

Toward an Understanding of Mexican Freemasonry: A Panoramic and Theoretical Approach

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“Not even the vertigo of incessant transformation can make radical tradition fully anachronistic, upheld as it is in writings, in the quest for knowledge, in liberty’s tolerance and customs.”¹

On his brilliant essay, *Las herencias ocultas de la Reforma liberal del siglo XIX (The Hidden Legacy of the 19th Century’s Liberal Reform)* Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis explores the contribution of a group of liberal Mexican writers of the twentieth century in order that their legacy not pass unnoticed he states that:

Among the truths of forgetful modernity, ubiquitous functional illiteracy, and the inaccessibility of books and periodical collaborations from another time, too much of the seminal works of the 20th century’s great writers has fallen by the wayside.²

Monsiváis approach has caused me to carefully consider not only the great number of writers, but also individuals, political, social and cultural organizations and movements, that have played vital roles in the formative process of the Mexican nation. Of these, many

have been relegated to obscurity or, if they have been studied, they have not received the attention they deserve. In some cases, this is due to their not forming part of Mexico’s official history; in others, it is because they have not attracted the interest of consecrated intellectuals or scholars. Such is the case with an organization that, early in the twentieth century, had a great impact on the liberal movement that began before the turn of that century. Despite this group having contributed significantly to the formation of national discourses and having had great political prominence, it is one that has not been studied in depth: the Masons. I am not arguing that there are no works that analyze in depth the role of Freemasons in history and society, what I argue is that the comprehensive works that are produced by people who are not experts on Freemasonry, usually neglects the works that such organization has had around the world. It is therefore this ar-

1 Carlos Monsiváis, *Herencias ocultas de la Reforma liberal del siglo XIX*, Mexico, Random House Mondori, 2006 [2000], p. 12.

2 *Ibid.*, 11.

ticle's objective to provide a closer study of the impact this organization has had in the development of formative and post-nationalist discourses of the nineteenth century Mexico. In addition, I attempt to bring Freemasonry into the light without considering it a forbidden topic and to study this organization's impact on the political history of Mexico.³ As opposed to customary approaches to this topic, this essay asserts that Freemasonry, in its countless aspects, has been a transcendental force in Mexico since the end of the eighteenth century, in the time of the War for Independence from Spain, and through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this work I argue that Masonry, by means of its lodges, played a key role in defining the canon of national thought which, in turn, was vital to the creation of the liberal and secular State, as well as to the development of rather anticlerical sentiments (among the laity) that promoted secularization, and which endured until the middle of the twentieth century. This participation manifested itself in the direct or indirect formation of political and lettered officials who influenced the national discourses. Masonry's participation in Mexico unfolded privately, transgressively, subversively, and/or secretly—and, at times, publicly. Their strategy: Since its membership was largely secret, this proved of great advantage to the organization's impact on the national discourses of the nineteenth century. In like fashion,

Freemasonry's participation in Mexico was due in large part to its forerunners in Europe; as Margaret C. Jacob accurately points out, and as this book corroborates, these Masonic lodges were the first forms of modern civil society,⁴ and in the case of Mexico they became the first political forces (*yorkinos*—York Rite—and *esocesés*—Scottish Rite).

One possibility that has been largely ignored that is posited here is that in a Mexican society where opportunities for education were restricted for economic and social reasons, Masonic lodges provided a secure space in which political and philosophical topics could be discussed, oratory practiced, and networks of political influence forged. Likewise, they provided a place for young members with political aspirations to improve their rhetorical and organizational skills and to have access to the arena of government. The close relationship of many Mexican presidents—Guadalupe Victoria, Vicente Guerrero, Valentín Gómez Farías, Benito Juárez, Porfirio Díaz, Francisco I. Madero, Lázaro Cárdenas, and Miguel Alemán, among others—with the Masons illustrates this idea.

On the other hand, During the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth century the Masons served to counterbalance the influence of the Catholic Church, which constructed a clerical discourse that it used over centuries to maintain the status quo, especially when this institution felt threatened. Since the Masonic lodges served a function as political parties, they

3 Some of the ideas presented here were originated in one of my books: *Herencias secretas: Masonería, política y Sociedad en México*, BUAP, Puebla, Mexico, 2009.

4 Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, 4.

promoted the development of a secular-anticlerical discourse that contributed enormously to liberal and lay thought in Mexico. The Church's clerical influence combined with the anticlerical influence of Freemasonry, which manifest in their constant confrontation, censure and subversive criticism, gave rise to a mixed discourse, one with both secular and religious elements, and one that combined the conservative traditions, ideas, and morality imposed by the Church with the liberal ideas of Freemasonry. Said another way, the Masons contributed to the formation of a hybrid discourse that bore influence upon the national imaginary. This discourse manifests as secular in the political realm, but with hybrid nuances due to religious influence in practice.

This article highlights the origins of secular liberal discourse and how that continues to develop. Nevertheless, while it is not the primary purpose of this work, I will emphasize the conservative-religious discourse as well as the mixed type of secular-religious, mixed discourse that has so marked Mexican political culture.⁵

Putting the Masonic Puzzle Together

When discussing Freemasonry, it is important to note one's sources, due to the secretive, discreet or hermetic nature that characterizes this organization. One reason Freemasonry has been so little investigated is the difficulty en-

countered in compiling the materials necessary to reconstruct and interpret its history. This, in fact, was one of the greatest obstacles at the beginning of this project. In Mexico, neither national archives nor private records preserve much of the historical material relating to the Masonic lodges. As a consequence, the researcher's work soon becomes primordial, since in order to be able to create a narrative that allows a better telling of this organization's history, every piece of data must be hunted down and collected like a piece of a puzzle. Despite this limitation, it ultimately proved possible to compile reliable information by visiting a great many Masonic lodges within Mexico and in other countries. In Mexico: Tampico, Ciudad Madero, Mexico City, Puebla, Mérida, Zacatecas, Colima, Oaxaca, and Monterrey; in the United States: San Diego, San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, Houston, El Paso, San Antonio, and Washington, D.C.; in Spain: Barcelona, Madrid, and Seville; in France: Paris; and in Great Britain: London and Edinburgh. In these lodges it was possible to consult a diversity of primary sources such as documents, letters, and essays. In the archives of lodges in countries outside of Mexico, documents issuing from within Mexico were reviewed, the majority of which contained valuable information about the circumstances surrounding Freemasonry in that country across vari-

5 See Guillermo de los Reyes, "The Cross and the Compass: The Influence of the Catholic Religion and Masonry in the Formation of the Mexican Political Thought", in: Nicolás Kanellos, ed., *Recovering Hispanic Religious Thought and Practice of the United States*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, 8-24; Paul Rich and Guillermo de los Reyes, "Freemasonry's Educational Role," *American Behavioral Scientist*, no. 40, June-July, 1997, 957-967.

ous historical periods. Also, secondary sources such as books, magazines, and monographs were consulted, and a number of Masons were interviewed. It should also be mentioned that the lodges that best preserve their history are those of the United States and Europe.

The lodges in Mexico have not sufficiently preserved their history, particularly their early history, from the end of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth. This was due in large part to persecutions brought by the Inquisition and the prohibition of Masonic practices. Later, the political chaos of the times contributed further to the difficulty of lodges keeping records and thus preserving their history. During the regime of Porfirio Díaz a few lodges attempted to safeguard their stories, but the struggles and chaos of the Mexican Revolution prevented such projects from crystallizing. This does not mean that there were no lodges concerned with the preservation of their historical memory, which have, in fact, saved part of that heritage; however, these efforts are not sufficient sources from which to reconstruct Freemasonry's past in Mexico. For a more complete investigation, it is necessary to search among other archives and to collect information from various sources. Particularly, this work was richly informed by Inquisitorial documents and by numerous publications put forth by the enemies of Freemasonry, which came to comprise a fund of sources that helped bring about this cultural and historical analysis. The lodges' lack of resources aimed at preserving their memories, together with the sim-

ilar lack of the custom of doing so, have resulted in an absence of significant Masonic records within Mexico.

For this article, primary sources were consulted: From legal and Inquisitorial documents, the latter of which are in the *Archivo de la Nación in Mexico* (National Archive of Mexico); to political essays, pamphlets and other written works of the time, both those sympathetic with the Masonic institution as well as those of its enemies. Only a small part of the material collected is presented, since space does not permit me to include it all. Also, it is worthwhile pointing out that when dealing with topics as controversial as Freemasonry, it is important that one be very cautious with the sources one compiles. One should maintain one's distance from the documents and books found within the Masonic institutions, as well as from the sources consulted in the "profane" world, to use Masonic jargon. I recommend that those interested in this topic endeavor to carry out field studies, visit libraries and archives, so that they may see up close the inner workings of this institution and gain a better understanding of, among other things, its history, its rituals, and its behavior.

Setting the Stage: A Theoretical, Historical and Conceptual Approach

The contributions of José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, Margaret Jacob, María Eugenia, Vázquez Semadeni, Paul Rich, among others, in the field of Masonry and civil society;⁶ and

6 Especially their thesis concerning Masonic lodges as promoters of modern civil society during the 18th century. See Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, Lafayette, Cornerstone, 1981; *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth Century Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

those of Victor Turner,⁷ with his theory of ritualism and liminality; together with the works of Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, and Eric Hobsbawm on national discourse, imagined communities and the invention of traditions;⁸ and those of Antonio Gramsci and Ángel Rama on the role of the intellectual and the learned;⁹ have allowed me to study Freemasonry with an interdisciplinary focus that combines historiography and ethnology with cultural and postcolonial studies and, by doing so, to analyze in a more global manner this institution's contributions to and impact on the national discourse.

"Discourse" is defined here according to Michel Foucault's approach, which I conceive as "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements."¹⁰ Foucault utilized

the term 'discourse' to describe a social system tied to specific historical contexts, responsible for generating knowledge and significance. He highlights that discourse has tangible consequences, shaping what he refers to as practices that consistently shape the subjects they discuss. According to the French philosopher, subjects come to define themselves through the regulating practice of the official and alternative discourses (by means of knowledge). Consequently, it is through the formation of these discourses that identities and subjectivities already established are reinforced.

The abovementioned theoretical approaches combined with my archival and ethnographic work have contributed to the definition of Freemasonry (particularly for the Mexican context, that I propose in this essay. I define Freemasonry as a ritualistic organization with rites of initiation; it is philanthropic, transnational, formed by intellectuals and educated people –

teenth-Century Europe, op. cit.; *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fiction*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. For more on their proposal of Masonry as a model of secular organization and promoter of political ritualism and formers of political patterns, see Paul J. Rich, *Elixir of Empire*, London, Regency Press, 1993; *Chains of Empire*, Regency Press, London and New York, 1991; "Researching Grandfather's Secrets", *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 20, no. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 139-146; see also Paul Rich and Guillermo de los Reyes, "Ritual in the Service of the State", *Papers in International Studies*, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 1-98.

7 Of particular interest is his thesis on ritual and liminality. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine Transaction [1969] 1995; *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, PAJ Publications, 1982; *Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media*, Academic Press, 1985.

8 In particular, see the works on imagined communities and nationalism, in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, New York, Verso, 1991. For his study of nationalism and postnationalism, in addition to his thesis opposing the binarisms imposed by Western cultures, see Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, New York, Routledge, 1990; *The Location of Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1994. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

9 See Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, New York, International Publishers, 1971. Of particular interest also is Ángel Rama's signal work, *La ciudad letrada* [The Lettered City], Hanover, Ediciones del Norte, 1984.

10 Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1969) (trans. AM Sheridan Smith, 1972), 135-140. See also M Foucault 'The Order of Discourse' in R Young (ed) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (1981).

mostly male – who convene for common interests, with the essential outcome of developing and defending these interests. Entry into the organization requires one to pass through a special ceremony of initiation, rituals are practiced that give it the feel of a secular religion, and its members follow the precepts of its constitution. The organization's meetings are held in a venue called a "lodge." The meetings are conducted according to a certain ritual, according to the rite and the degree, which is itself a collection of rites and symbols taken from a mythological past to which members feel closely bound. Some interpret this past literally and believe in this interpretation; others see it as a founding myth. Masonic meetings have a bureaucratic and hierarchical structure, which bestows certain titles and offices, such as Grand Master or Grand Potentate. Throughout the organization's history, the Masons have been responsible for promoting modern civil society in various countries of Europe and Latin America, as well as in the United States.¹¹ As Margaret Jacob and María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni have argued, "The masonic vision of improvement was so compelling by the 1789s that some masonic reformers wanted to use the lodges as ways of gaining access to state authority, as places where masonic membership could translate into political power aimed at reform."¹² In Mexico, the Masons have

recruited a great number of the educated class and intellectuals into their ranks. In this way, Freemasonry, from its very beginnings, succeeded in appropriating the images of national heroes, in practicing certain rituals, and in safeguarding its secrecy. These achievements imbued the organization with the mysterious and powerful character that has contributed to its success over the years.

As stated above, the Masons meet periodically in groupings known as lodges in appropriate locations also termed lodges, and it is understood by this that they meet to accomplish certain tasks. Even in present-day meetings, the vocabulary of working masonry is used. Today, there is at least one Masonic lodge in every modest-sized town in Mexico, each of which imparts the three basic degrees of symbolism, or Blue Lodge Freemasonry, namely: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. All of these lodges are incorporated into a Grand Lodge, the limits of whose jurisdiction usually reaches to the border of the state in which it is located.

Historically, as I have pointed out, Masonry in Mexico has been involved in controversies and struggles; this has contributed to its tight secrecy, and in turn has helped to create the disinformation one finds about it. My purpose here is not to promote Freemasonry or to create fantastical histories in which it is the cause,

11 It is important to note that in each country there are similarities and differences in this process, depending on the region and the time period in which it takes place. See Margaret Jacob, *Living... op. cit.*; Antonio Ferrer Beninteli, *Los Archivos secretos vaticanos y la masonería* [The Vatican's Secret Archives and Masonry], Caracas, Universidad Católica, 1976; *La masonería española: la historia en sus textos* [Spanish Masonry: The History in its Texts], Madrid, Istmo, 1996; David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590-1710*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988; Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

12 Margaret Jacob & María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni, *Freemasonry and Civil Society: Europe and the Americas (North and South)*, New York: Peter Lange, 2023, p. 3.

either justly or unjustly, of revolutions, independence movements, or attempts at solving humankind's ills. The objective of this discussion is simply to recognize this organization's role within Mexico's historical evolution and its impact upon the secular and political discourse in various periods of that country's national history.¹³

The founding myths and the creation of a literary and philosophical canon has contributed to the expansion and maintenance of Freemasonry.¹⁴ This formative process began with the association's members initially and strategically communicating passwords and other various verbal signs of brotherhood. These forms of expansion were similar to those employed by the romantic nationalists during the nineteenth century in some European countries and the Americas. Jacob and Vázquez Semadeni point out that in the regions mentioned previously, both "north and south, reveal similar nationalistic tendencies, but with vastly different outcomes."¹⁵ In this way the Masonic precepts could be exchanged and applied with a degree of self-awareness to a wide range of social situations, merging with a variety of ideological and political elements that would influence the ways in which Masons perceive themselves.¹⁶

Some of the questions I try to address in this work are: What has been Freemasonry's influence in the various political movements over the course of Mexico's history? Similarly, what influence did these political movements have on the development of Freemasonry in that country? To answer these questions, it is important to define the concept of influence and how it is treated in this article: Influence is the process of either imposing policy (one's own) or accepting policy (that of others), aided by the threat of severe deprivations (either real or imagined) in the case such policy is not followed. In other words, "the power to make other persons act, think, or feel."¹⁷ Based on historical experience, one can safely say that influence is always in play among those holding government office, outside the political parties. Sometimes this influence is invisible; the influence that groups not occupying positions of power exercise over those in power can be very discreet. The degree of influence can vary, depending on the parties in power and on those who would impose influence. So many organic political groups differ from political parties in that they bring influence to bear instead of directly wielding power. The Masons in Mexico have directly held power, as when they served

13 For the Masonic view on this topic, see Eulalio Morales Zepeda, "La masonería mexicana en defensa de nuestra independencia política y nacionalismo" ["Mexican Masonry in Defense of our Political Independence and Nationalism"], *Supremo Consejo* 1, Mexico, D.F., Spring 1993, 13.

14 Guillermo de los Reyes, Heredia, "La rehabilitación del mito en las masonerías mexicana y estadounidense," *Cultura masónica: Revista temática de francmasonería*, Vol. XIV, Issue 49, April 2022: p. 190-200. The production, distribution and translation of Freemasonry's books, as with the creation of regulatory institutions and the writing of a constitution and other documents are examples of this.

15 Jacob and Vázquez, *op cit*, 41.

16 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

17 Edward C. Banfield, *Political Influence*, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1971; José F. Gómez Hinojosa, *Intelectuales y pueblo*, San José, DEI, 75.

as proto-political parties (*yorkinos & escoceses*), and thus had direct access to it. On other occasions, which have comprised the majority of the time, Freemasonry's power has been attained through its exercise of influence.

As a consequence, it is necessary to inscribe Freemasonry's evolution in Mexico in accordance with the influence that it has exerted. To that end, I have developed a framework that permits an understanding of the process of this evolution, based on Gramsci's theoretical approach (hegemonic and subaltern blocs); influence theory; and Foucault's constructivist model, in which a subject or a group is influenced by historical, social, political and cultural context.¹⁸ The framework is divided into four phases:

1. The formative years and persecution (1790-1820). In this phase the Masonic institution took very cautious first steps due to Inquisitorial persecution. During this time, the Freemasons formed part of the subaltern bloc, which kept a low profile; but gradually, both within and outside New Spain, those interested in the organization were preparing and promoting Masonic ideas.
2. Political prominence, secularization and anticlericalism (1820-1876). This was the most political and successful phase of Masonic society, which consolidated the organization as part of the hege-

monic bloc. Its lodges became political parties and were made up of the intellectual and scholarly class of the time, who influenced decision-making and the creation of laws. Many times they were involved in the development of political discourses of the epoch. It should be mentioned that this was also a violent period for Freemasonry.

3. The reign of Porfirio Díaz (the *porfiriato*), Masonic unification, and the Mexican Revolution (1876-1917). During this period, Porfirio Díaz held indisputable hegemonic power, taking advantage of Freemasonry's power, making the organization his ally and, at the same time, controlling it. During this time, the Masons had very little influence as an institution; only a few Masons, such as Bernardo Reyes, achieved any prominence. At the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, the Masonic organization tried to retake hegemonic power, but due to the chaos of the time it was unable to regain the strength it had during the nineteenth century.
4. The post-revolutionary period, decline and transformation (1917-2023). In the 1920s and 1930s, Freemasonry again achieved a certain prominence in the efforts to promote a secular

18 For a framework to study the different cycles of Freemasonry in México, see, Marco Antonio Flores Zavala, Los ciclos de la masonería Mexicana siglos XVIII-XIX," in José A. Ferrer Benimeli, *La masonería en Madrid y en España del siglo XVIII-XIX*, Vol.1, Zaragoza, Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española, 2004.

state and in the anticlerical struggle. Later, the institution once again began to decline, due in great part to the manner in which hegemonic institutions develop; that is, the institutionalization of political organizations, since executive power and the political party of the majority (PRI-Institutional Revolutionary Party, ruled Mexico for over seventy years) became the hegemonic bloc. In this way, the Masonic lodges comprised the loyal instrument of the official party and of the State, as well as being a group that could exert pressure when it came to safeguarding the secular State, which, according to the organization's members, has been threatened in recent decades. The transformation happened when the conservative party took power and the Neoliberal ideas arrived in Mexico in which the masonic lodges in Mexico became less involved in politics and not so close to the government. It was until the current administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, that Mexican freemasons have been more involved.

Ever since its formation in Mexico, the Mexican Masonic organization has maintained contact with international Freemasonry, which has been influential in the actions and political tendencies of its members. As an example, the anticlericalism that has characterized Mexican Freemasonry arose from con-

tinental Europe. This point is set forth and illustrated by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, where he asserts that religion and Freemasonry have served as a source of political-ideological fugue, both national and international, that have generated various political expedients of historical origin, and that these have contributed to the development and expansion of Freemasonry in some countries. Gramsci states that the function of Freemasonry and religion, as well as that of other volunteer organizations, "is to mediate between the extremes, to socialize technical discoveries that permit the function of leadership activities, to arbitrate agreements and ways out of tough situations."¹⁹ As we have seen, Freemasonry in Mexico has had—and continues to have, although to a lesser extent—influence in the politics of Mexico.

Both within and outside present-day academia there has emerged a marked interest in the study of Freemasonry and nationalism, of laicism and liberalism – all key terms in the cultural, social and political life of Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Up to now, those publications concerned with these topics have been limited to academic articles that only analyzed these questions in part. Among these, the works of Virginia Guedea, Jean-Pierre Bastian, Juan-Jürgen Prien, Christopher Domínguez Michael, Beatriz Urías, Marco A. Zavala, María E. Vázquez, Paul Rich, Marco Antonio Flores Zavala, Marco Antonio García Robles, Ricardo Martínez Esquivel, and the author of this

19 A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, *op. cit.*, 415-416.

essay could be mentioned.²⁰

In 2007, *Masones en México: historia del poder oculto* [*Masons in Mexico: History of Hidden Power*], by José Luis Trueba Lara, was published; this work attempts to present a comprehensive history of Freemasonry in that country. As the author notes, his book's objective is "to cover Freemasonry's history [...] not to claim in any way to be a book for experts in the field; in fact, the opposite is true. The book seeks an audience of readers who are not specialists but who are interested in Freemasonry."²¹ As a consequence, Trueba's work, in spite of its limitations, brings the controversial subject of Freemasonry into the light. Few publications (those of Domínguez, Rich, and De los Reyes, among others) examine the degree of influence of the works done by the Masons and other co-Masonic organizations. Part of the reason for this is that many scholars believe there is not adequate material available on Freemasonry. It is therefore important that these works be studied with their Masonic influence firmly in mind. These works were instrumental in the development and promotion of political thought within the Republic of Mexico during the periods of independence and post-independence (at the beginning and middle of the nineteenth centuries).

There are other publications that it is important be mentioned: The compilation by Jean-Pierre Bastian, titled *Protestantes, liberales y francmasones: sociedades de ideas y modernidad en América Latina, siglo XIX*, [*Protestants, Liberals and Freemasons: Societies of Ideas and Modernity in Latin America, Twentieth Century*] (1993)²², and various works by Virginia Guedea, an outstanding example of which is "Las sociedades secretas durante el movimiento de independencia" ["Secret Societies During the Independence Movement"] (1989).²³ In the introduction to her compilation, Bastian notes that the study of Masonic lodges, of Protestant societies, and of liberal clubs is a relatively new field in the historical study of nineteenth-century Latin America. Even so, rarely has their relationship to each other been taken up as a topic of study as societies connected to form informal networks and, at times, political fronts.²⁴

As Bastian states, the various organizations that have influenced the political development of Mexico have been given little importance; and on the occasions when these are taken into account, as with the case of the York Rite and the Scottish Rite at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they are not studied thoroughly,

20 See: Marco Antonio García Robles, *Arte, prensa y poder: historia de los masones y sus prácticas discursivas en el Aguascalientes del siglo XIX*, Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2019; Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno and José Luis Soberanes, *Masonería y sociedades secretas en México*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2018; María E. Vázquez Semadeni, *La formación de una cultura política republicana: El debate político sobre la masonería en México, 1821-1830*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2020.

21 José Luis Trueba Lara, *Masones en México: historia del poder oculto* [*Masons in Mexico: History of Hidden Power*], Mexico, Grijalbo, 2007, 18-19.

22 J.-P. Bastian, comp., op. cit., 7.

23 V. Guedea, "Las sociedades secretas durante el movimiento de independencia" [*Secret Societies During the Independence Movement*], op. cit. 45.

24 J.-P. Bastian, op. cit., 7.

their evolution and context not analyzed, nor the wide range of their development and impact over the years examined. Only the fact of these groups' participation in certain events is discussed, without consideration of either the causes or effects of such participation to various episodes in Mexico's history, and with scant consideration of the anti-Catholic front they would become, particularly since this was one of the pillars of the Mexican secular State that, in the nineteenth century, began the process of secularization. As mentioned previously, the Masons' anti-Catholic stance derived from the organization's European influence. Like Gramsci, Virginia Guedea, Rogelio Aragón, Marco Flores Zavala argue that from its European beginnings, "Freemasonry was regarded jealously by the Catholic Church. In Spain in particular, Fernando VII, states Guedea, outlawed the organization because it was "suspicious to Religion and to the State,"²⁵ As we will see further on, Freemasonry's role in Mexico's evolution shows it to be a multifaceted organization, one that cannot be viewed as apolitical and with simply ritualistic aims.²⁶ Throughout history, Freemasonry has had a close relationship with politics in Mexico, some of the institution's philosophies influencing certain political actions in that country, as with the separation of Church and State.

Despite the Masonic lodges' prominence in Mexico's history, few academic works have been published on the topic, as I have mentioned throughout this es-

say. Only recently has interest in the study of this subject been revived, in large part because of the important work done at Spain's Universidad de Zaragoza, under the direction of Professor José A. Ferrer Benimeli, who has been the chief promoter of Masonry in the Hispanic world. In addition, a group of Latin American scholars led by Ricardo Martínez Esquivel created an academic journal dedicated to the study of Freemasonry: *REHMLAC: Revista de Estudios Historicos de la Masonería Latinomaericana y Caribeña plus*. The most remarkable achievement on the study of Freemasonry in Mexico has been the founding of the "Cátedra Internacional Historia de la Masonería Latinomaericana y del Caribe José A. Ferrer Benimeli (Endowed Chair-- José A. Ferrer Benimeli) at the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas in Zacatecas, Mexico, led by Professor Marco Flores Zavala and Dr. Marco Antonio Garcia Robles. Its objective is to promote research and academic exchange related to Freemasonry. This is perhaps one of the most impactful initiatives on the serious study of Freemasonry in Mexico.

Nevertheless, even up until very recently, some Mexican scholars of the period in which Freemasonry played an important role in Mexican history took it as a given that since the Masons no longer had the power they had in the nineteenth century, it was of no use studying the organization. In fact, I posed this question to various intellectuals in Mexico whom I know, many of them historians, and their answer

25 V. Guedea, *op. cit.*, 46. See also Iris M. Zavala, *op. cit.*, 196-197.

26 The members of what seem to be secret societies, including the Masonic organizations, maintain that the Freemasonry is not a secret organization but rather a "discreet" one. Allen E. Roberts, *Freemasonry in American History*, Richmond, Macoy Publishing, 1985, p. 1; "Secrecy", *Royal Arch Mason*, vol. 18, num. 4, winter 1994, 118.

was: Why should it be studied? Or even: That seems a question for fanatics. I do not know if these views were due to ignorance of or bias toward the topic, or perhaps simply that they believe it to be irrelevant. Such views may be partly credited, as was pointed out earlier, to both the pro- and anti-Masonic propaganda so plentiful as to deflect interest from the topic and to cause scholars to keep away from it because of the many conspiracy theories surrounding it. Fortunately, in the last few years, as mentioned earlier, the group of scholars from different parts of the world, particularly from Latin America, Spain and France have contributed to *REHMLAC* and have published academic works that have had a big impact on the study of Mexican (and Latin American) Freemasonry. A pivotal work I cannot omit is, *Historia mínima de la masonería en México*, edited by Ricardo Martínez Esquivel, that includes works from scholars such as Yvan Pozuelo Andrés, Marco Antonio García Robles, Rogelio ragón, María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni, Marco A. Flores Zavala, Julio Martínez, García, Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno, Fredy Cauich Carrillo and the author of this article. This edited collection is perhaps one of the most important books that we currently have on Freemasonry in México that provides key information about the subject as well as detailed information about different aspects of Freemasonry in México. Such volume invites the reader to think Mexican modernity from

a different perspective, considering its alterity, contradictions, political culture, and peculiarities.²⁷

Epilogue: Mexican Freemasonry, Myth, Ritual, and Politics

As Benedict Anderson, Victor Turner, Eric Hobsbawm, Doris Sommer and Beatriz González Stephen²⁸ have proposed, every nation has need of the public theater, fabricated ritual, and foundational fictions by which they promote a national and emotional identity, vital in the construction of a national imaginary. Mexico is no exception. In fact, Mexico's rulers have been quite effective in the creation of symbols, rituals, texts and discourses, all of which have a great impact upon this construction. Of course there have been a certain number of Masonic acts performed publicly that have come to be associated with the images of Mexico's presidents. The square and the compass of Freemasonry are emblems that appear frequently on the floral arrangements placed on the tombs of Juárez, Díaz, Madero, Cárdenas, as well as those of other heroes entombed in the national pantheons and monuments, or in the very *Rotonda de los Hombres Ilustres* (Pantheon of Illustrious Men) of Mexico. One commonly sees magazines or other periodic publi-

27 Ricardo Martínez Esquivel, Editor; *Historia mínima de la masonería en México*, Texere Editores, 2021.

28 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Victor Turner, *Ritual Process*, op. cit.; E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, op. cit.; Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, California, University of California Press, 1993; Beatriz González Stephan, *La historiografía literaria del liberalismo hispanoamericano del siglo XIX*, Havana, Casa de las Américas, 1987.

cations that depict prominent Mexican political figures, both past and present, in their relationship to Freemasonry. Another example of the Masons' political participation are the public declarations of support the organization purchases either in national or regional newspapers on behalf of favored candidates aspiring to certain political posts.

As this investigation unfolds, one sees that indeed the Masonic elite form part of the "theater" of Mexican history. The Masonic lodges were precursors of liberal thought in Mexico and contributed to the development of a political perspective different from that proposed for a conservative Catholic State. Additionally, it was in these lodges that a great part of political discourse and practice was created during the nineteenth century. It should be noted that many times, from among the ranks of the Masons, there have emerged certain political elites who have sought to be part of the government. There have been a great number of Masons who have held high government posts, national as well as regional, and who have influenced the country's politics. The group of liberals making up the ranks of the Masons, and/or groups sympathetic to them, provided Masonic ideas that allowed and supported the discussion of political and religious ideas with a degree of freedom. Freemasonry in the first decades of the nineteenth century in Mexico, as well as prior to then in other parts of the world, had been recognized as an institution that promoted liberal and

revolutionary ideals. For that reason, it is important to mention that the period's intellectuals and politicians, such as Fernando de Lizardi and, later, Benito Juárez, and other liberals that Carlos Monsiváis revisits (as I mentioned at the beginning of this essay) recognized that the Masonic institution had contributed enormously to the consummation of independence and had been a key to overthrowing Emperor Iturbide. This does not mean that the intellectuals of the time did not criticize Freemasonry's mistakes and the rivalries that existed among the various Masonic groups. But at the same time, they were aware of the ideals proposed by this transnational organization despite the practices of the group's leadership.

The Church's clerical influence combined with the anticlerical influence of Freemasonry, which manifest in their constant confrontation, censure and subversive criticism, gave rise to a mixed discourse, one with both secular and religious elements, and one that combined the conservative traditions, ideas, and morality imposed by the Church with the liberal ideas of Freemasonry. Said another way, the Masons contributed to the formation of a hybrid discourse that bore influence upon the national imaginary. This discourse manifests itself as secular in the political realm, but with hybrid nuances due to religious influence in practice. Thus, it is paramount to study Freemasonry in Mexico as an agent that played an important role during different moments in Mexican history.