it has adopted. The author reminds us of the need to analyze networks in order to capture “the forms of sociality of the Mexican political class” and “the structures of informal social power behind the formal institutions of public life”. Thus, *caciquismo* is visualized as a part of Mexican modernity, in which local and regional forms of personalized and exclusive intermediation continue as alternatives to social politics.

Salvador Maldonado offers a case study that illustrates concretely the power of network analysis in the study of *caciquil* organizationes. He first deconstructs the complex of networks and contentious political alliances that were associated with the image of the “Atlacomulco group” between the 1940s and 1990s. Elites in the State of Mexico organized government workers in coordination with industrial enterprises and the national political center. Through the creation of these union-based *cacicazgos*, the elites assured that the transforming processes of industrialization would be congruent with national stability, at the same time as they succeeded in consolidating their position within the dominant political class. This case reveals local and regional power that, far from challenging the regime and the state, formed part of the “process of the cultural, political and economic construction of the nation-state”.

We close the Thematic Section with an important work of synthesis. As Jeffrey W. Rubin notes in his analysis of the post-1930s Mexican State, the National Revolutionary party (*PNR*) began as a federation of regional parties controlled to a great degree by principles of power both personalist and exclusionary. This origin closely resembles the contentious processes in which the labor unions described by Maldonado were formed and points to the regional peculiarities of the formation of the Mexican State. Perhaps the prolonged moral renovation that Sayer and Corregan examined in the case of state formation in England finds its Mexican counterpart in these cultural regions and their articulations. Rubin advances his political analysis in precisely this direction through a comparative, “sub-national” review of various case studies. *Relaciones* is pleased to have the opportunity to publish this seminal work for the first time in Spanish.

In the Documentary Section of this issue, we present extracts from one of the last “*Relaciones Geográficas*” of the Mexican army. Solveig Turpin and Herbert Eling MacIntosh Jr. undertake the task of placing several chapters of Major Blas María Flores’ descriptions of military campaigns against the Indians of Chihuahua and Coahuila in 1880 and 1881 into their historical, geographical and ethnological context. Turpin and Eling have surveyed the zones described in Flores’ narrative and have carried out archaeological research in the area. Thus, they can offer a critical reading of the author’s descriptions in light of their own research. The chapters and appendices they have selected contain valuable information about the Indian campaigns, the tribes that operated in the desert of Coahuila and Chihuahua in the 19th century, the military and tribal leadership, the sites and battles that took place in the frontier area during that time and geographical aspects of the 1881 expedition.
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In our General Section, we return to some topics examined in recent issues. In the first article, Francisco Javier Ullán de la Rosa proposes an analytical model for studying the spread of evangelical-Pentecostalism in Latin America. It is probable that by the end the first decade of the 21st century, one of every three Christians will be practicing some “charismatic” form of their faith. Ullán de la Rosa discusses this significant growth of practitioners of popular, charismatic Christianity among the most marginal sectors of Latin American society. The analytical framework that the author presents to explain this phenomenon is then applied to a concrete case: that of the Ticuna Indians of Boyahuasú, Colombia, who are members of a Pentecostal community.

Another phenomenon that is enjoying notable growth is cultural identity. Its growth and newfound importance is observable in the role of identity in the organization of effective social mobilizations and novel political strategies. Arguments concerning, for example, the fragmentation of class identities and the growing importance of trans-class cultural identities (ethnic, religious, gender, sexual), are now common. After a 20th century strongly dedicated to denying cultural plurality and diversity in favor of the homogenizing principles of the formation of nation-states, we have now entered a period in which the collective rights of identity groups have taken on increasing interest. Using Charles Taylor’s notion of “recognition politics” as his starting point, Alejandro Anaya Muñoz examines this phenomenon in relation to the policies of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) during the past three state governments in Oaxaca. By recognizing the legitimacy of the demands of Oaxaca’s native peoples, the PRI has succeeded in negotiating its own legitimacy, in addition to assuring the stability of governance by ceding greater ethnic autonomy in the municipal and state arenas.
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