

Buñuel and Mexico

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The Crisis of National Cinema

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Mexican films are treated as an inevitable detour in an otherwise stylistically and thematically interconnected body of work.

Buñuel's declared marginality from the mainstream of Mexican cinema, his position as an outsider, gave him a privileged perspective. Interestingly, in the chapter on Mexico in *My Last Sigh* Buñuel speaks more about Mexico than about his Mexican films. However, what is missing about the Mexican films in *My Last Sigh*, namely the connection between those films and the rest of his oeuvre, I believe, is readily apparent in the body of the work itself, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow.

Buñuel's memoir serves to state, from the safe perspective of a fifty-year career and an assured place in world cinema history, his own critical opinion about his work. The book tells us for which work Buñuel wishes to be remembered. Appropriately, as the work of a surrealist, *My Last Sigh* seemingly flows as stream of consciousness, with the deceptive unpredictability of automatic writing. But like a dream, it speaks figuratively; it represses and projects that which the conscious mind of the filmmaker fears, such as the significance of his Mexican period. As a work of self-critique, *My Last Sigh* confirms the generalized neglect of Buñuel's Mexican work. As part of his artistic production, it aims at being consistent with the detached wit of the surrealist artist, downplaying the aspects of his life where he may have seemed more vulnerable—his family and his involvement with Mexico.

3 *Los Olvidados* and the Crisis of Mexican Cinema

I am the Mexican Cinema.
—Emilio Fernández

I feel profound horror for Mexican hats.
—Luis Buñuel

Luis Buñuel's first Mexican films, *Gran Casino* (1946–47) and *El gran calavera* (1949) were self-reflexive yet mild forms of genre parody, and they were harmless, almost experimental. In the former case, Buñuel worked generic conventions for producer Óscar Dancigers (not to mention star Jorge Negrete, also one of the producers of the movie) and, in the latter case, he worked under powerful star-producer Fernando Soler. It took the commercial success of *El gran calavera* to guarantee Buñuel enough independence to pursue the serious social, political, and aesthetic issues of *Los olvidados* (*The Young and the Damned*), his third Mexican movie.

Widely regarded by European film critics as Buñuel's "return" to notoriety after a period of prolonged inactivity and apprenticeship (between 1932 and 1946, when he moved to Mexico), the release of *Los olvidados* was an important historical marker of the "crisis of nationalism" in Mexican cinema. Sometimes seen as a foreigner's distanced view, *Los olvidados* also relates directly to cultural, political, and economic concerns among contemporary Mexican intellectuals and artists. Furthermore, *Los olvidados* gains importance to Mexican issues in light of its close formal and historical relationship to Octavio Paz's 1950 cultural essay, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, itself a turning point in Mexican literary and culture studies. Grounding *Los olvidados* in its Mexican context helps us to better understand Luis Buñuel's impact on the tradition of Mexican cinema and the contribution of his early years in Mexico to the entirety of his subsequent career.

It is well known that at the time of the movie's premiere in Mexico City on 9 November 1950, *Los olvidados* was mainly taken as an insult to Mexican sensibilities and to the Mexican nation. The stories of the film's original detractors are many and well documented.¹ Subject to the old Mexican "colonial complex," *Los olvidados* first had to gather prestige

abroad before it could be welcomed in Mexico City.² After its triumph at the Cannes Film Festival (where Buñuel won the best director award) and other European festivals, *Los olvidados* enjoyed a successful first run. It was re-released in 1954 and acknowledged in Mexico, according to publicity materials, as both "a masterpiece" of Mexican cinema and as the "pinnacle" (*la obra cumbre*) of Buñuel's career.³

Luis Buñuel's relationship with Mexican cinema went through several different stages, and it is significant that *Los olvidados* was recognized both by international critics and Mexican film historians as the turning point in the director's career. *Los olvidados* was also the first film made during Buñuel's Mexican years in which the director specifically addressed issues related not only to Mexican cinema but more particularly to Mexican politics and society itself.

The small, yet significant amount of freedom that producer Óscar Dancigers allowed Buñuel in *Los olvidados* enabled the director to "return" formally and philosophically to his surrealist years. In particular, Buñuel returned to the violent visual and political style of *Las Hurdes*, his 1932 parody of John Grierson and Robert Flaherty's social and ethnographic documentary aesthetic. Nevertheless, as much as *Los olvidados* can arguably (and probably rightly so) be associated with the style and themes of *Las Hurdes*, the film also did something entirely new. It exposed and criticized the fissures, cracks and failures of classical Mexican cinema. In *Los olvidados* Buñuel directly addressed his expressed dislike for official folklore, for the image of Mexico as dictated by the visual style of classical cinema and revolutionary art, and of the social and political transition to modernization.

Los olvidados coincides with a current of critical intellectual thought about the Mexican revolution that was first articulated in Daniel Cosío Villegas's essay "La crisis de México." First published in the intellectual review *Cuadernos Americanos* in March 1947, the essay marked a turning point in Mexican intellectual debates about the Revolution.⁴ In the often-quoted opening paragraph, Cosío Villegas states, "The goals of the Revolution have been exhausted to the point that the very term revolution is already lacking any meaning."⁵ With this sentence (in both senses of the term), Cosío Villegas opens his critical review of the institutional Revolution's failure to achieve the utopian goals first expressed in 1910 and which seemed possible during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. For Cosío Villegas, there were three goals of the Revolution that had not been achieved: first, to avoid the tenure of power by one person for indefinite periods of time, the most criticized political characteristic of *porfirismo*; second, to improve the conditions of the masses while avoiding the benefit of

the small landed aristocracy composed of the so-called one-hundred families; and third, to acknowledge the demographic profile of the nation as *mestizo*, the brand of nationalism proper to the Mexican Revolution.⁶ As noble as the original goals of the Revolution appeared to be in the 1920s and 1930s, Cosío Villegas argued that they were misconceived and that they were directed toward "destruction" rather than "construction."

All the revolutionary men were inferior to the work the Revolution needed to do: Madero destroyed Porfirismo, but did not create democracy in Mexico; Calles and Cárdenas ended the large landed estates (*latifundia*), but did not create the new Mexican agriculture. . . . Thus the work of the Revolution has always remained in the most vulnerable position: exposed to the fury of its enemies, and without generating in its followers the . . . conviction of its achievements.⁷

Thus, in Cosío Villegas's view, not only was the Revolution a failure, but it was also unsuccessful in building up Mexicans' faith in national institutions. The crisis encompassed practical issues (no real improvement in the economic and social conditions of the lower classes, for example) as well as philosophical concerns. That lack of faith was turning "the crisis" of the Revolution into something of an emotional trauma, an "identity crisis," so to speak, at a national level.

Furthermore, by 1947, it was apparent that even the Revolution's true achievements were endangered in the face of economic policies that benefited only the traditional upper classes. In *Estado e ideología empresarial en el gobierno alemanista*, Mexican economic historian Felicitas López-Portillo Tostado analyzed the growth of the commercial/ industrial class, developmentalism, and the shift toward political conservatism in México under President Miguel Alemán.

History has branded President Alemán as a counterrevolutionary because of his government's pro-business, pro-industry economic policies. In a judgment that is common in Mexican history, López-Portillo Tostado negatively contrasts Alemán's six years in office to those of President Cárdenas, whose nationalist policies were "distorted by the Alemanista government in favor of private interests."⁸ However, in López-Portillo's view, not all of Alemán's initiatives were ill conceived; they were more in tune with the original economic goals of the Revolution even though they contrasted with Cárdenas's utopian, romantic views about social problems. *Alemanismo* wanted to put Mexico in the course of modernization by "augmenting production, promoting agriculture, and promoting industrialization." These were all, says López-Portillo, legitimate revolutionary aspira-

tions in the spirit of the 1917 Constitution.⁹ Yet, according to López-Portillo, the president was not willing to acknowledge the crisis of the Revolution and its institutions, although he was aware of the pressing need to overhaul the economy, to make structural economic changes. In his inaugural address, Alemán invoked the Revolution's populist philosophy in the face of economic adversity and announced there was "consciousness that in ourselves—in our effort towards work and in our moral and spiritual convictions—lie the solution to our problems."¹⁰

Alemán's economic plan of "productivity" also imposed a political scheme, since the aid of the United States and other capitalist allies was necessary to ensure the growth of the economy and industry. Because of the "leftist" leanings of the nationalization policies of the previous decade, Mexico's political course had to turn right. After 1947, as the Mexican state embraced a more "Christian-Democratic" ideology, the most left wing factions of the [Institutional] Revolutionary Party were expelled.¹¹

Such policy changes toward political conservatism, private interest, and industrial/capitalist development, inasmuch as López-Portillo writes that they did not contradict the 1917 Constitution, were precisely the kinds of reforms that Cosío Villegas predicted in 1947 and against which his essay spoke. They were signs of "the crisis," of the failure of the Revolution. In particular, the Revolution was seen as a failure, insofar that even such acts of bravura as President Cárdenas's nationalization of the railroads and oil resources seemed threatened. Cosío Villegas himself coined the term *neoporfiriato* to refer to the period's unwelcome ideological return to prerevolutionary times.¹²

Historians of the period agree about Alemán's achievements in matters of infrastructure. There was substantial improvement in railroads, the establishment of hydroelectrical and thermoelectrical plants (which is one of the subtopics of Buñuel's 1951 film, *Una mujer sin amor*), new housing projects, betterment of highways, and the development or revitalization of cultural institutions like the Instituto de Bellas Artes and the Instituto Indigenista.¹³ Nevertheless, there is also consensus that the achievements of *alemanismo* improved neither the financial nor the social situation of the lower class. The turn of the decade of the 1950s, in fact, dramatized the gap between rich and poor that the first decades of revolutionary government had allegedly tried to close. Under President Alemán spending on social programs decreased steadily, to the point that in 1952 it represented 11.2 percent of the national budget, "the lowest since 1927."¹⁴

While there was real growth in production and manufacturing, income distribution became even more unequal than in previous decades. There was

a decline in real per capita income between 1945 and 1950. Significantly, this was attributed in part to the rapid growth of urban population, as land reform laws proved ineffectual in keeping peasants away from the city (which was the immediate context surrounding the rise of the *cabaretera* subgenre of Mexican melodrama).

The critics of the Alemán administration thus saw the Revolution's failure on several fronts: social, economic, political, and even philosophical (the loss of "faith" in the Revolution and its "Mexicanness"). As the decade of the 1940s reached its end, "the crisis" was the topic of discussion in many intellectual forums. In the pages of *Cuadernos Americanos*, Jesús Silva Herzog declared the Revolution "dead" in 1949; "the crisis" was also discussed in *Revista Mexicana de Cultura* and *Filosofía y Letras*, among other publications.¹⁵ A series of articles on "Mexico and Mexicanness" appeared from 1949 to 1953 in the intellectual reviews and took the shape of a philosophical debate on issues of national identity, with the Revolution providing historical background. "The crisis" also provided the immediate context for Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the most influential cultural essay on Mexico in the second half of the last century.

"LOS OLVIDADOS" IN "THE LABYRINTH"

Solitude, the source from which anguish springs, began the day
in which we separated from the maternal dwelling and fell into a
strange and hostile world.

—Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*

Mexico's revolutionary crisis under *alemanismo*, as well as the struggle with modernization (as seen in García-Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures*) serve as the background against which to understand the inherent "Mexicanness" of *Los olvidados* and its relevance within the context of 1950s Mexico. Perhaps not too coincidentally, the release of *Los olvidados* was also contemporary with the more direct and just as controversial questioning of Mexican society and culture in Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*. Paz's book-length essay was a revisionist, provocative, and controversial look at the portrait of Mexico exemplified by revolutionary rhetoric and aesthetics. The book was the turning point for intellectual debates in Mexico about national identity, the Revolution, the role of the intellectual, and other themes.

Paz's controversial cultural essay can serve, like *Los olvidados*, as a marker of the crisis of Mexican culture in general at a time of accelerated urban development and the decay of "traditional" moral and revolutionary

values. The same context characterizes the best *cabaretera* movies, which were associated with President Miguel Alemán's *sexenio*. A complete critical analysis of the chronological and formative coincidences between these two landmarks of Mexican cultural production remains to be done. I must, however, call attention to some of the contextual parallelism between the two works, since *Los olvidados* and *El laberinto de la soledad* both treat the "crisis" of Mexico as a form of psychosis in Mexican society and they are both based on the theoretical structure of "ethnographic surrealism."

At the time of the book's publication and the film's release, in 1950, *Los olvidados* and *El laberinto de la soledad* were both controversial and targets of cultural and intellectual criticism. But, in time, they both became seminal points of reference in film studies and Mexican cultural studies, respectively. Time and criticism may have been kinder to *Los olvidados* than to *El laberinto de la soledad*. Buñuel's film has no expressed pretensions of analyzing Mexican culture, Mexican cinema, Mexican art, or the Mexican nation. It does serve, however, as an example of the need to revise some of the representations of Mexico that were directly addressed, more deeply deconstructed, schematized, historicized, scrutinized, and set up for questioning in Paz's book.

El laberinto de la soledad has been called "a modern essay, itself a critical reflection on modernity. A cultural essay, an essay on cultural identity—Völkerpsychologie—[and] a moralist essay of historic interpretation."¹⁶ Of all these characterizations, however, the book is considered especially relevant on the issue of "identity," and it is the inevitable reference, since its publication, in every scholarly debate about Mexico and "Mexicanness." "Within Mexican literature, in particular, writes Enrico Mario Santí, "the book occupies . . . a privileged space: it continues, summarizes, and closes the reflection about national identity."¹⁷

Paz's cultural formation and the intellectual trajectory that led to his writing of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* also shed light on the formal, psychological, methodological, and philosophical similarities between his book and *Los olvidados*. Paz's first publication, the poem "¡No pasarán!" which appeared in 1936, is said to be a reflection on the Spanish Civil War, sympathetic to the Republican cause. While in Paris in 1937, Paz befriended Alejo Carpentier and Robert Desnos, who "were by then part of the dissidents around the surrealist group," and Paz also met many Spanish Republican exiles in the Parisian political, cultural, and literary circles of the late 1930s.¹⁸

More significantly, Paz's flirtation with the surrealists of 1930s Paris also marks his initiation into the theories of "psychohistory," of interpreting history psychoanalytically, which Paz then used to rehearse an understand-

ing of Mexican culture, which reached its final form in *El laberinto de la soledad*. Octavio Paz's "description" of Mexican identity, "supposes the Freudian model of neurosis: a reality which manifests a conflict whose symptoms point out another reality, distinct and latent, of which the patient is unconscious."¹⁹ Luis Buñuel's original surrealist movies, *Un chien andalou*, *L'Age d'Or*, and even *Las Hurdes* are deeply grounded in the sort of orthodox Freudian exercises about dreams and the unconscious in which the surrealists were interested in the 1920s.²⁰

The themes of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and their treatment by Paz are also similar to those of *Los olvidados* and arguably to Buñuel's own working style. Santí writes that "the themes of *El laberinto de la soledad* are directed by a folkloric interest (*afán costumbrista*), sometimes frankly and deliberately humorist, satirical, whose purpose is moral analysis."²¹ Santí's judgment of *El laberinto de la soledad* is very much like that of the critics of *Los olvidados*. In one of the most famous reviews of the film, André Bazin calls the movie "the only contemporary aesthetic proof of Freudianism," and states that "Buñuel's surrealism is no more than a desire to reach the basis of reality. . . . The fantasy of *Un chien andalou* is a descent into the human soul, just as *Las Hurdes* and *Los olvidados* are explorations of man in society." Buñuel himself called *Los olvidados* a film "of social struggle."²²

Like Luis Buñuel, Octavio Paz spent a formative period of his life in a diplomatic post, which took him to France and the United States. In his second long stay in France in 1946, Paz befriended the old surrealists of Buñuel's own generation, among them André Breton. "With them," says Santí, "he shared their interest in Mexico, whose 'strangeness' had fascinated other surrealists, like Breton and Artaud . . . [They also shared] their investigation of the poetic powers of the unconscious." Santí concludes that for these reasons "the influence of surrealism over . . . Paz [in] this period is very important."²³

There is one more important issue that I have only hinted at here and that is most relevant to situate *Los olvidados* as a significant Mexican text that should have the place and importance in Mexican film that *El laberinto de la soledad* has in Mexican literature. The most important link between both texts is their common origin in ethnographic surrealism. Santí states that Octavio Paz's closest ties to surrealism came from his association with the "Collège de sociologie," founded in Paris in 1937 by surrealist dissidents Roger Caillois and Georges Bataille, who, like Buñuel, had departed the group proper in the mid-1930s. Like Buñuel, who chose the subtitle "An essay on human geography" for his documentary *Las Hurdes* in 1932,

Caillois and Bataille became interested in "human sciences," which prompted their exit from the group. From the surrealists Bataille, Caillois, and, of course, Buñuel, whom Santí does not mention, emerged "ethnographic surrealism," which "dissented from orthodox or academic anthropology by focusing its studies not on societies that were archaic or "primitive"—but on modern, current societies."²⁴ On this topic, Santí concludes:

In *The Labyrinth of Solitude* we find in effect, what we could call, with the help of anthropologist James Clifford, an *ethnographic surrealism*: an ironic experience of culture which "attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness—the unexpected." Different from pure ethnography, whose efforts are to make the strange comprehensible, the surrealist tends to work backwards, making the familiar strange. Vanguard art in the XX century and the development of ethnography . . . both achieve . . . subversive cultural criticism.²⁵

The critique of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as surrealist ethnography proper both to Mexican cultural studies and surrealism could not be more germane. It helps us to frame *Los olvidados* in the same context. The well-documented links of Octavio Paz with surrealism do not deny but confirm the relationship of *Los olvidados* with debates about Mexico, the Revolution, and Mexican culture, which were by then a decade old. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *Los olvidados* both summarize and end the debate. After breaking with the surrealists, Buñuel's first film was indeed the ethnographic surrealist "essay on human geography," *Las Hurdes*.

In his book *Mists of Regret*, Dudley Andrew reaches practically the same conclusions about *Las Hurdes*, which critics generally agree is the formal parent of *Los olvidados*. This provides further evidence that Octavio Paz and Luis Buñuel were of a similar mind, along with a significant portion of the Mexican intelligentsia, when they produced their mid-century classics. Andrew writes:

Buñuel's stark films help verify the link James Clifford has made between the surrealists and the founding of modern ethnography in Paris. Like Bataille, Leiris, and Roger Caillois, Buñuel learned to explore himself through the study of bizarre rites and foreign peoples. . . . Violence, the surrealists preached, can generate as well as destroy possibilities. If there exists any excuse for the cruelty that Buñuel so disturbingly displays in the manner in which he films the poor people of *Las Hurdes* it must stem from this need, this instinct, to make us shudder.²⁶

Andrew's judgment on the origins, operations, meanings, and value of surrealist ethnography are as valid for understanding *Las Hurdes* as they are for understanding *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, and, of course, *Los olvidados*.

The surrealist pedigree of Buñuel's film is not in question. That has been established by fifty years of criticism about the movie and by every book about Buñuel. What remains to be seen is the film's real connection to Mexico, which is based on the movie's indisputable conjunction with what is an integral part of Mexican studies, however controversial. From Cosío Villegas, to the debates on "Mexicanness" of the 1940s, to Octavio Paz, "the crisis," surrealism, and ethnography, *Los olvidados* is a film that is meaningfully specific to its cultural and historical context.

In this sense, *Los olvidados* becomes the most critical link between surrealism and Mexico, and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* is the bridge that connects the film to the specificity of its Mexican context. From similar intellectual backgrounds and conforming to similar formal structures, *Los olvidados* and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* complement each other in their commentary about Mexico, the failure of the Revolution, and the crisis of the national in Mexican cinema. Like *El laberinto de la soledad*, *Los olvidados* does not just represent a "bizarre" culture drawn by a European surrealist, but it is what surrealism became in Mexico.

Like Buñuel, Paz had feared that the reception of his work could be negative.²⁷ This fear came in part because Paz's book was meant to be critical of Mexico's nationalist rhetoric, was meant to be yet another form of criticism of the "crisis" of the revolution as an ideological system. Paz's book specifically attempted to "treat" nationalism as a disease by "raising consciousness of its myths and mechanisms."²⁸ Paz thus turns the key issue of Mexican nationalism—the illicit, violent sexual exchange of Hernán Cortés with doña Marina (La Malinche)—into a "family romance" which includes "the violent father, the humiliated mother, the traumatized son."²⁹ This scenario is one of the key characteristics that makes Buñuel's Mexican melodramas (*Una mujer sin amor* and *El río y la muerte*) fit smoothly into the narrative conventions and ideological operations of classic Mexican melodrama. But this layout was first proposed in coherent theoretical terms in *El laberinto de la soledad*.

Los olvidados really begins by questioning the cinematic Mexico. But, unlike *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, *Los olvidados* is not much concerned with understanding the abstract psychoanalytic construction of Mexican national identity. That sort of analysis is present in Paz's book in the chapters on "La Malinche" and "El Pachuco," and in Paz's comments on "El Pelado" (all of whom are key figures of Mexican cinema: the virgin/whore, Tin-Tan, and Cantinflas, respectively). In Paz's essay, the "surrealist ethnographic" methodology of the book (making the familiar bizarre and drawing psychoanalytic conclusions based on the Freudian scenario of the "family

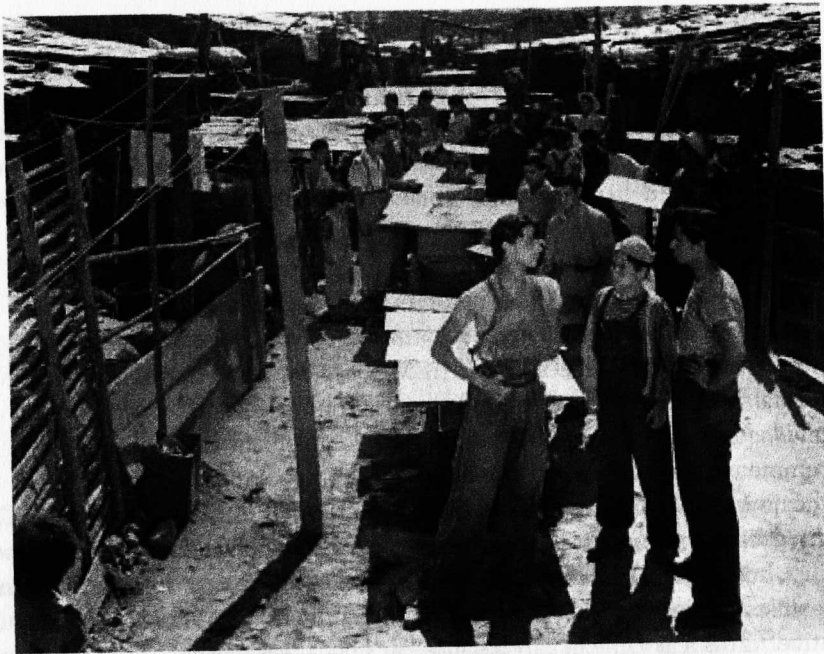


FIGURE 4. Roberto Cobo (as Jaibo), Alfonso Mejía (as Pedro, center left), and Javier Amezcua (as Julián) posing for *Los olvidados* (1950) in “the very real slums of Mexico City.” In the film, the three characters die and are disposed of as garbage in locations similar to this one. Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

romance”) is employed to explain the “neurosis” of the Mexican national identity.

Buñuel’s film shows the physical reality (notwithstanding its surreal elements) that may—in its modern and “modernizing” urban setting, in the very real slums of Mexico City—incarnate some of the issues brought up in Paz’s book, as well as the “cracks” and “fissures” and “weaknesses” of classical cinema’s anti-modernist utopia.³⁰ The characters that populate *Los olvidados* are, like Paz’s Mexicans, traumatized and trapped in their own “drama of identification.”³¹

In fact, Buñuel was openly opposed to the style, look, patriotic values, and rhetoric of classic Mexican cinema.³² As one of the few true surrealists, Buñuel did not acknowledge “national” symbols as anything other than a political manipulation and a bourgeois aberration.³³ In *My Last Sigh* Buñuel tells Jean-Claude Carrière about his “profound horror” of “official folklore” and of his distrust and dislike of “organized” folklore and “patriotic” nation-

alism. For example, in recalling a meeting in Hollywood of Spanish Republicans and other Europeans, Buñuel wrote, “All patriotic displays make me nauseous.”³⁴

At face value, *Los olvidados* is an urban drama, an *arrabalera*, as Mexicans pejoratively called the realist movies set in the slums and back alleys of the city. Like Vittorio De Sica’s *Sciuscia* (1946) and *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), both of which Buñuel admired, *Los olvidados* conforms to a picaresque structure.³⁵ Like its literary structural models, *Lazarillo de Tormes* and Francisco de Quevedo’s *Historia de la vida del buscón*, *Los olvidados* follows its principal character, Pedro, through a series of adventures and encounters with a succession of formative figures. None of these individuals helps Pedro to accomplish anything. They only mistreat him, lie to him, take advantage of him, or, in their misdirected attempt to help (as in the episode with the farm-school director), lead him to his death. Unlike classic picaresque, which works as a rudimentary, primitive version of a Bildungsroman, there is no hope for the protagonist of *Los olvidados*.

Through hard knocks, Pedro “learns” what seems to be a life-lesson on self-preservation, which tragically fails him when he at last meets his nemesis, the evil Jaibo. The paradox lies in the impossibility of redemption for the protagonist. *Los olvidados*, like the Spanish picaresque novel, and the post-war film masterpieces of Italian neorealism, has often been recognized and interpreted as a social critique. With its realistic depiction of overcrowded slum shanties, domestic abuse, incest, child abuse, crime and punishment, poverty, and the ineptness of public social services, it is an indictment of contemporary urban society. Nevertheless, the real social and political context from which it sprang—the specific conditions of the Mexican “crisis” of the late 1940s—are all but ignored by film critics in favor of obvious comparisons with De Sica’s work, which Buñuel did not welcome.

Los olvidados arguably rejects both the values put forward by some of the most important and popular genres of classical Mexican cinema and the stylistic conventions of the best examples of Mexican classical cinema from the 1930s to the 1950s. Certainly, *Los olvidados* was not the only movie set in the poor neighborhoods of Mexican cities. There were, of course, Alejandro Galindo’s *arrabaleras: Campeón sin corona* (1945), *¡Esquina, bajan!* (1948), and *Espaldas mojadas* (1953), among others. But *Los olvidados* did go several steps further in its depressing pessimism and in displaying the city’s sheer filthiness.³⁶ In that way, *Los olvidados* directly addresses and attacks the official idea of Mexican culture, the official shape of Mexican cinema that was part of the postrevolutionary cultural project which included the organization of national museums, the proliferation of murals,

cultural publications, and, at the international level, the cinema. Where *Los olvidados* goes a little deeper than classic *arrabalera* is in its critical commentary on a specifically Mexican moment of "crisis" at so many different levels (economic, political, cultural, moral).

In accordance with its social "thesis" (or essay) façade, Buñuel and co-screenwriter Luis Alcoriza open the film with a disclaiming voice-over narration asserting that it is based on real-life events (the origins of which are unclear). This sets the tone and mood of the movie as one of skepticism and criticism, often taken, mistakenly, for "documentary." Like *Las Hurdes*, *Los olvidados* appears as "an essay," only this time one on Mexican society as well as "on human geography." The narrator states, "[The] film is based on real-life facts, is not optimistic, and leaves the solution to the problem to the progressive forces of society." It is relevant to note the similarity of these words to the inauguration address of Miguel Alemán, who stated precisely the need for a "progressive society," for the state, and for the people to find the solution to Mexico's social and economic problems. Indeed, Buñuel and Alcoriza acknowledge "the crisis" and the urge that it be addressed, that "a solution" be found, to use Alemán's words.

In his extensive interview about the film with José de la Colina and Tomás Pérez Turrent,³⁷ Buñuel tells of the research that went into the preparation for *Los olvidados*. Buñuel, co-screenwriter Luis Alcoriza, and production designer Edward Fitzgerald spent six months doing field research inside the Mexico City slums where the movie's action was to take place. They attempted to be particularly realist in their physical depiction of the environment—the interiors of shacks and shanties, the existence of animals, the number of people in each house, and so on. Buñuel and his team were concerned with being true to the "reality" that they found. "Reality," however, constituted a rejection of the dominant images, settings, and characters in classical cinema.

Los olvidados is populated by a cast of characters that represents the poorest of any society in situations that bring out only the worst in them: violence; murder; decrepit, filthy settings; overcrowding; lying; cheating; stealing; sickness; sexual abuse; domestic abuse; incest; abandonment; hopelessness. There are no noble Indian souls here, no "essence" of Mexican beauty (à la Dolores del Río in *María Candelaria* and María Félix in *Maclovía*): there is only the provocation that the only redeemable character in the movie is a naive country boy, "El Ojitos." He is the only one who wears a poncho and a sombrero, true markers of the folkloric Mexico for which Buñuel felt "profound horror."³⁸ There are neither gentle, manly revolutionary generals nor faithful *soldaderas* (as in Fernández's *Enamorada*):

there is only a mean blind man who speaks nostalgically of the times of Dictator Porfirio Díaz.

Significantly, El Ojitos is a country boy who is brought to the city and abandoned in one of the farmers' markets. Thus, El Ojitos is a product of the failure of the 1930s land reforms: he is left with no land, is displaced to the city, is unskilled, and must search for work. It seems rather calculating that this abandoned child, literally an "olvidado," ends up in the hands of the evil, "Porfirian" blind man, Don Carmelo, since this gives more relevancy to Daniel Cosío Villegas's judgment about the development of a *neoporfiriato* in the midst of the moral, political, and economic crisis.

Don Carmelo is first seen singing on the street and panhandling as a one-man band. He tells his audience:

I'm going to sing you a song from the time of our great general Porfirio Díaz. . . . You may laugh, but in the time of our great general, people were more respectful. And women stayed at home instead of gadding around and deceiving their husbands like they do today.

Don Carmelo is thus introduced before he discovers El Ojitos, the abandoned Indian boy, who is then adopted by Don Carmelo as the blind man's own guide, or *lazarillo*.³⁹

We may remember that, according to Cosío Villegas and López-Portillo Tostado, one of the Revolution's great failures by 1950 was the lack of improvement of the conditions of the Indians and Indian rural communities.⁴⁰ El Ojitos eloquently dramatizes that failure: he is lost and abandoned, he is taken for an Indian (the nickname "Ojitos" [Little Eyes] refers to his Indian facial features), and he is immediately adopted by a *neoporfiriano* for exploitation. Don Carmelo soon decides that El Ojitos was abandoned because he represented a burden to his father, most likely a subsistence farmer from some rural community in the Valley of Mexico and possibly from a bankrupt agrarian cooperative (*ejido*).

In *Los olvidados* no national landmarks in the backgrounds retell national history, as did Diego Rivera's murals in the National Palace prominently featured in Emilio Fernández's *Río Escondido*. There are no singular geographic landmarks, like the volcano Popocatepetl, shot against the background of "inevitably" white clouds. There are only the hills of a garbage dump where the body of the last victim, Pedro, is unloaded. There is the skeleton of a high-rise building under construction and the city smog, which effectively substitute for Popocatepetl and the "inevitable" white clouds and which are present in the background at both narrative turning points: the deaths of Julián and Jaibo.

The presence of the frame or skeleton of the high-rise building, to which Buñuel wanted to add the surreal touch of an orchestra of one hundred musicians, is also an important piece of "cine de arrabal." *Los olvidados* effectively comments on the conditions of the urban poor, but it also raises a key issue on Mexico's race toward modernization—the urban construction boom of the 1940s. The new city of the "developmentalist" 1950s was an urban nightmare because, just as the intellectual and cultural elite of the 1940s had feared, the changes in the city landscape also meant deep changes in the city's demographic profile. In *Los olvidados* the ever-present images of buildings under construction present a rare documentation of the actual construction boom at the turn of the decade, when thousands of rural Mexicans were relocating to the city every day, that was so characteristic of President Miguel Alemán's administration.

Finally, there are certainly no "traditional" family values in *Los olvidados*—no "God, nation, and home" in the fashion of the family melodramas of Juan Bustillo Oro, Fernando de Fuentes, and Julio Bracho. On the contrary, it is the absence of the Porfirian morals of the family melodrama that are more evident in *Los olvidados*. This, however, is surprisingly apropos to Don Carmelo's words at the beginning of the movie: "People were more respectful, and women stayed at home . . . in the time of our great general." Indeed, the moral decay of Mexico in the times of *alemanismo* was seen as a true sign of the Revolution's failure by intellectuals like Cosío Villegas, and a sign of the people's loss of "faith" in the Revolution. As stated in the narrator's opening remarks, the phenomena of both child neglect and child delinquency in Mexico City was no different than it was in big cities in developed countries, as the gender and class demographics of the industrial workforce expanded to include women. Thus, in Don Carmelo's "Porfirian" analysis, women's absence from the home, for whatever reason, was one of the causes of the moral decay of Mexican society.

Los olvidados can also be seen as a film that addresses the defining problem of the systematic but slow transition to modernity after the Revolution, and not just as it relates to the historical context of *alemanismo*, but as it relates to the discourse of classical cinema. The transition and negotiation of Mexican society into modernity was a deep concern of classical Mexican cinema that is especially treated in the canon-building 1940s films of Emilio Fernández.

Without referring directly to classical cinema, Néstor García Canclini has addressed the issue of "modernization" and its relationship to the defining postrevolutionary period in Mexico. García Canclini analyzes both the ill-fitting ideological position of classical cinema's resistance to "moderniza-

tion" and the dramatic and thematic alliance of *Los olvidados* with "modernity" and the "new" nationalism of the 1950s. Mexico's cultural establishment, in coordination with the state, attempted to condense, to consolidate traditional arts and crafts with modern art (exemplified most dramatically in the projects undertaken by Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, of course). The idea was to negotiate the paradox of modernization by incorporating modern and traditional tendencies under the signature of "the nation":

Mexican cultural history of the 1930s through the 1950s demonstrates the fragility of that utopia and the attrition it was suffering as a result of intraartistic and socio-political conditions. The visual arts field, hegemonized by dogmatic realism, the dominance of content, and the subordination of arts to politics, loses its former vitality and produces few innovations. In addition, it was difficult to promote the social action of art when the revolutionary impulse was being "institutionalized."⁴¹

García Canclini's analysis of the failed "utopia" of the visual arts project in Mexico around 1950 can help us understand the rationale of the generally romanticized image of Mexico that was popularized by classical cinema. The films of Emilio Fernández were specifically concerned with the tensions of modernization, as some studies of his works demonstrate.

In his book *Cine y realidad social en México* Alejandro Rozado writes that the work of Emilio Fernández represented a sort of romantic, innocent resistance to Mexico's process of modernization.⁴² In Fernández's imaginary, the paradoxical (hybrid, if you will) nature of modernization cannot be negotiated. Emilio Fernández's films, according to Rozado, fail to harmonize the romanticism of tradition with the pressing, unstoppable needs of modernization, thus failing, I may add, to conform to the "hybrid" social and cultural agenda of the Revolution, as Néstor García Canclini has concluded. "Hybridity," in the García Canclini sense of the word, refers to the negotiated coexistence in Latin American societies of "modern" technology, media, politics, and modes of production, with "traditional" values, the syncretism of religious cults, moral guidelines, and so on.

Appropriately, Fernández's anti-modernist position does not take the shape of any sort of anti-technological or anti-industrialist critique, but it becomes a moral position: it is the old Mexico's moral codes and values that are really opposed to and threatened by the decaying morals of the new, modernizing Mexico.

Of the entire panorama of Mexican film production in the 1940s, the work of Emilio Fernández stands out for the tragic resonance adopted in

the filmic spirit by the conflict of modernization that [Mexico] has lived since the republican era. Fernández begins with melodramatic representation, whose tradition is extraordinarily vigorous in Hispanic America, and submerges in a space where the conflict of values generates a learning experience. From the beatified attitude that constitutes melodrama, which takes the side of "good" versus "evil" values, the visual tragedy of Indio Fernández develops in a reiterated reconsideration of the struggle between the traditional values of the "Mexican community" and the values of progress.⁴³

Thus, according to Rozado, Mexico's precipitation into modernity under Presidents Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán was very traumatic and resulted in the kind of idealistic representation of Mexico ("nationalist rhetoric" and "physical formalism") that distinguished the cinema of Emilio Fernández. The classic images of Mexican cinema sprang from the Revolution's ambiguous position between traditional values and a modern economy. The films of Emilio Fernández, among the most illustrative of the country's cinema, fail to resolve that tension, either by simplifying (as in *Río Escondido*) or sometimes ignoring (as in *Pueblerina*), the impact of the economic changes of the 1940s and beyond. But Mexican cinema became known around the world as a result of Fernández's *Flor silvestre* and *María Candelaria*. Even Fernández's films *Río Escondido* (1947) and especially *Pueblerina* (1948), which now seem somewhat critical and more in agreement with the concerns of "the crisis," still impose a very romanticized version (a "foundational fiction," to borrow from Doris Sommer) of Mexico's state in the late 1940s.⁴⁴

In clear contrast, *Los olvidados* presents Mexico at the threshold of modernization in a less melodramatic fashion than the contemporary *arrabal* films of Alejandro Galindo—which were also structured in the guise of moral predicaments—yet in a more realistic way than the films of Emilio Fernández.⁴⁵ If the image of classical Mexican cinema was one of moral resistance to modernization, then the image of Mexico's submission to modernization, which Buñuel dramatizes as one of hopelessness and a completely amoral existence in *Los olvidados*, would be the epitome of what was "anti-classical" in Mexican cinema.⁴⁶

If there is anything that dramatically represents what "Mexico" is in *Los olvidados*, it is precisely moral and social decay as a sign of modernization. *Los olvidados*, unlike the imaginary world of Emilio Fernández, poses the problem of modernization in the shape of a moral dyad instead of a moral dilemma (which is more like the way Galindo's films present modernization). In *Los olvidados* Buñuel resists the temptation to "take sides," to

judge in moral terms what Mexico *is* and what Mexico *is not*. In this sense, *Los olvidados* is, quite literally, an "amoral" tale: like Buñuel's *Las Hurdes*, it is emotionally detached from its subject(s).

In classical Mexican cinema being "amoral" could also be a way to be situated on the margins of the nation (no "God, nation, home"⁴⁷) while at the same time participating in the "national" cultural debate on "the crisis," in which classical cinema represented the "traditionalist" position. Buñuel's *Los olvidados* inevitably placed the director in the middle of this debate, and it also situates itself as a commentary on the crisis of politics, economy, culture, and the nationalist rhetoric of Mexican cinema. In any case, Buñuel and Alcoriza's script, and Buñuel's aesthetic and thematic treatment of this "amoral" story, do attempt to negotiate the position of urban Mexico in the dyad of tradition and modernity. *Los olvidados* opposed the classic "Indianist" films of Emilio Fernández (which ignore modernization by placing characters in times and spaces where the Revolution seemed unambiguous) and the urban melodramas of Alejandro Galindo (which demonize modernization by turning it into a metaphor of Mexico's proximity to and relationship with the United States). *Los olvidados* comes closer to being a draft, a sketch, or an essay on Mexico City in the face of modernization. Consequently, *Los olvidados* can be taken as truly representative of this moment of crisis that is also a juncture of definition. If the negotiation of Mexico's "hybrid" cultural configuration in the revolutionary period is a marker of its national identification, as García Canclini points out, then *Los olvidados* can be seen as the quintessential "Mexican" movie of the late classical period.⁴⁸

The only other films that in any way resemble the analysis of Mexican society proposed by *Los olvidados* are those in the *cabaretera* subgenre of Mexican melodrama of the late 1940s and 1950s—movies like Julio Bracho's *Distinto Amanecer* (1943), and Alberto Gout's *Aventurera* (1949) and *Sensualidad* (1950). *Los olvidados* evidently struck a cord in the classical cinema establishment, very much like the lurid *cabaretera* films initially did.

The original Mexican detractors of *Los olvidados* missed the key points of Buñuel's criticism. Distracted as they were by defending the "honor" of Mexico's institutions traditionally championed in national cinema ("God, nation, and home"), they were deeply wounded when the international festivals praised Buñuel's film. Like the European critics, they shifted their attention away from the film's primary target: "the crisis" of the turn of the decade.⁴⁹

A few personalities involved in Mexican art, culture, and politics congratulated Buñuel on the film immediately upon its initial run in Mexico

City. Among them were Octavio Paz and the politically active muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros.⁵⁰ But most other celebrities and critics were originally negative, based on their belief that *Los olvidados* portrayed a viciously negative, false, and "dirty" image of Mexico. Even the film's producer, Oscar Dancigers, was afraid the film was too dangerous, that there was "too much filth" in it, not enough recognized talent, and that it was too much of a risk for his production company.⁵¹ Significantly, when *Los olvidados* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 1951, Octavio Paz wrote what is still considered one of the most beautiful reviews of the film.⁵² In it, Paz praised the film for "turning its back to the temptation of the impressive Mexican landscape" and referred to the film with direct references to *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. After acknowledging the film's debt to Spanish cultural and literary history, he wrote:

And the children, their mythology, their passive rebelliousness, their suicidal loyalty, their thundering sweetness full of exquisite ferocity, their torn affirmation of themselves in and for death, their endless search for communion—even through crime—are nothing, nor can they be anything but Mexican. . . . Buñuel uncovers in the dream of his heroes the archetypal images of the Mexican people: Coatlicue and sacrifice.⁵³

Paz's reference to Coatlicue is especially telling. She was the mythical Earth goddess of the Mexicas, and also the mother of Huitzilopochtli, one of the central deities of the ancient Mexicans, before the conquest. Paz here refers to the search for the mother in *Los olvidados* as "a Mexican obsession" and again makes a direct reference to *The Labyrinth of Solitude*: "The world of *Los olvidados* is populated by orphans in search of the 'others,' of their equals, [which is] the other face of the search for the mother. Or the acceptance of her definitive absence: knowing ourselves alone." These words echo those of Paz in the chapter on "The Pachuco and Other Extremes," where Paz writes, "The discovery of ourselves is manifest as the acknowledgment of ourselves alone."⁵⁴ Paz ultimately established the most direct and relevant connection between *Los olvidados* and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by referring to the film by using the exact words from his essays on La Malinche and the Pachuco. He acknowledged more than anyone at the time the distinctly Mexican quality of the film. Solitude, violence, and being orphaned are definitive qualities of Mexicanness in Paz's imaginary, just as they are the defining qualities of the children of *Los olvidados*.

Although initial reactions to *Los olvidados* within Mexican critical circles were not just negative but almost visceral, it is significant that when it was released abroad the film encouraged comparisons (or rather, contrasts) with



FIGURE 5. Pedro's mother (Estela Inda) and Jaibo (Roberto Cobo) consummate the Oedipal narrative in *Los olvidados*. "The search for the mother," wrote Octavio Paz, is "a Mexican obsession." Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

the classical style of Mexican cinema. Interestingly, the critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* (particularly André Bazin) were the ones who originally shifted critical attention specifically away from Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa and toward Luis Buñuel in 1951, after the French release of *Los olvidados* and *Subida al cielo*.

Bazin, arguably the period's most influential film critic and a co-founder of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, expressed this change in the focus of attention from classical Mexican cinema to Buñuel's Mexican movies on the occasion of the French release of *Subida al cielo*:

Juries seem to mistake cinema for photography. There was admittedly something more than beautiful photography in *María Candelaria* and even in *La Perla* (1945). But it is easy to see, year in and year out, that physical formalism and nationalist rhetoric have replaced realism and authentic poetry. With the exotic surprises gone, and [Gabriel] Figueroa's cinematographic feats reduced to fragments of technical bravura, Mexican cinema found itself crossed-off the critics' map. . . . It is entirely thanks to Luis Buñuel that we are talking about Mexican films again.⁵⁵

Despite Bazin's hyperbolic style and judgmental claims, he often influenced the balance of criticism. Even Luis Buñuel, as apathetic as he was to the critics (and increasingly to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, later in the 1960s), sometimes listened and paid attention to Bazin's views about his films. In his book *André Bazin*, Dudley Andrew comments on the unlikely friendship that developed between the artist and the critic: "Buñuel, notorious for his cynicism and anger, found in Bazin a kind of depth and honesty of vision which set him aside from all other critics. Even before they had met, Buñuel had 'found in Bazin's essays truths about my films I had never thought of.'" Andrew went on, "Later, Buñuel would describe his projects to Bazin before final scripting."⁵⁶ According to Andrew, Bazin and Buñuel not only respected each other but Bazin's criticism may have even influenced Buñuel's later style in the 1950s, and consequently Bazin rediscovered Mexican cinema through Buñuel's lens.

What is most important about Bazin's criticism of Buñuel's Mexican films is that, as interested as Bazin was in technical and visual matters, he took up Buñuel over Fernández-Figueroa because neither he nor *Cahiers du Cinéma* was interested any longer in "the nationalist rhetoric" of Mexican cinema. Even though *Cahiers du Cinéma's* critics often praised the technical proficiency and artistic beauty of the Fernández-Figueroa movies exported to the European film festivals, and especially to Cannes, Bazin was no longer impressed with that "physical formalism." Instead, he detected that it was stalled, decadent, and in a creative decline. Classical Mexican cinema was no longer evolving, thought Bazin, and Buñuel appeared to him to dictate the future direction of Mexican cinema. It is most significant to note that for Bazin at *Cahiers* it was evident, visible, that Mexican cinema was going through a period of crisis, and that it needed some form of revision.

Buñuel's films, as demonstrated by André Bazin's prophetic review in *L'Observateur* in August 1952, replaced Mexican classical cinema both at the film festivals and in the critical circuits. In other words, *Los olvidados* exemplifies and represents a clear moment of transition, or crisis, in what constituted Mexican classical cinema. The classical period ended in 1950, in the eyes of festival juries and critics, and Mexican cinema became Luis Buñuel.

As Buñuel occupied the center of critical attention, his films began receiving the international festival awards previously presented to the predictable "nationalist" films of Emilio Fernández, Gabriel Figueroa, and their heirs.⁵⁷ Bazin's championing of Buñuel anticipates the clear transition of Mexican cinema's classic aesthetic to that of the New Cinema of the 1960s, which was more formally experimental and more critical of Mexican issues

than classical cinema had been. As we shall see in the following chapter, after the impact of *Los olvidados* had secured his reputation Buñuel went through an experimental period with (and within) the styles, genres, and topics of classical Mexican cinema. Buñuel became one of the figures that helped to break the ground for the more open revision and experimentation with styles and genres that occurred in Mexican cinema in the 1960s.

The aesthetic crisis of Mexican cinema was closely related and rooted in the general political, economic, and cultural crisis of Mexico that was first articulated clearly by Daniel Cosío Villegas in his 1947 essay. Luis Buñuel's incorporation into the Mexican cinema industry at a time of crisis did not necessarily imply his "conversion" to the system of symbols and representations that classical cinema immortalized and that was best exemplified by *María Candelaria* and *Flor silvestre* (the "anti-modernist utopia" of classical cinema). Nevertheless, in spite of its critical aura, the resistance to the themes and visual conventions of classical cinema present in *Los olvidados* became a sign of the film's correspondence with the transitional juncture of the revolutionary crisis and modernization. The film thus initiated Buñuel's integration into the debates on Mexican politics and culture in the postrevolutionary period and thus corresponded with the processes of cultural negotiation about which Néstor García Canclini writes in *Hybrid Cultures*.

Interestingly, like García Canclini, although writing in a different context and nearly forty years apart, André Bazin, who did not know the first thing about Mexico but who did know about the cinema, also recognized the failure of Mexican cinema's "physical formalism and nationalist rhetoric [as they] replace[d] [the] realism and authentic poetry"⁵⁸ represented in the canonical works of Emilio Fernández. Thus, "the crisis" of Mexico may have had its original cinematic representation in the decaying aesthetics of the films of the 1940s and its transitional vision toward the New Cinema in Buñuel's *Los olvidados*.

Buñuel's arrival in Mexico in the "late Golden Age" coincided with the decline of the romantic aesthetic of Emilio Fernández and the rise of the psychoanalytic pessimism of Octavio Paz. But that juncture, that "crisis of nationalism" at the turn of the decade of the 1950s also helps us to contextualize and validate Luis Buñuel's inquiry into the idea of Mexico that was invented, codified, hierarchized, and divulged by the Revolution. For decades that image was conceived in the plastic arts and painting (as in the work of the muralists), in literature and philosophy (as in José Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* and Alfonso Reyes's *Última Tule*), and, of course, in national cinema.

Los olvidados, to some extent, represents the crisis of revolutionary



FIGURE 6. Pedro (Alfonso Mejía) is inevitably lost in the labyrinth of violence and solitude in *Los olvidados*. Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

rhetoric in Mexican cinema and “the cultural nation”⁵⁹ at the juncture of the decline of the cinema’s Golden Age, as well as an analogous comment on the discussions about “the crisis” of the Revolution of the turn of the decade. It also serves as a revisionist approach to the superficiality and weaknesses (the “masks,” as Octavio Paz would call them) of Mexican revolutionary mythology and of “the myth of the revolution” as exemplified by the work of “the fourth muralist,” as Emilio Fernández is said to have once called himself.⁶⁰

The 1950s constitute the climactic moment of intellectual activity of the so-called “philosophy of Mexicanness” (*filosofía de lo mexicano*) in Mexico, a movement which recruited the musings of many an important figure in the arts, the letters, and the academy. From the works of José Vasconcelos in the 1920s to those of Leopoldo Zea in the 1930s, Alfonso Reyes in the 1940s, and ending with Paz in the 1950s, Mexican intellectuals had been “philosophizing” about the cultural, historical, and even spiritual characteristics that defined the nation’s identity. Daniel Cosío Villegas’s famous essay on “the crisis of Mexico” helped frame historically what Octavio Paz achieved culturally. In the manner of *The Wretched of the Earth*, *The Labyrinth of*

Solitude was an attempt at understanding the troubled postcolonial mind, and Paz’s conclusions were a sign of the psychological and spiritual side of the failure of the Revolution. With *Los olvidados*, as Octavio Paz himself acknowledged in his writings, Luis Buñuel contributed to or became part of that debate. His groundbreaking film is a visual and poetic rendition of Mexico that was originally misunderstood as something foreign, or anti-Mexican, but that proved to be in close communication with the contemporary stream of Mexican intellectual activity.