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Tourism and a Telenovela:
Magic and Money in Representations of Tequila, Jalisco, Mexico

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Abstract

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By Nayive Sarahi Gaytán

My thesis explores how ideas of the “magical” are used to magnify the existing cultural appeal of tourist destinations in Mexico. I use the *Pueblo Mágico*, or “magical town” of Tequila in the state of Jalisco as the primary site of my case study. My research questions center on the commodification of the culture and landscape of Tequila the town and its primary cultural product, the beverage tequila. I am particularly interested in how the discourses conveyed through state-sponsored tourism initiatives and privately funded broadcast media promote symbols associated with Mexican national identity.

I argue that messaging about Tequila and messaging about Mexican national identity both work to privilege affect and emotion while camouflaging the role of neoliberal financial transactions. Despite highlighting the local and the traditional, these discourses ultimately affirm global capitalism. Concepts from film theory and tourism theory inform my analysis. In the first chapter, I focus on the history of the Mexican Ministry of Tourism’s Pueblos Mágicos program. In the second chapter, I explain the town of Tequila’s transformation into a tourist destination following its acceptance to the nationwide Pueblos Mágicos program. In the third chapter, I analyze the popular telenovela “Destilando Amor,” which is set in Tequila and is centered around a family-owned tequila corporation, within the context of melodrama. Throughout this project, my goal has been to show how a national strategy for fomenting tourism, by focusing on the local and the regional, on cultural traditions and landscapes, and on the magical and the emotional, is continually revealed to be following the money across the globe.

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Preface

As a 2nd generation Mexican-American, I have truly cherished opportunities to visit Mexico with my family and on my own, because for much of my childhood Mexico seemed like a faraway land that we could only reach through international calling cards. My mother would occasionally spend hours talking with her family (on speakerphone, of course) as she moved about her day. Her conversations with my great-aunt who lives in Guadalajara, the capital of the western state of Jalisco, caught my attention because she almost always promised to take us to a *pueblo mágico* (magical town) called Mazamitla that was a few hours away from her home. I wasn't sure what to expect but hoped it would be like something out of a Disney movie.

I eventually had a chance to see this “magic” as a teenager when my parents, brother, and I went on a road trip from Texas to Jalisco. After spending a few days in Guadalajara, my uncles, aunts, and cousins led us to Mazamitla. This *pueblo mágico* is located in the mountains and is surrounded by pine trees. All of the buildings in the town square are white with tile roofs, and the church looks like a castle. It was unlike anything I had had ever seen. We all spent the night in a cabin in the forest; think *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, but with twice as many people. In retrospect, this magical town met all of my childhood expectations.

I returned to Mexico in my early twenties on a spring break trip and unexpectedly visited two more *pueblos mágicos* in the Yucatán Peninsula as part of a guided tour. It was here where I made the connection that *pueblos mágicos* are a national phenomenon. My mother recalls that when she left Mexico almost 30 years ago, no places were called *pueblos mágicos*, but she is glad that then and now in Mexico, “*Hay mucho que conocer* (There’s a lot to get to know).” And I agree.

Introduction

In Mexico, select small towns with rich history, culture, compelling natural surroundings, and architectural beauty have been named “Pueblo Mágicos,” or magical towns, as part of the nationwide Pueblo Mágicos initiative. Mexico’s Ministry of Tourism established this program in 2001 to identify and provide funding to towns with the potential to offer domestic and international tourists an exceptional cultural experience.

As I began this project, I was curious about how ideas of the “magical” are used to magnify the existing cultural appeal of tourist destinations in Mexico. The Pueblos Mágicos tourism initiative itself is part of a discourse of “magic” that marks Latin American cultural productions, a discourse whose best-known example may be of the literary movement known as magical realism. Magical realism is not limited to Latin America, but many of its best-known authors are Latin American.¹ Critics generally agree that magical realist texts allow “the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist without conflict, without even calling attention to one another’s otherness.”² In doing so, these texts do not assign a supernatural quality to the mundane but accept the supernatural as something normal. The Pueblos Mágicos program reflects some of these principles in its efforts to strike a balance between the normalcy and the cultural magic of these towns.

For this project, I will focus on one particular pueblo mágico, the town of Tequila in the province of Jalisco. I am interested in how the concepts of magic and autofolklorization are

¹ The bibliography related to magical realism is extensive. “Oxford Bibliographies” is a great starting point (doi: 10.1093/obo/9780199766581-0212); see also *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (<https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822397212>)

² Siskind, Mariano. “Magical Realism.” In *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, edited by Ato Quayson, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, 834.

present in visual representations of Tequila's tourism and tequila industries. Autofolklorization is best described as the creation and promotion of a mythical version of its culture by a community.³ In this process, stakeholders are aware of the performative nature of the cultural experiences they are curating for outsiders.⁴ "Popular artisans, musicians, dancers, and poets," are but a few of the stakeholders in question, because they have a vested interest in "maintaining and renewing their heritage" both for cultural reasons and to ensure their economic survival.⁵

In order to explore these ideas in the context of the Pueblos Mágicos program, I turn to the work of several cultural theorists. My exploration of Tequila as a pueblo mágico is informed by scholars who have worked on topics related to tourism. Their work provides valuable insight into the processes that shape this industry. I turn first to Eric Storm's claim that collective national identities are co-created through tourist interactions with residents at the regional level.⁶ Storm explains that tourists tend to have a set of expectations about the places they visit and expect to have them fulfilled by their travels. Those involved with the tourist industry at the formal and informal level are aware of these expectations and are intentional in providing experiences that cater to most of the tourists' expectations.⁷ While the images associated with a nation are at the forefront of tourists' imaginations, these images do not necessarily represent the

³ Thank you to Prof. Robert Goddard for calling my attention to this term. I cannot locate who coined it, but have seen it used (autofolclorização) online in Brazilian Portuguese news articles to describe a process where communities adapt parts of their culture to make it more appealing to outsiders like tourists or documentary filmmakers.

⁴ Thank you to Prof. Mónica García Blizzard for encouraging me to think about the "auto" in autofolklorization.

⁵ García Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 155.

⁶ Storm, Eric. "A More Spanish Spain: The Influence of Tourism on the National Image." In *Metaphors of Spain: Representations of Spanish National Identity in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Javier Moreno-Luzón and Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, 239-259. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017.

⁷ Ibid.

identity of its constituents on the individual level. In the case of the Pueblos Mágicos initiative, towns in the program are selected based on their potential to offer something unique to domestic and international tourists.

George Yúdice has observed that “globalization has transformed everything into a resource.”⁸ He goes on to make the compelling claim that culture and nature are used as resources when the state appraises them based on their perceived uniqueness.⁹ Traditional practices such as those related to music, food, and folktales are often used at the local, regional, and national levels to promote heritage industries and attract tourism.¹⁰ These characteristics are crucial for a town to receive the title of a Pueblo Mágico, with the attendant funding from the state. The interest in this funding underscores Yúdice’s conviction that if there is no intentional investment in the dissemination of culture, the potential for capital development in a region will be extremely limited. This connection between culture and capital development is the core of the Pueblos Mágicos program, as I suggest in the title of my thesis.

A beautiful landscape is also central to towns in the Pueblos Mágicos program. Each pueblo mágico is set in a curated visual landscape that serves to reconstruct cultural history, which contains socioeconomic contexts and ideas that explain the power structures and state of technology in the present.¹¹ According to Isabel Rodríguez Chumillas, “canonical images” of landscapes are often distributed in mass media and make their way into the popular imagination.

⁸ Yúdice, George. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Duke University Press, 2003, 28.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Rodríguez Chumillas, Isabel. “La reconfiguración turística de los lugares.” In *Entre Pliegues del Turismo: Desde el territorio y las representaciones en España y México*, edited by Isabel Rodríguez Chumillas, et al., 27-40. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015.

She provides an example of this in a Spanish context, with the case of Miguel de Cervantes' classic 17th century novel, *Don Quijote*. The landscapes the protagonist explored in this text became more intentionally accessible to tourists with the creation of the *Ruta del Quijote*. Here, an imagined historical and cultural narrative influences the ways people interact with curated physical landscapes in the present. We will see a similar phenomenon taking place in Tequila.

These curated images are also present in cinema according to Nuala Finnegan's discussion of "tourist vision" in cinematographic representations of national landscapes.¹² According to Finnegan, "tourist vision" occurs when a director attempts to capture a scene in a way that feels relatively authentic to a domestic viewer *and* fulfills the international audience's expectations of what the country displayed on the screen is "really" like. This concept's presence in visual media is related to Storm's observations about tourism and national identity formation, Yúdice's understanding of culture as a commodity, and Rodríguez Chumillas' ideas about curating landscapes in order to highlight their cultural relevance.

The combination of tourist and cinematographic visions, which rely on external validation, impact Mexican self-perception and influence the national self-image promoted in state discourse. Film historian and theorist Ignacio Sánchez-Prado proposes that Finnegan's understanding of "tourist vision" has become so commonplace in Mexican productions because the governments' failure to live up to its founding ideals has left many Mexicans unwilling to perceive or represent their nation in a way that does not rely on the gaze and validation of

¹² Finnegan, Nuala. "So What's Mexico Really Like?": Framing the Local, Negotiating the Global in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*." *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Breaking into the Global Market*, edited by Deborah Shaw, Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.

outsiders.¹³ In the case of the Pueblos Mágicos program as a whole and the marketing of Tequila and tequila, in particular, positioning cultural images relies on negotiating the expectations of domestic and international visitors, as I will argue in what follows. I will explore how the pueblos mágicos function as a localized form of national self-representation and how that self-representation communicates a particular message about Mexican identity in an increasingly globalized world.

In my research, I return to the state of Jalisco that I visited in my childhood and use the pueblo mágico of Tequila as my case study. This pueblo mágico is central to my research because it is well-publicized in popular media. The blue agave plant, from which is extracted and distilled the spirit tequila, and the finished product are often showcased in promotional imagery for both Jalisco and Tequila. Tequila is a perfect example of how the natural landscape and the products it yields can be commodified and tied to a hegemonic Mexican national identity. My project focuses on Tequila the town as a pueblo mágico, and tequila as a beverage, in addition to a telenovela that centers them both. The telenovela is a key part of my research because it is itself a cultural commodity - an iconic form of Latin American popular culture that combines auditory and visual manifestations of melodrama as seen in 20th-century radio-novelas and pamphlet-like novels, in an updated format.¹⁴

My research questions center on the commodification of the culture and landscape of Tequila the town and its primary cultural product, the beverage tequila. I am interested in how

¹³ Sánchez Prado, Ignacio. *Screening Neoliberalism: Transforming Mexican Cinema, 1988-2012*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014.

¹⁴ Benavides, O. Hugo. "Traveling Melodrama: Telenovelas and Exporting Southern Moralities; Or, How Can Something So Bad Still Be So Good?" *Global Latin America: Into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Matthew Gutmann and Jeffrey Lesser, 1st ed., University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2016, 303.

this commodification is facilitated through discourses promoted in tourism and media representations through the Pueblos Mágicos program and the telenovela. I argue that messaging about Tequila and messaging about Mexican national identity both work to privilege affect and emotion while camouflaging the role of neoliberal financial transactions. Despite highlighting the local and the traditional, these discourses ultimately affirm global capitalism. This points to the intrusion of global influences in ever-transforming performances of regional and national culture and leads to conversations about the alleged devaluation of cultural traditions for profit.

In the first chapter of my thesis, “Finding ‘Magic’ in Mexico,” I provide an overview of the history of the Pueblos Mágicos tourism program from its inception in 2001 to its current status in 2020. I discuss how the state defines “magic” in a cultural sense and how it and u

ses this definition to decide which towns are qualified to join the program and receive funding for tourist infrastructure. I present some examples of how bureaucracy has affected the program’s effectiveness, and I discuss the general perceptions that residents and tourists who engage with Pueblos Mágicos have of the program’s success.

In the second chapter, “Welcome to Tequila,” I introduce readers to the site of my case study by providing geographic, ecological, and historical context of Tequila and its surrounding landscape. The agave plant is integral to this story, and I explain its role in the lives of Indigenous peoples before and after colonization and the lives of the European colonists and their descendants in the transition from colony to nation. Then, I shift the focus to the contemporary era, which ushered in two significant developments: the industrialization of tequila production, and Tequila’s distinction as a Pueblo Mágico and UNESCO World Heritage Site. These developments shaped Tequila into a tourist destination.

My third chapter, “Tequila on the Small Screen” analyzes the 2007 telenovela *Destilando Amor* (“Distilling Love”). The town of Tequila and the surrounding agave fields serve as the backdrop for a story of forbidden love between a migrant farmworker and the heir to a multi-generational, family-owned tequila company. While this telenovela provides insight into the workings of a tequila industry, it also illustrates how a melodramatic story can generate affect and make a site memorable for an audience that has not physically visited it. I consider how the plot thickens as the setting of the telenovela shifts to international urban centers like London and Paris. The growing reliance of the tequila industry on the global economy ends up undermining the perceived importance of the town of Tequila, its local traditions and customs, and the role of affect and emotion in maintaining those traditions.

In the conclusion, I turn to a discussion of how the marketing of Tequila through tourism driven by tequila consumption and a telenovela contribute to the tradition of idealizing rural spaces while commodifying Mexican landscapes. In this context, the idealization is rooted in the state’s desire to emphasize the economic productivity of a region because it is tied to a cultural product that is recognized globally, which is considered a source of national pride in and of itself. I find that the marketing of Tequila is connected to something much more complicated, as it intertwines land, nature, history, and culture with commerce. The money and the magic work in conjunction to create a national discourse that is profitable in a globalized world.

Chapter 1: Finding “Magic” in Mexico

“A Pueblo Mágico is a place with symbols and legends, villages with history that in many cases have been the setting of transcendent acts for our country, they are places that embody national identity in each of its corners, with a magic that emanates from its attractions; visiting them is an opportunity to discover the charm of Mexico.”¹⁵

According to the Mexican Ministry of Tourism, Pueblo Mágicos are sites of significant historical and cultural value that provide a unique experience for domestic and international visitors. The intention to prioritize an intangible concept like “magic” as a cornerstone of this national tourism initiative is intriguing. The federal government has formally employed this strategy since 2001 through the *Programa de Desarrollo Regional Turístico Sustentable y Pueblos Mágicos*, or “Program for Sustainable Regional Tourism Development and Pueblos Mágicos” (PRODERMAGICO).¹⁶ There are nine categories of tourism (including health, business, athletic, coastal, and eco-tourism) identified in the government’s plans for sustainable regional tourism development.¹⁷

The Pueblos Mágicos division of this initiative aims to promote the development of tourism infrastructure in small towns with “historical architecture, exceptional natural landscapes and deep-rooted traditions” that are typically overlooked as tourism destinations by providing annual financial support.¹⁸ The end goal of this program is the macroeconomic increase driven by an influx of tourism, and the government commits to invest in regions that will generate

¹⁵ Translated from: Secretaría de Turismo. “Pueblos Mágicos de México.” Gobierno de México. December 1, 2020.

¹⁶ Estrella, Viviana. “Estados, Aún Con Incertidumbre Por Programa De Pueblos Mágicos.” *El Economista*. July 09, 2019.

¹⁷ “Acuerdo por el que se emiten las Reglas de Operación del Programa de Desarrollo Regional Turístico Sustentable y Pueblos Mágicos (PRODERMAGICO), para el ejercicio fiscal 2017.” *Diario Oficial De La Federación*. 2017.

¹⁸ Dirección General de Divulgación de la Ciencia. “Pueblos Mágicos: Historia Y Tradición.” Fundación UNAM.

money. The Pueblos Mágicos discourse which centers mostly on rural, inland towns shifts away from previous state discourses, which prioritized beaches and historical monuments as tourist attractions.

A well-maintained town square is at the heart of a typical Pueblo Mágico. These spaces are almost always grounded with a church, and most of the buildings in the area are characterized by a colonial style of architecture.¹⁹ It is common for there to be a permanent or pop-up type market where *artesanías* or artisanal handicrafts associated with the town are sold. Here, practical items (such as clothes, shoes, and ceramic cookware) can often be sold alongside items that hold ceremonial value (like masks that contain sacred representations). These informal markets provide Indigenous peoples, peasants, and migrants with valuable opportunities to participate in local economies by showcasing their traditional goods and music because they are often excluded from formal sectors of the economy.²⁰ Néstor García Canclini explains that these very different items are “equalized under the name of ‘handicrafts’ in urban markets” because items from different eras and ethnic groups with varying degrees of meaning are lumped together.²¹ This results in an ongoing state of cultural hybridity that makes an array of cultural products accessible to local, domestic, and international consumers.

Some Pueblos Mágicos also have specific cultural products that are closely associated with their names. For example, the town of Cholula, Puebla shares a name with a brand of hot

¹⁹ Ángel Rama's 1984 book, *La ciudad letrada/The Lettered City* contains a thoughtful discussion of the ways colonial-era towns in Latin America were designed to reflect power structures by placing the lettered elite at the center and relegating the poor and illiterate constituents to the periphery.

²⁰ García Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures*. 154.

²¹ *Ibid.* 130, 223-224.

sauce. Tecate, Baja California shares a name with a brand of beer, and of course, we have Tequila, Jalisco which shares a name with the iconic Mexican spirit, tequila.

In 2010 the Ministry of Tourism allocated 1.9 billion pesos to be distributed among the 35 Pueblos Mágicos to be put towards the maintenance of sites with historical and cultural value, like museums, galleries, convents, and churches.²² Secretary of Tourism Gloria Guevara Manzo explained that these towns have demonstrated that it is possible to generate touristic value by taking advantage of existing historical and cultural landmarks.²³ She added that it was critical to focus efforts on emphasizing the “clearly identifiable personality” of each town because “new tourism products [...] provide added value for marketers and Mexican and international visitors.”²⁴ In this context, Guevara Manzo is speaking as a representative of the state. She communicates a message that outlines the government’s strategy to appraise and market existing sites of cultural and historical significance.

The Ministry of Tourism contributes to efforts to promote pueblos mágicos by including updated information about these tourist attractions on their government website (<https://www.gob.mx/sectur/articulos/pueblos-magicos-206528>). The entire website is in Spanish, which suggests that it is not the primary source of information for tourists who do not speak the language. This page features a brief definition of what a pueblo mágico is in large font as an introduction; the definition serves as an epigraph for this chapter. Below this definition is a comprehensive list of all pueblos mágicos in alphabetical order. The name of each pueblo is formatted as a link that connects visitors to an article with more information. Each article has the

²² El Universal. "Destinan Mil 900 Mdp a 'Pueblos Mágicos'." Zócalo. June 18, 2010.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

same format: the town's name is followed by a brief paragraph of its historical, cultural, and/or ecological characteristics, and one or two photographs. Then, there is a list of local attractions and a list with the dates of annual festivities. The final section includes a brief textual description of where the town is located, and an image of a topographical map of the country redirects the viewer to Google Maps to see the precise location.

Despite high investment in emphasizing the uniqueness of each Pueblo Mágico, research supported by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) Foundation suggests that visitors perceive them to be very similar to each other, which indicates that the image of these destinations has been homogenized in the popular imagination.²⁵ These perceptions highlight the ways local claims to the uniqueness of their towns can be challenged by the outsiders who interact with them.

A study of tourist perceptions of the pueblo mágico of Cholula, Puebla conducted by Anna María Fernández Poncela in 2013 suggests that pueblos mágicos generally have a positive association. In this case, she asked domestic and international tourists to identify characteristics that represented the “magic” of the town. Tourists generally responded that the town's architecture, cultural traditions, and ambiance were what made their experience magical, and they also had positive comments about their interactions with the locals.²⁶ Fernández Poncela also interviewed residents of this pueblo mágico for her study, and some of them mentioned a feeling of belonging and pride that is rooted in being from the town that is recognized on a

²⁵ Dirección General de Divulgación de la Ciencia. "Pueblos Mágicos." Fundación UNAM.

²⁶ Fernández Poncela, Anna María. “Turismo, imaginarios, y magia: El caso de Cholula.” In *Entre Pliegues del Turismo*, edited by Isabel Rodríguez Chumillas, et al. 259-269. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015.

national scale.²⁷ These findings suggest that some locals accept or even embrace their role in the performance of autofolklorization; moreover, they underscore the co-existence of the magical and the quotidian that is at the heart of magical realism.

While the Pueblos Mágicos program was organized by the Ministry of Tourism with economic benefits as a primary goal and there is an emotional association for those who are part of the community, many residents of these towns fail to receive tangible economic benefits.²⁸ Although the program is intended to promote and revitalize areas of touristic interest, some residents of Pueblos Mágicos feel that the investment is superficial because funds are almost exclusively invested in the downtown areas, where few of the towns' inhabitants can afford to live and where only some of them are employed.²⁹ Additionally, research conducted across several Pueblos Mágicos has called attention to the fact that the inhabitants of towns are not leading the decision-making processes related to joining this program, nor do they have a say in the necessary interventions that follow.³⁰ Because members of the ruling class, namely government workers and wealthy entrepreneurs, are overrepresented in leadership roles, their plans tend to lack foresight and have undesirable consequences for the poor and working-class, despite having positive intentions.³¹ A few of these unintended issues include increased levels of

²⁷ Fernández Poncela, Anna María. "Turismo, imaginarios, y magia: El caso de Cholula." In *Entre Pliegues del Turismo*, edited by Isabel Rodríguez Chumillas, et al., 259-269. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015.

²⁸ I explore the connections between sentiment and profit in my discussion of the telenovela in the following chapter.

²⁹ Dirección General de Divulgación de la Ciencia. "Pueblos Mágicos." Fundación UNAM.

³⁰ Valverde, María del Carmen, and Jesús Enciso. "Turismo y magia: ¿El orden de los vocablos altera el resultado?" In *Entre Pliegues del Turismo*, edited by Isabel Rodríguez Chumillas, et al., 129-155. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015.

³¹ *Ibid.*

unemployment and concerns about the overreliance on the tourism industry for economic survival.³²

Despite these valid critiques and complications, the program continued to expand, registering a total of 121 Pueblos Mágicos in 26 of 31 states in 17 years.³³ Recently, however, more uncertainties have come to the fore regarding the fate of the program. In early 2018, the PRODERMAGICO program was not assigned a budget for the following year, leading to doubts about its continuity.³⁴ Then in February of 2019, the Ministry of Tourism clarified that the López Obrador administration would not abolish the Pueblos Mágicos program.³⁵ Humberto Hernández, Subsecretary of Development and Tourism Regulation, declared that the program would continue "more strongly than ever" after some restructuring.³⁶ Under a new decentralized strategy, the Ministry of Tourism would continue to process prospective Pueblos Mágicos, manage the branding and marketing for the program, and support the states' efforts to obtain loans through development banks.³⁷ Then, state governors would be responsible for allocating the federal funds towards projects in the towns.³⁸ Although this announcement was supposed to be reassuring, people involved with the program at the state and municipal level were frustrated

³² Rodríguez González, Sylvia Cristina. "El programa Pueblos Mágicos. Metodología para el estudio del montaje de escenarios urbanos a partir del imaginario turístico." In *Entre Pliegues del Turismo*, edited by Isabel Rodríguez Chumillas, et al., 209-238. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015.

³³ Gutierrez, Daniel. "Después de 17 años...¿Pueblos Mágicos al olvido?" POSTA. August 08, 2019.

³⁴ Estrella, Viviana. "Estados, aún con incertidumbre por programa de Pueblos Mágicos." *El Economista*. July 09, 2019.

³⁵ Rodríguez, Alberto. "Gobierno De AMLO mantendrá el programa de Pueblos Mágicos." *SDP Noticias*. February 12, 2019.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

by the lack of specificity, because the resources allocated through this federal program are critical to their livelihood.³⁹

That summer, Secretary of Tourism Miguel Torruco Marqués explained that the program would not be accepting new Pueblos Mágicos in the 2019 cycle because the previous administration had failed to complete the necessary procedures for sites that were under consideration.⁴⁰ Torruco Marqués also acknowledged that if the existing Pueblos Mágicos were audited, some would not meet all the requirements to maintain their status.⁴¹ However, Torruco Marqués reiterated that he was not interested in reprimanding state authorities for these shortcomings; as a representative of the federal government, he expressed his intentions to collaborate with state representatives to revitalize these towns.⁴² Torruco Marqués presented a new initiative to reach this goal: the *Barriendo y Pintando* or “Sweeping and Painting” program, which allocated 1,250,000 pesos to each Pueblo Mágico to support more frequent garbage collection and building maintenance.⁴³ The states and municipalities were expected to match the investment amount, bringing the total investment for each Pueblo Mágico to 2,500,000 pesos.⁴⁴ The total combined investment for the 121 program sites is 302.5 million pesos. This budget is

³⁹ Estrella, Viviana. "Estados, Aún Con Incertidumbre Por Programa De Pueblos Mágicos." *El Economista*. July 09, 2019.

⁴⁰ Hernández, Maricarmen. ""Barrer y pintar", el programa federal que busca fortalecer los Pueblos Mágicos." *El Sol De Puebla*. June 21, 2019.

⁴¹ This status can be maintained by meeting the standards that were required when the town applied to, and was approved to join the program (e.g., sufficient health and public service resources for tourists, ongoing evidence of efforts to invest in quality tourism development, etc.). In the history of the program, only two Pueblos Mágicos have lost their status (both in 2009) but have since returned to compliance and had their membership restored.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Espinosa, Camila Ayala. "Nuevo Programa De Pueblos Mágicos, Positivo: Sectur." *El Economista*. May 19, 2019.

⁴⁴ Gutiérrez, Daniel. "Después de 17 años..." *POSTA*. August 08, 2019.

47% less⁴⁵ than the 586 million pesos that were allocated for the program under PRODERMAGICO in 2018.⁴⁶

This drastic budget cut occurred after the federal government increased the Ministry of Tourism's budget by approximately 124%.⁴⁷ Although more funds were available that year, they were diverted towards other projects, such as the Mayan Train,⁴⁸ that were being prioritized by the López Obrador administration.⁴⁹ During this time, the Ministry of Tourism launched additional initiatives, such as the *Programa de Ordenamiento Turístico General* or "General Tourist Organization Program" which aims to allocate funding to tourism sites across the nation. This program consists of four main strategies, which include an update to the master programs of port development, the implementation of airport protection zones, the promotion of projects that are adaptable to climate change, and the inclusion of environmental sustainability efforts.⁵⁰

However, in 2020, the Ministry of Tourism resumed acceptances to the Pueblos Mágicos program, welcoming 11 towns to the program, increasing membership to 132 towns and villages across all 31 states.⁵¹ The same year, the Ministry of Tourism released the *Estrategia Nacional de Pueblos Mágicos* (ENPM), which outlines a set of new strategic objectives to guide the vision

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Espinosa, Camila Ayala. "Nuevo Programa." *El Economista*. May 19, 2019.

⁴⁷ Gutiérrez, Daniel. "Después de 17 años..." *POSTA*. August 08, 2019.

⁴⁸ The Mayan Train is a tourist train that intends to connect tourist destinations (like the beaches of the Riviera Maya, archaeological sites, small towns, etc.) in the Yucatán Peninsula. The project has not been completed at the time of this writing.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Torruco Marqués, Miguel. "Acuerdo por el que se expide el Programa de Ordenamiento Turístico General del Territorio." *Diario Oficial de la Federación*. May 8, 2019.

⁵¹ Secretaría de Turismo. "Pueblos Mágicos de México." Gobierno de México. December 1, 2020.

of the Pueblos Mágicos program.⁵² First and foremost, the program intends to shift towards a more socially focused approach to tourism that respects the human rights and overall well-being of people who live and work in Pueblos Mágicos. Second, the program aims to promote fair and balanced development at the individual, community, and regional levels to democratize the benefits tourism brings to host communities. Third, the program will support new and diversified marketing opportunities for Pueblos Mágicos. Lastly, the program intends to practice sustainable tourism by prioritizing efforts to conserve and revitalize sites that represent the nation's heritage and legacy. This new approach can hopefully offer tangible results and improve the quality of life of those that have been left behind by the Pueblos Mágicos program.⁵³

Before concluding this discussion, I would like to return to the epigraph as a reminder of what the Pueblos Mágicos are meant to signify for those who visit them:

*“A Pueblo Mágico is a place with **symbols and legends**, villages with **history** that in many cases have been the setting of transcendent acts for our country, they are places that **embody national identity** in each of its corners, with a **magic that emanates from its attractions**; visiting them is an opportunity to discover the charm of Mexico.”⁵⁴*

Notwithstanding the recent changes to the program's strategy that respond to concerns of equity and sustainability, the language at the core of the original initiative remains unchanged. The

⁵² Secretaría de Turismo. "Estrategia Nacional de Pueblos Mágicos." Gobierno de México. October 1, 2020.

⁵³ This is a particularly timely concern, considering the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has already had on the tourism industry. While some rural towns are experiencing a steep decrease in visitors, coastal pueblos mágicos like Tulum have had a significant influx of tourism because plane tickets are very affordable and beaches are at the forefront of many tourists' minds.

⁵⁴ Translated from: Secretaría de Turismo. "Pueblos Mágicos De México." Gobierno de México. December 1, 2020.

intention to preserve and showcase a magical Mexican culture that is key to Mexican identity remains at the forefront.

Chapter 2: Welcome to Tequila

The pueblo mágico of Tequila is nestled within the valleys bordering a volcano that shares the same name. The name Tequila is derived from the Náhuatl word “Tecuilan,” which means “place of tribute.”⁵⁵ There is indeed much to be grateful for in this place, as the rocky and mineral-rich soil in the region has sustained life for centuries. Indigenous peoples cultivated the hilly land using slanted farming methods, which relied heavily on mountain springs as a water source.⁵⁶ At least nine different varieties of agave plants dotted this volcanic landscape, according to botanical records dating back to the 19th century.⁵⁷ Agave has many practical uses; Indigenous peoples have used different parts of the plant to make food, beverages, and medicine, in addition to textiles and construction materials.⁵⁸ The Chichimec, Otomi, Toltec, and Nahua are among several Indigenous communities with a longstanding tradition of consuming the juices of the agave plant.⁵⁹

Changing the Landscape

During colonization, Spanish settlers exerted control over natural resources and other human beings as they made decisions that gradually transformed the landscape of the region. José de Jesús Hernández López outlines the intricacies of this process in *Paisaje y creación de valor*. Initially, the Spaniards displaced the Indigenous peoples and exploited their labor by

⁵⁵ Secretaría de Turismo. "Tequila, Jalisco." Gobierno de México. August 27, 2019.

⁵⁶ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor: La transformación de los paisajes culturales del agave y del tequila*. El Colegio de Michoacán, 2013, 69-77.

⁵⁷ Huerta Rosas, Rogelio, and Luna Zamora, Rogelio. “Los caminos del mezcal y el tequila.” In *Agua de las Verdes Matas: Tequila y Mezcal*, edited by Rodolfo Fernández and José Luis Vera Cortés. Mexico City: Conaculta, 2015, 45.

⁵⁸ Valenzuela Zapata, Ana Guadalupe, and Gary Paul. Nabhan. *Tequila: A Natural and Cultural History*. University of Arizona Press, 2003, 5-6.

⁵⁹ Secretaría de Turismo. "Tequila, Jalisco." Gobierno de México. August 27, 2019.

ordering them to dig irrigation ditches and clear existing trees and brush to make way for subsistence crops, both autochthonous crops and others brought from Europe.⁶⁰ As Spanish colonizers settled in this region, they became aware of the Indigenous tradition of fermenting agave juice and developed it further using European methods of distillation to produce a spirit that evolved into the tequila consumers recognize today.⁶¹

The first distillery in the region was established in 1600, but tequila was not produced on an industrial scale until the end of the 18th century.⁶² Throughout this transition period, land and water resources became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few families. These wealthy landowners and operators of distilleries that produced cane or agave-based alcohols ensured they had priority access to the water.⁶³ They also managed a highly specialized labor force. The knowledge and tools *jimadores* (farmworkers who maintain and harvest agave plants) use in their work is not transferrable to other crops in the region.⁶⁴

The social unrest brought on by the Mexican War of Independence in the early 19th century caused a decline in alcohol production. After the war, some of the wealthy landowners from Tequila moved to Guadalajara and the demand for agave-based beverages in the city increased, and production resumed.⁶⁵ After the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century, the government intended to make access to water more equitable, but the wealthy families largely

⁶⁰ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 77-90.

⁶¹ "Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila." UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

⁶² Secretaría de Turismo. "Tequila, Jalisco." Gobierno de México. August 27, 2019.

⁶³ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 90.

⁶⁴ Valenzuela Zapata, Ana Guadalupe, and Gary Paul. Nabhan. *Tequila*. 17.

⁶⁵ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 91.

maintained control of the water for their fields and industrial use.⁶⁶ Inequality has been a recurring theme since the formal establishment of this industry.

Blue agave quickly became the preferred variety of the plant for tequila production because it takes less time to mature and produces more seedlings than the other varieties, which makes it economical to grow and process on a large scale. Today, the economy of this rural municipality is rooted in activities connected to the production, packaging, and sale of tequila. The agricultural landscape surrounding the town reflects this. The other varieties of agave that are native to this region no longer account for even 1 in 1000 plants; if they are kept at all, they are typically used in landscaping, as decorations, or to make fibers.⁶⁷ The current blue agave monoculture that defines this region was intentionally curated to maximize the productivity of the natural landscape, at the cost of sacrificing biodiversity.

Defining Tequila

The state of Jalisco has remained the global leader in tequila production for over one hundred and fifty years, and the Mexican government has advocated for policies to ensure this does not change. The state's effort to define and regulate tequila as a cultural symbol is strategic because it creates an official set of guidelines for the authenticity of this national product in an increasingly globalized market.

A key example of this is the Denomination of Origin for Tequila. In the past, Denominations of Origin have been approved for alcoholic beverages with specific regional connections to European countries, such as champagne and cognac in France, and scotch whisky

⁶⁶ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 104.

⁶⁷ Valenzuela Zapata, Ana Guadalupe, and Gary Paul. Nabhan. *Tequila*. xxvii.

in Scotland.⁶⁸ In each of these cases, the country of the product's origin becomes the proprietor of its trademark.⁶⁹ With the ownership of this trademark comes the responsibility of determining what exactly the product is. Any products that do not meet these criteria are considered imitations. This distinction helps protect the longstanding prestige of national brands and expanding them to global consumers, with an extremely minimized likelihood of external competition.

Tequila's Denomination of Origin was declared by the Mexican government in 1974. This international status declares that Mexico is the only country that can produce spirits derived from agave that are marketed as tequila. Tequila was the first Mexican spirit to receive a Denomination of Origin, but others have followed since then.⁷⁰

The Denomination of Origin has agricultural and industrial implications as well as commercial ones. Only agave plants that are cultivated and processed in select municipalities of the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and Tamaulipas can be used to create products marketed as tequila because they have an acceptable climate.⁷¹ Of all the states listed, Jalisco is the only state where all of its municipalities have been deemed acceptable to grow and process agave for tequila. There are also strict regulations regarding the elaboration process, in addition to rigorous quality control testing required for agave-based alcohol to be called

⁶⁸ Valenzuela Zapata, Ana Guadalupe, and Gary Paul Nabhan. *Tequila*. 46.

⁶⁹ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 252.

⁷⁰ "¡Fascínate con los pueblos mágicos de Jalisco!" Secretaría de Turismo. November 29, 2019. Other Mexican spirits that have received a Denomination of Origin include Bacanora which is traditionally extracted from agave pacifica in the state of Sonora, and Charanda which is derived from fermented sugar cane in the state of Michoacán.

⁷¹ Valenzuela Zapata, Ana Guadalupe, and Gary Paul Nabhan. *Tequila*. 51.

“tequila.”⁷² The *Consejo Regulador Tequila* (Tequila Regulatory Council) is a private, non-profit, government-accredited organization that was established in 1994. It has different branches that oversee the production, bottling, and labeling of tequila using an official set of rules, known as the *Norma Oficial Mexico*, which were introduced in 2006 and revised in 2013.⁷³ These entities work in tandem with tequila producers to ensure that the products they formulate are of the utmost quality for an international consumer base.

In the 21st century, additional national and international designations have helped shape Tequila’s image as a site for tourists, further consolidating the identification of the town with the alcoholic spirit.

Transformation to a Tourist Destination

The town of Tequila, Jalisco has been a member of the Pueblos Mágicos program since 2003, when a group of prominent tequileros headed by the Beckmann family, owners of the José Cuervo Company, approached the Ministry of Tourism with the request for membership.⁷⁴ This is one of many instances of wealthy entrepreneurs leading important development initiatives, where they draw on the existing historical and cultural value of these sites.⁷⁵ Their efforts were successful, and between 2003 and 2005, the federal, state, and municipal governments invested a grand total of 16,500,000 pesos in projects to improve Tequila’s urban infrastructure.⁷⁶ These

⁷² Suro Piñera, David. “Rumbo a la regionalización de las denominaciones de origen en la producción de tequila.” In *Agua de las Verdes Matas: Tequila y Mezcal*, edited by Rodolfo Fernández and José Luis Vera Cortés. Mexico City: Conaculta, 2015, 227.

⁷³ Difford, Simon. “Tequila's Appellation and Regulatory Bodies.” *Difford's Guide*. May 01, 2015.

⁷⁴ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 262-263.

⁷⁵ However, this initiative may have resulted in concerns of limited representation for poor and working-class residents, as I discussed in the previous chapter.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 261.

funds were primarily used to restore the historic town square and improve the roads leading to Tequila, as it is now located less than a half-hour drive from the capital city of Guadalajara. The town continues to receive annual funding for upkeep, in alignment with the expectations of the Pueblos Mágicos initiative.

In 2006, UNESCO declared the Agave Landscape, which designates an area that includes the town of Tequila and other nearby tequila-producing municipalities, a World Heritage Site.⁷⁷ This international distinction highlights the conjunction of nature and culture, which helped expand the reach of the national Pueblo Mágico distinction. In 2009, the *Ruta del Tequila*, or Tequila Route, was established with funding from the Inter-American Bank to help tourists access the eight municipalities located within the designated Agave Landscape.⁷⁸ This route is divided into two paths on opposite sides of the Tequila volcano. In its inaugural year, the route welcomed 130 thousand visitors, but by 2019, the route was averaging about one million visitors annually.⁷⁹

Tourism in Tequila

While Tequila is laid out like most colonial-era towns and shares many similarities regarding its markets for cultural goods, as discussed in the first chapter, tourists are primarily drawn to this pueblo mágico to participate in experiences related to the production and consumption of tequila.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ "Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila." UNESCO.

⁷⁸ Mejía, Francisco. "La Ruta del Tequila a 10 Años de su Creación." *Entorno Turístico*. March 22, 2019.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ As discussed in the first chapter, the Secretariat of Tourism's website is an informative and educational resource for Spanish-speaking tourists with an interest in the history and culture of Pueblos Mágicos. However, this site is not translated to English. Because of this, English-

The map of the city, while it shares the standard features of most pueblos mágicos, is marked by buildings associated with the production and marketing of tequila. In the town square, some of the imposing mansions which housed the families of the local elite have since been repurposed into hotels, restaurants, museums, and galleries.⁸¹

One such case of this is the Museo Nacional del Tequila, which was founded in 2000. This state-sponsored museum intends to “promote the history and uses of agave in Mexico from the pre-Hispanic period to the present” through five permanent exhibitions.⁸² This museum’s creation predates Tequila’s Pueblos Mágicos distinction, but occurred after the Denomination of Origin was established. This suggests that the government believed preserving this natural and cultural history was a worthy investment because it is important to the nation’s history.

Some of the oldest tequila factories (e.g., José Cuervo’s *La Rojeña* facility, and Sauza Tequila’s *La Perseverancia*) are also a prominent part of the urban landscape.⁸³ After the state began efforts to facilitate tourists’ access to this rural town, many tequileros opted to capitalize on their existing facilities by allowing guided tours, which are popular with visitors.⁸⁴ These tours are immersive excursions that lead tourists through the agave fields and factories; some even include meals and unlimited tequila tasting during the tour.⁸⁵ Much of the value of this experience is derived from the combination of observation and participation in the culture surrounding tequila, which is magnified by the fact that Tequila is, quite literally, the namesake.

speaking tourists interested in traveling to Tequila turn to travel websites or blogs which place a significantly higher emphasis on consuming alcohol as part of the experience.

⁸¹ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 260.

⁸² Translated from: "Museo Nacional Del Tequila." Secretaría de Cultura/Sistema de Información Cultural.

⁸³ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 259.

⁸⁴ "¡Fascínate [...]!" Secretaría de Turismo. November 29, 2019.

⁸⁵ "The 10 Best Tequila Tours." Tripadvisor.

Meanwhile, the José Cuervo company took this immersive experience concept a step further and developed additional business ventures. One major innovation in transportation is the José Cuervo Express train, which connects tourists in Guadalajara to the company's facilities in Tequila. The company also added a gallery, restaurant, and market for artisanal goods and souvenirs to their existing facilities as part of the *Mundo Cuervo* project.⁸⁶ As the largest tequila producer in Mexico and global leader in tequila exportation, the José Cuervo company undoubtedly has the means to fund its extravagant initiatives. It also has an internationally recognized brand name, which may make some tourists feel more inclined to engage with its tourism offerings.

As we have seen in the first chapter, regional artesanías are a standard element of every pueblo mágico. In Tequila, we see some of the same things that can be found in other Pueblos Mágicos, but here many of these artesanías are closely related to a particular product – tequila. The artisanal goods produced in the region often include specific references to the blue agave plant and tequila production.⁸⁷ Small, reusable items such as shot glasses or coasters are a practical souvenir that is easy to pack. Another option some tourists may consider taking with them is a bottle of tequila (that is if they pack it in their checked luggage) because it allows them to share an authentic tequila experience with others. However, if visitors to Tequila happen to forget to purchase their tequila memorabilia, they need not worry. Tequila-related items can be purchased throughout Jalisco and at regional and international airports in Mexico, so everyone can take some of the magic home with them.

⁸⁶ Hernández López, José de Jesús. *Paisaje y creación de valor*. 263-265.

⁸⁷ Secretaría de Turismo. "Tequila, Jalisco." Gobierno de México. August 27, 2019.

Indeed, the presence of artesanías at airports highlights the transition from a local to a global market where people can identify and choose to purchase cultural goods they find appealing. Some travelers who purchase items related to tequila have never set foot in, and may not intend to visit Tequila. This goes to show that the marketing of the product has transcended the regional context.

In the following chapter, I will analyze another example of the magical marketing of tequila/Tequila in a telenovela, and explore how it engages a larger national identity narrative in a global context.

Chapter 3: Tequila on the Small Screen

The Mexican telenovela *Destilando Amor* (“Distilling Love”), set in Tequila, took the country by storm when it was broadcast on Televisa’s Las Estrellas channel in 2007. The series aired during prime time with 45-minute episodes released every weeknight. The premiere aired on January 22nd and the finale aired on September 16th, which coincided with Mexican Independence Day.⁸⁸ With an average of 30.61 nightly rating points, *Destilando Amor* is the third most-watched telenovela Televisa has ever produced.⁸⁹ In addition to being an audience favorite, this production won national and international awards for outstanding acting, directing, and cinematography.⁹⁰ The popularity and critical success of this telenovela was a pivotal moment in the careers of leading actress Angélica Rivera, and her co-star Eduardo Yáñez. In this captivating story, a migrant farmworker named Teresa Hernández, better known by the nickname Gaviota, (“seagull”) and Rodrigo Montalvo, the heir to his family’s tequila empire, fall in love and suffer a series of external challenges that threaten their relationship.

This telenovela’s deployment of the techniques of melodrama is clear at first glance. Film scholar Linda Williams defines melodrama as a “peculiarly democratic and American form that seeks dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and action.”⁹¹ Melodrama is characterized by an effort to bring to the forefront the “absolute innocence and good in which most thinking people do not put much faith.”⁹² According to

⁸⁸ *Destilando Amor*.” Wikipedia. January 13, 2021.

⁸⁹ “¡Los golazos de Televisa! Estas son sus 5 telenovelas más exitosas de todos los tiempos.” *Las Estrellas TV*, Televisa, 25 June 2018.

⁹⁰ “*Destilando Amor*.” Wikipedia. January 13, 2021.

⁹¹ Williams, Linda. “Melodrama Revised.” *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, edited by Nick Browne, University of California Press, 1998, 42.

⁹² Williams, Linda. “Melodrama Revised.” 61.

Williams, melodrama is a method, not a genre, of storytelling that intends to provoke an emotional response from viewers.⁹³ Upon further inspection, the pathos and plot that are typical of melodrama also serve as a reflection on the production of a state discourse surrounding tequila as a part of Mexican identity that is marketed for a global audience. The use of melodrama in *Destilando Amor* mirrors the state discourse of the Pueblos Mágicos program in the sense that they both amplify the role of emotional connection in their representations of Mexican national identity while minimizing the role of neoliberal financial transactions.

Destilando Amor's plot is an adaptation of the 1994 Colombian telenovela *Café, con aroma de mujer* ("Coffee, with the scent of a woman") which takes place on a coffee plantation. Coffee is a market product with substantial economic and cultural value for Colombia, raising obvious points of comparison with agave and tequila. In *Destilando Amor*, the classic melodramatic trope of forbidden love between members of different social classes takes on a new life as it unfolds in another landscape associated with an iconic national beverage - tequila. In the discussion that follows, I focus primarily on plot elements because melodrama relies on continuous action and repeated appeals to emotion to engage the audience and effectively communicate its message.

From the beginning, *Destilando Amor* introduces viewers to a rural, unequivocally Mexican environment. The title sequence of this telenovela begins with a montage of images that feature the landscape surrounding Tequila. In the opening image, a bright orange sunrise creates a silhouette of *jimadores* (farmworkers with specialized knowledge of agave harvesting) working

⁹³ Williams uses primarily English-language films produced in the United States to illustrate melodramatic principles, but I think her definition of this concept can be applied to other American cinematographic productions, like the Mexican telenovela.

in a field of agave. The word “Amor,” (with a stylized blue agave plant embedded behind the letter “A”) slowly rotates onto the center of the screen. Suddenly, the word “Destilando” is stamped above “Amor,” much like the label on a bottle of tequila, and the title quickly disappears. The image of the sunrise then fades into a sweeping drone shot of expansive blue agave fields bordered by mountains.

Subsequent images occur within the same expansive landscape, but place more emphasis on the individual actors. For instance, in one shot that comes early in the title sequence, Don Amador Montalvo rides a horse through the fields. His grandson, Rodrigo, can be seen traveling by horse in subsequent shots. These images highlight how their social class allows them to navigate the rural landscape relatively comfortably, and on their terms, as “caballeros” in the Spanish tradition.

Meanwhile, the Montalvo’s employees, dressed in their traditional long-sleeved white cotton shirts and pants, bandannas, and wide-brimmed hats, are tightly packed onto a bus that transports them to agave fields following a set path.⁹⁴ Gaviota is one of the only employees who does not wear the traditional uniform while working in the fields. Instead, she wears a white, short-sleeved, off-the-shoulder blouse with dark jeans and a hat with a smaller brim. She stands out visually from the other employees because she dresses differently, and has a distinctly youthful beauty about her. Gaviota is the only employee in the title sequence that manages to access a metaphorical degree of mobility (albeit temporary), which is illustrated in several shots where she is riding along with Rodrigo on his horse. The combination of Gaviota’s youth,

⁹⁴ This uniform is popular because it protects the workers’ skin from the sun, and the cotton material is more breathable and absorbs less heat than synthetic fibers.

beauty, and virtue makes her the ideal victim of circumstance in a melodramatic narrative, which makes viewers more likely to sympathize with her.⁹⁵

The title sequence weaves in a series of images associated with the production and consumption of tequila. While many of the images of workers are close-ups of their only their hands planting and harvesting agave, one shot features a group of them standing in the field, sharing a toast of what is presumably tequila in rustic-looking wooden cups. This image shows the workers enjoying a moment of leisure, and alludes to the fact that members of any social class can consume this product. However, a shot of Rodrigo and Don Montalvo sitting at a table in a dimly lit cellar surrounded by barrels as they sip tequila from glasses highlights the way their social class gives them access to a more luxurious experience. This is reminiscent of the way marketing efforts to promote tequila use different branding techniques to appeal to different audiences, because tequila consumption looks very different based on the class status of the consumer.

The combination of these images creates a clear visual connection between the natural landscape surrounding Tequila, the products it yields, and the way people engage with it all. The multiplicity of experiences presented throughout the telenovela helps viewers reconcile Tequila's role as a site of productivity, leisure, culture, and nature. This is closely related to the goal of the Pueblos Mágicos program, which intends to offer tourists an array of experiences to enjoy Tequila and tequila in different capacities.

Viewers are introduced to the town of Tequila in the first episode when a crowd of migrant workers passes through the town square. They move with purpose towards a row of

⁹⁵ Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revised." 42.

pickup trucks that will transport them to the La Montalveña hacienda for the annual agave harvest. This scene contextualizes how the workers referenced in the opening montage arrive at the rural landscape. Once the workers are seated in the cargo beds, the trucks begin to drive off. The camera zooms out into an aerial view of the town square shortly after, highlighting the colonial architecture of the buildings and the bustle of activity the workers are leaving behind and perhaps anticipating both the global reach of both tequila and subsequent plot developments in the telenovela that will lead to the dispersion of the main characters far beyond the town of Tequila.

At La Montalveña, Don Amador Montalvo's family and employees are informed that his health is declining rapidly. Before the end of the first episode, the viewer is transported back to Tequila's town square as members of the community gather for Don Amador's funeral procession. The camera captures members of the clergy, the Montalvo family, and their employees as they all slowly make their way into the church. Here, community members of all social classes have come together for this shared ritual of respect and mourning.

Gaviota and her mother Clara, who is also a migrant farmworker, arrive a few minutes late to the mass held in Don Montalvo's memory. They stand in the back of the church and discuss where they should sit. Clara whispers that she is reluctant to sit in the empty pews at the front of the church because "that's not where the poor people can go." It is evident that she is aware of her positionality and does not want to disrupt the social hierarchy and call attention to herself. Gaviota, on the other hand, is undeterred; she quietly declares that "the rich and the poor are equal in the house of God" and proceeds to take the bouquet her mother was holding and slowly marches down the aisle to place the flowers on Don Amador's casket. In this scene, Gaviota's actions indicate that she does not feel limited by social conventions, and instead acts

on the principles she holds. Gaviota's wholehearted belief in the notion that all people are equal is reflected in many national discourses, but her mother reminds her of the harsh reality of living in the nation-state as a poor woman.

Meanwhile, the camera zooms in on Rodrigo Montalvo, who is seated at a pew in the front of the church. A voiceover provides insight into his internal monologue where he expresses admiration for his grandfather and vows to protect the lands he loved so much. His promise is rooted in a sense of obligation and love, not money. As the telenovela progresses, it becomes evident that these commitments are increasingly difficult to maintain the further he goes from Tequila. In this situation his innermost thoughts are revealed without him saying a word out loud. This technique helps Rodrigo provide what Williams describes as an "[...] emotional [display] of virtue" to the audience without jeopardizing his "pure and absolute (and also sternly masculine) morality."⁹⁶

The camera cuts to show Gaviota approaching the empty seat next to Rodrigo, who does not notice her because his head is bowed. Once she is situated, her internal monologue is also revealed in a voiceover. In a prayer of affirmation, she declares that Don Amador "must be in heaven," because his generosity and kindness were unparalleled, and expresses that she and her mother are grateful for all he did to help them. The use of voiceover in this scene allows viewers to access the presumably unfiltered thoughts of the protagonists. Gaviota's words of appreciation for Don Amador seem sincere and informed in part by the expectation that workers in a capitalist economic system should be grateful for the opportunity to work because their survival depends on it. With this in mind, the sheer presence of mourners at the church, portrayed in the earlier scenes, suggests that Don Montalvo was a pillar of the community because he was respectable

⁹⁶ Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revised." 54-55.

and because his tequila company is a major source of jobs in the region. The highly gendered content of the melodramatic voiceover contributes to what Williams describes as a “big ‘sensation’ scene” that combines the “prolonged ‘feminine’ pathos” and “the ‘masculine action’” without interrupting the flow of the narrative.⁹⁷

In this telenovela, the Montalvo family represents the trajectory of the transition from land and agriculture to the industrialization of tequila production and its expanding global reach. This process is related to the Pueblos Mágicos programs’ focus on assigning national value to regional cultural sites and symbols and marketing them to visitors. The Montalvos, in addition to building their lives in Tequila, had also built the largest tequila company in Mexico. They can be interpreted as a fictionalized version of a family like the Beckmann’s of the José Cuervo company mentioned in previous chapters. The news of Don Amador’s passing forces members of the Montalvo family who were managing the company’s New York offices, or studying in London and Paris, to return to Tequila for his funeral and the reading of his will. It is here where they learn that Don Amador chose to delegate all leadership responsibilities within the company to his grandsons to ensure the company maintains the family name.

When the lawyer prepares to discuss the document, the camera focuses on it, then fades into an image of Don Amador in a crisp white suit. Here the cinematography underscores a desire to emphasize affect and familial connection even, or especially, in the context of a financial matter. In this scene, Don Amador’s imagined presence following his death is extremely touching. His white suit is a symbol of purity and suggests that he is a man who lived honestly. In subsequent images, he also wears a traditional white uniform (similar to the ones worn by his workers) as he wanders through the fields of agave, which highlights his connection

⁹⁷ Williams, Linda. “Melodrama Revised.” 59.

to the land. These images gently reintroduce Don Amador visually then audibly, into the narrative at a time where his sudden absence is a cause of great uncertainty for his family.

As the scene progresses, Don Amador's voice narrates the text of his will while relevant images flash across the screen. In doing so, the viewers can begin to understand the expansiveness of this operation, as illustrated through shots of the agave fields and processing plants, to corporate offices in Mexico City and abroad. Don Amador closes his recitation of his last wishes and his last will and testament with a sentimental monologue about how he believes the land is the source of the Montalvo's' wealth and pride, reiterating that the company must remain in the hands of the family. Unlike his grandson Rodrigo, Don Amador does not shy away from prioritizing finances. His will functions as a document that is both relational and transactional. Here, it is evident that the landscape has been commodified, and its value is based on what it can produce. This perspective indirectly upholds the Mexican states' belief that rural regions that produce iconic cultural symbols and experiences are worthy of continued financial investment because they are most likely to yield a return. The Pueblo Mágico of Tequila distills the values of land and nature into a marketable product, which is at the core of this story.

As viewers consume the telenovela, they may begin to assign emotional value to Tequila and the surrounding area, as this is the site where the romance between Rodrigo and Gaviota develops. This becomes apparent in the second episode after Gaviota is involved in a physical altercation with another worker while they are working in the field. As the supervisor, Rodrigo stops the conflict and offers Gaviota some water to cool down, but she boldly declares that only a shot of tequila will help temper her anger. This outburst was unexpected but is not uncharacteristic because Gaviota has shown that she is not always compelled to adhere to gender and social norms, as illustrated in the church scene. Rodrigo seems pleasantly surprised and takes

her to an outdoor restaurant in the town square where they begin to discuss their lives and short-term plans over a drink (of tequila, of course). They drive back to the agave fields later that afternoon and continue their conversation. Here, Gaviota accidentally reveals that she has feelings for him, and they kiss for the first time. After Rodrigo takes Gaviota back to her small home, she tells her mother what happened between them. Clara is shocked and gently advises her daughter to not pursue things further. She is the only person who knows about their budding relationship but does not interfere.

In later episodes, the couple continues to spend time together. They return to the fields in the evenings to watch the sunset and spend time together, away from prying eyes. The views in these scenes are very beautiful, and the interactions between the couple are endearing. The couple seems happiest when they are outdoors and can enjoy each other's company because they know their time together is short: Rodrigo has to return to London to complete his doctorate at Cambridge, and Gaviota plans to continue moving through Mexico as a migrant farmworker with her mother.⁹⁸ Rodrigo leaves Tequila and goes abroad to pursue higher education because, in an industrialized world, having a family connection to the land is not enough to be considered qualified to lead a multinational corporation. Meanwhile, Gaviota remains in a comparatively pre-industrial world, where her movement is dictated by nature as she follows the crops that are ready for harvest, alongside her traditionally-minded mother. Despite the impending separation, Rodrigo and Gaviota are confident in their love for each other and vow to reunite and get married in Tequila the following year.

⁹⁸ Gaviota's identity as a mobile subject in a national context prior to arriving in Tequila helps her navigate the wider global context, as viewers find later in the telenovela.

Viewers are emotionally invested in this outcome and want the lovers to defeat the odds against them, as is often the case in melodramatic narratives. In this telenovela, the biggest obstacles the protagonists face are class, physical distance, and a lack of communication. When Rodrigo returns to London, he leaves Gaviota behind but cannot stop thinking about the time they spent together in Tequila. This is particularly evident in one scene where he is sitting in a common area on campus. He is reading a book and lovingly touches a photograph printed on the page. The camera focuses on the photograph and it transforms into a video of him carrying Gaviota and spinning her around in the field. The camera abruptly cuts to a medium shot of Rodrigo as he sighs Gaviota's name. He immediately remembers that he is in public and slams the book shut. As the telenovela progresses, flashbacks continue to serve as a visual manifestation of the protagonists' sense of longing for the experiences they had in rural Mexico.

Back in Tequila, the plot thickens. After she realizes she is pregnant, Gaviota grows impatient and takes initiative to reunite with Rodrigo. However, she does not have his phone number or address because he did not provide it to her, and she did not ask for it before he left. This is both a plot complication typical of melodrama and also an indication of the deep socio-economic chasm that separates them. The existence of their whirlwind romance is not known to Rodrigo's family because his grandmother, mother, and aunts place immense value on public perceptions and intend to protect their family's social status. Even though Rodrigo's grandmother Doña Constanza Montalvo does not know Gaviota personally, she dislikes her because she sings loudly when she works in the fields and her voice can be heard inside the house. Undoubtedly, the women in the family would disapprove of Rodrigo being involved with a woman of a lower social class and would be outraged to learn that they were expecting a child out of wedlock. This unspoken truth leads Gaviota to convince some of the domestic employees

to help her obtain Rodrigo's contact information without raising suspicion from the Montalvos, another fleeting example in the telenovela of class resistance and solidarity. Despite their best efforts, they are unsuccessful. Viewers are reminded that the dynamic between the Montalvos and the workers on the hacienda is not usually as egalitarian as it appears to be during ritualized moments like the funeral inside the church.

Gaviota once again is undeterred, as she is naively determined to find him on her own. Because she is desperate for money, she finally cedes to a local photographer's repeated requests that she model for him. He takes headshots of her and makes arrangements for her to fly to Paris with a female modeling agent. His persistence reflects the notion that beauty can be commodified and is marketable and profitable. Gaviota is enthusiastic to make the trip because Paris is relatively close to London, and she figures that she can find Rodrigo somewhere near Cambridge's campus. Once she arrives at the Guadalajara International Airport, the photographer scolds her for being late and quickly hands her a boarding pass and passport. The airport functions as a gateway to the international world and its complexities and risks. When Gaviota asks why the passport has the name Marianna Franco Villarreal on it, the photographer explains that they chose a new name for her because it facilitated the visa process. He claims that her legal name is not elegant enough to land her jobs in the modeling industry. Gaviota accepts this explanation and successfully moves through the airport with her new agent. While "Gaviota" is a nickname, it feels authentic and natural to the audience's understanding of the character because it draws on her musical talent and the migratory nature of her work, which is much like that of a seagull. The rushed renaming of Gaviota at the airport feels insincere because it is rooted in a desire to make her appealing to the market. This insincerity is a precursor to the deception that unfolds shortly after.

When they arrive in Paris, the agent gives Gaviota a tour of the beautiful mansion where she is expected to live and work. As Gaviota settles into this new space and interacts with the other women there, she realizes that she has been lured into a sex trafficking ring. Gaviota angrily confronts the modeling agent and manages to escape this precarious situation, only to fall into a series of misadventures in Europe. Despite being in precarious situations, she asserts herself and remains resilient. Unfortunately, her strong values cannot protect her from the injustice of the world and its oppressive structures. The unhappy ending of this telenovela emphasizes the fact that melodrama is predicated on complications and conflict. Following Don Amador's death, the increasingly apparent jealousy and greed of Rodrigo's family members suggests that financial gain is more important to them than maintaining traditions and preserving the natural landscape.

As the telenovela continues its inexorable arc towards its unhappy ending, the rural landscape of Tequila ceases to be its primary setting. The telenovela presents Tequila in retrospect as an idealized space. Once Gaviota leaves the idyllic beauty of this rural landscape, she falls victim to the evils of the world. She loses her innocence and suffers immensely, but remains resilient in the face of adversity. When Rodrigo leaves his home for London, he is distracted and tempted but tries his best to be true to his beliefs. This leads me to associate the town of Tequila with the distillation process, as the title of the telenovela suggests. This rural space is a site where values like goodness and morality can be found in their most distilled, or pure, form. As people distance themselves, their responses to moral questions become increasingly muddled.

The idealization of rural space is a common theme in Mexican visual media productions. Specifically, the portrayal of rural spaces as the unadulterated, moral antithesis of cities has been

a central theme in Mexican film and media for almost a century. One example of this can be found in the 1932 film *Santa*, which follows a beautiful country girl's spiral into poverty and despair after she goes to Mexico City and does sex work to survive. *Destilando Amor* falls into this tradition by emphasizing the idea that rural spaces offer the opportunity to make an honest living through manual labor. But this telenovela suggests a more complicated state discourse by suggesting that while small towns are charming and integral to the construction of national identity, they cannot survive through the sake of virtue alone. In a globalized society, urban areas, corrupt as they are, are the sites where the negotiations take place.

Destilando Amor addresses the tensions of the idealized rural landscape and its commodification. While the telenovela itself portrays Gaviota as a dedicated worker and loyal girlfriend, there are brief moments in the closing credit sequence that center her sensuality within the beauty of Tequila's landscape. This is particularly evident in two shots of the actress Angélica Rivera wearing a silky, light-green, off-the-shoulder dress paired with a pointy crown that looks like an agave plant. A colorful sunset and agave plants are in the background as she poses dramatically and gazes into the camera. This choice of clothing is rather unusual because in the telenovela itself Gaviota's character does not typically wear anything this revealing. Her outfit seems out of place because it is unconventional, and is not explicitly connected to a specific cultural practice from the region. While this dress and headdress may not resonate as authentic with local viewers, it is striking and memorable in ways that reach beyond the melodramatic plotline. As Néstor García Canclini suggests, the "media is not concerned with maintaining [...] culture or tradition; the culture industry is more interested in constructing and renewing the simultaneous contact between broadcasters and receivers."⁹⁹ This process results in

⁹⁹ García Canclini, Néstor. *Hybrid Cultures*. 187-88.

a performance of authenticity, which inevitably reveals the cultural hybridity and instability that lies behind the facade of tradition.

This telenovela makes a statement that played a significant role in promoting national culture, and to an extent, politics. The combination of Gaviota's beauty and work ethic within the tequila industry throughout this production cemented Angélica Rivera's reputation as a cultural ambassador for Mexico. In 2007, the *Consejo Regulador Tequila* (Tequila Regulatory Council) gave Rivera an award for "promoting the culture of the most Mexican beverage" at an international level through her performance as Gaviota in *Destilando Amor*.¹⁰⁰ This formal recognition reinforces the fact that telenovelas have tremendous reach and suggests that engaging with these audiences is an invaluable promotional opportunity. So while this telenovela is not a commercial in the traditional sense, the product placement is undeniable.

Angélica Rivera has not returned to acting since her celebrated performance in this telenovela but remained in the public eye because of her relationship with Mexican politician Enrique Peña Nieto of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). They met when he hired her to help publicize his 2005 campaign for Governor of the State of Mexico, and they began dating in 2008.¹⁰¹ The couple married in 2010 while he was still Governor, which made her the First Lady. In 2012, she became the First Lady of Mexico following her husband's election to the presidency.¹⁰² Peña Nieto's victory marked the PRI's return to power after candidates from the political opposition won the presidency in the 2000 and 2006 elections. Before this, the PRI had

¹⁰⁰ Translated from: Consejo Regulador Tequila. "Reconocimiento a La 'Gaviota.'" *Flickr*, Yahoo!, 4 Nov. 2010.

¹⁰¹ D'Artigues, Katia, et al. "Enrique Peña Nieto confirma en el programa 'Shalalá' que mantiene una relación con la actriz Angélica Rivera." *El Universal*, El Universal, 13 Nov. 2008.

¹⁰² Criales, José Pablo. "La vida congelada de Angélica Rivera, la actriz que lo dejó todo por Peña Nieto." *El País*, PRISA, 8 May 2020.

ruled Mexico for 71 uninterrupted years, despite accusations of fraud and corruption.¹⁰³ It is interesting to think that a compelling fictional narrative situated in a place with cultural significance might sway political power. Rivera's beauty and popularity, which was magnified because of the likeability of her character in the successful telenovela, may have helped boost Peña Nieto's visibility and perceived electability. To this day, the press refers to Angélica Rivera as "Gaviota," or at the very least includes a mention of her beloved character's name in articles about her. Rivera's adoption of this name functions as a market-influenced appropriation of the purity and connection to nature that her character embodied. *Destilando Amor* and the culture associated with the Pueblo Mágico of Tequila emphasize national imagery and work alongside the state discourse of magic to both support and undermine it.

In the larger scheme of things, *Destilando Amor* helps advance the notion that economic productivity and recognition for one's cultural products on a global scale should be a source of pride. But it also shows that this global reach and recognition has costs and unintended consequences. While Mexicans were the original target audience for this production, it also reached a diaspora of Spanish-speakers when it aired on Univision in the United States.¹⁰⁴ With this in mind, this telenovela does not function as a commercial to attract non-Spanish-speaking people to Tequila as a tourist destination. Instead, it serves as validation and celebration of Mexico's contributions to global capitalism. This supports the motivation of the Pueblos Mágicos program that are promoted publically: that is, the overarching importance of embracing the magic of cultural experiences. However, the harsh reality is that not everyone will be able to access their fair share of the money or the magic and the satisfaction that comes with it.

¹⁰³ "Political Parties in Mexico." Baker Institute for Public Policy. June 12, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ "Destilando Amor." Wikipedia. January 13, 2021.

Conclusion

I close as I began, with a personal reflection. A few years ago, one of my closest friends went on a cruise that docked in the port of Cozumel, Mexico and they brought me a shot glass as a souvenir. It has a metallic purple label with embossed silver lettering and an illustration. The words “Reserva Especial” appear in small letters above the word “Tequila” at the top of the label. An image of a step-pyramid, with what appears to be a large agave plant on top of it, is in the center of the label. The presence of this plant is a nod to the natural source of the beverage that the tiny glass is intended for. The word “COZUMEL” is directly below it. My friend is Guatemalan and Mexican, so they understood how interesting the label on this souvenir is because it combines images and concepts that do not usually coexist. While Mayan ruins can be found in Cozumel, blue agave plants are not native to the region. The port of Cozumel and the town of Tequila are over 1000 miles apart. If a tourist is on a cruise, it is highly unlikely that they will stop near any site where tequila is produced. However, this does not prevent businesses at the port from selling items like shot glasses and offering tequila tasting experiences marketed to tourists. This desire to cater to tourists’ expectations of Mexico proves to be very profitable.

With this in mind, we can understand tequila as an example of how a localized, regional product is transformed into a cultural object tied to a brand of Mexican national identity that takes on a global dimension. The beverage’s protected status granted by the Denomination of Origin encourages people around the world to associate it with Mexico because Mexico is the only country that can produce and market it as such. As tequila experienced increased visibility in a global market and popular culture, it gradually made its way into the popular imagination through expanded tourism and a popular telenovela.

The town of Tequila's Pueblo Mágico distinction gives the region visibility and attracts visitors to enjoy for themselves the landscape and the products it yields. The cultural items found in Tequila and other Pueblos Mágicos are often marketed as commodities that represent the nation's culture. These activities can be understood as examples of Nuala Finnegan's concept of "tourist-vision" being employed by the nation-state in its efforts to curate a compelling experience for tourists. In the context of the Pueblos Mágicos program, this "vision" is rooted in the romanticization of natural landscapes and cultural histories. However, it is fair to say that these processes are not unique to Mexico. Similar processes take place in any nation with a tourism industry because everyone has an interest in positioning themselves as unique in order to attract curious visitors.

The tourist-vision in this region also plays out on television. In 2020, *Destilando Amor* was rereleased on the Las Estrellas network. Despite airing during an early afternoon slot, the telenovela performed impressively well; the series finale had a viewership of 4.4 million.¹⁰⁵ Thirteen years after its initial release, this love story situated in Tequila still managed to captivate the audience. By this time the telenovela aired, Enrique Peña Nieto and his former wife Angélica Rivera had vacated the presidential mansion nearly two years prior, and they faced various accusations of corruption and misconduct for several years. These controversies did not seem to have a negative impact on the telenovela's viewership.

In this thesis I have explored the connection between magic and money in representations of Tequila, Jalisco, Mexico. I examined the creation of the Mexican Ministry of Tourism's Pueblos Mágicos initiative in Chapter 1, and in Chapter 2 I explained how Tequila's recognition

¹⁰⁵ Solís, Erik. "Destilando Amor lo vuelve a hacer, a 13 años de su estreno, su gran final conquista a la audiencia." *Las Estrellas TV*, Televisa, 17 August 2020.

as a Pueblo Mágico was a catalyst in its transformation into a tourist destination. In Chapter 3 I provided a reading of a popular telenovela, set in the town of Tequila and centered around a family-owned tequila corporation, "Destilando Amor," within the context of melodrama. In this process, my intention has been to show how a national tourism strategy's focus on the local and the regional, on cultural traditions and landscapes, and on the magical and the emotional, is continually revealed to be following the money, whether it is from domestic or international consumers.

The Pueblo Mágico narratives and sites remain compelling to audiences because they embody a tangible understanding of Mexican identity, a concrete projection that can be shared domestically and internationally. The beverage tequila has a history that is longer than Mexico itself. As the tequila industry and its distribution network expanded rapidly in the last decades, so did the pride of holding a national identity associated with a cultural product that is recognized around the world. As I hope to have shown, the entangled narratives that promote national pride and market cultural products evoke questions about value and authenticity that do not have a consistent answer. Culture is not static, and must adapt to fulfill the expectations of a capitalist world. I do not think this renders either the cultural initiative of the Pueblos Mágicos or the various ways in which Tequila and tequila are marketed less valid, because their essence still remains as long as members of the community are involved and fairly compensated for their contributions to maintaining the reputation of the cultural patrimony.

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