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DEPARTMENT
OF POLITICAL
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SCIENCES

Post-Nationalism:
Postage Stamps as Carriers of National Imaginaries

Henio Pablo Luis Hoyo Prohuber

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences
of the European University Institute

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Examining Board

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Prof. Mauricio Tenorio, University of Chicago (Co-supervisor)
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Abstract

Despite their immense potential as information sources, postage stamps have been virtually ignored in academic research. Therefore, in this thesis I study how official national imaginaries have been promoted through iconographic and written messages in postage stamps; how such messages are linked to the ideology, interests and goals of political elites; and how competing elites and groups with relative power within the state try to influence such official ideas about the nation.

The thesis is divided in three sections. The first presents a theoretical framework for the study of national imaginaries. It also presents the properties of stamps that made them ideal 'carriers' of ideological propaganda. The second section analyses a random sample of 1,000 stamps by means of a typology of ideological messages. It was found that the vast majority of stamps are carrying messages related to the features, composition, and historical development of the nation that issued the stamp. Then, these 'nationalist' stamps were further studied by means of a second typology, in order to differentiate the particular aspects of the nation that were promoted in each stamp.

The third section analyses the political goals and processes behind nationalist messages in stamps. For that, both the United Kingdom during 1950-1970 and post-revolutionary Mexico were studied using process-tracing methodology. It was found that, while the most important actors are still the ruling elites, other actors such as competing elites, local authorities, pressure groups or social organizations will also try to influence the messages about the nation in stamps. A relevant finding is that intermediate structures, such as middle-range public officers in postal institutions, can have a key role not only in the promotion, but also in the shaping of official national imaginaries.

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symbols of national aspirations,
and icons of what a country esteems as important and noteworthy.

Fred Baumann

[In one occasion,] the Administrator rejected a proposed [stamp] design showing a government patron on the march, the carriers escorted by a constable of the Royal Papua and New Guinea Constabulary carrying a .303 rifle. Implications that could be drawn from the design – the forced labour of Papua New Guineans under the menace of an armed guard – made it politically unsuitable…

It was also an unwritten and unspoken rule to avoid designs depicting bare-breasted Papua New Guinean women, although to this day such a mode of dress is usual in many regions.

(Sinclair 1984, 174)

Acknowledgements

When people learn about my PhD research, one of the first questions consistently asked is: how on earth did you find this topic? The truth is, the first ideas about studying ideological messages in postage stamps came to me during my early B.A. studies at El Colegio de México, Mexico City, and continued intermittently during my M.A. in Nationalism Studies in Budapest, Hungary. Yet, I must also admit that during all those years, this was nothing but a relaxing, enjoyable academic activity alongside my main work, devoted to quite different topics within nationalism studies.

It was only during my studies at the European University Institute, that I came to realize the real potential and academic relevance of this topic in the study of nationalism and ideological propaganda. It was my supervisor, Prof. Rainer Bauböck, who encouraged me to take it on as full-time research. I am very grateful for that, as well as for his constant support both in this research and in my academic career in general. I am also grateful for the comments and time of my co-supervisor, Prof. Mauricio Tenorio, as well as those of the members of the panel, Profs. Pavel Kolář and Stephan Leibfried.

At the beginning, this research seemed to be quite straightforward, even relaxing, when compared to more 'standard' research in Political Science. Yet as it advanced, I found myself flooded and confused with a number of sources of all kinds, from academic texts, to philatelic materials and leaflets, to government manuals and archival materials. Then, when I was thinking I had a clear picture of the subject matter, the stimulating interviews with postal authority officers, experts, and stamp designers for my case-studies made me go back and review all my arguments. It was then when, with surprise, I found that my research could go beyond a very specific area, and have interesting implications for the more general literature in political science – for instance, in regards to the role of the actors and processes involved in the creation and particularly, in the diffusion of national imaginaries.

Most of this research was made in Florence, mainly in the wonderful setting of the EUI Library. Its staff deserves a special mention: they came to great lengths to fulfil my numerous requests of acquisitions and interlibrary loans of the most peculiar materials, such as massive philatelic catalogues, old typewritten thesis, or articles printed in local publications from places as far away as the Philippines. Yet, without such materials, this research just could not have been feasible.

The evenings spent by reading at the Badia Fiesolana or in the Boboli Gardens, with an Italian coffee in hand and the spectacular sight of the city and the Duomo down below, were certainly an endless source for inspiration. Yet my research took me to other venues as well. For the UK case, the staff and materials at the British Postal Museum and Archive in London were of immense value, easily overcoming the lack of interviews. I am particularly indebted to Mrs Clare George for leading me to the most vital sources, and helping me in any way she could. Then, with the support of public officers, specialists and stamp designers (many of them wishing to remain anonymous) at the magnificent Postal Palace in Mexico, housing both the central offices of the Mexican Postal Service and its Postal Library, was invaluable to understanding the processes, actors and considerations implied in stamp design and topic selection, and in assisting me in finding rare monographs and key internal documents. Then, the staff at the Archiv für Philatelie, of the Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation in Bonn, the Bundesministerium der Finanzen in Berlin, and the Philatelistische Bibliothek at the Münchner Stadtbibliothek, were very kind in giving me interviews and providing me information regarding stamps from Germany and elsewhere. Finally, the Universal Postal Union library headquarters in Bern, Switzerland was a useful source of materials on postal traffic as well as on international postal congresses, organizations and regulations.

It became common for me, when presenting my research, to witness the curiosity among my audience about first; why a political scientist would be interested in the study of postage stamps (especially since I am *not* a philatelist!) and second, why I was so interested in the processes of stamp design, discussion and production, rather than in stamps *per se*. I must also acknowledge that I made some real philatelists open their eyes in disbelief and outrage, when I mentioned that, in my perspective, it was irrelevant if stamps were damaged, faded, or even broken; or when I dared to mention that a simple colour reproduction of a stamp would have the same value as the original, painstakingly cared for postage stamp. Despite such offenses, they still were willing to help me.

Yet the research was not always as pleasant as it appears. Many friends were there when I needed them the most. For their help in difficult moments and sections of the thesis, I am greatly indebted to Laurie Beaudonet, Narayani Lasala, Roxana Branulescu and Ursa Mavric. Guadalupe Norma kindly provided me with philatelic 'essays' she produced, while Ciaran Burke helped me by correcting my poor English. Also, in several occasions I found stamps with cryptic messages in languages or alphabets that I was completely unfamiliar with. I am very grateful to Dyliara Suleimanova, Efe Baysal, Karla Koutkova, Marta Tawil, Tamara Kafkova and Valentina

CHAPTER I:

WHY, AND HOW, SHOULD WE LOOK AT STAMPS?

When asked about postage stamps, most people will recall two images: firstly, the traditional, paper-mail system with its envelopes, letters and postmen; secondly the collector or philatelist, looking attentively to a small stamp through large magnifying glasses. In fact, both ideas are quite accurate, and they both also carry a "smell of the past": e-mail and social media are now the standard means for written communication for both private and public matters. If someone finds a letter in his/her (physical) mailbox today, most probably it will be a bill or some commercial propaganda in a pre-paid envelope with no stamps attached, or bearing the mark of an automatic postage machine. Stamps now have an aureole of both antiquity and curiosity, but not one of a product of everyday, generalized use.

However, this should not make us forget that right before our generation, stamps were an extremely common, even pervasive object of modernity. A number of postal authorities have issued stamps both in large quantities and for extended periods of time; they have been sold and used almost everywhere; and together with the envelopes they were glued to, they reached almost every corner of the world. Stamps constituted a standard part of the everyday life of any individual or family; as frequently happens with such common objects, they were largely ignored.

Among the many topics covered in nationalism studies, two have been extremely important. The first is the study of nations not as "objectively defined" groups, but as *ideal* ones, based in a set of notions of what is (or should be) a nation, and which its core features are. Such studies, of course, are not thinking of nations just as loose collections of ideas. They also inquire about the instruments and conditions that allow those notions to be promoted and shared. In brief: this first topic is about how an idea of the nation led to the 'forging' of a real one.

Of course, the work by B. Anderson has become irreplaceable on this matter. His argument about the nation as being first and foremost an *imagined community*, and imagined as inherently limited and sovereign, has become one of the most influential paradigms when analysing the historical and political development of nations and nationalisms (see Anderson 2006 [1983]).(see Anderson 2006 [1983]). Also classic are his examples of censuses, maps and museums as both tools and products of this process of national imagination.

The second topic has been as fructiferous: how the national community (whether "real" or imagined) is signified, shaped and reproduced through the use of unifying symbols and narratives. This is at the core of one of the most important schools of nationalism studies: the ethnosymbolist one, with A. D. Smith as its main reference point (see Smith 1987, 1991, 1996; 1999b, for instance) as well as G. Elgenius' works on flags, symbols and national celebrations (Elgenius 2007, 2011a, 2011b). Furthermore, M. Billig (1995) made a convincing argument for taking into account not only the most 'visible', outspoken or radical expression of nationalism, but also the most pervasive: national symbols and references are everywhere, even in the most unsuspicious objects and situations, therefore becoming so usual ("banal") that they pass largely unnoticed by the common citizen –and yet, they still function as silent, everyday reminders of the existence, prevalence and superiority of the nation he/she belongs to.

Therefore, how can we relate postage stamps to nationalism? I will argue in this dissertation that postage stamps have been not just postal devices or objects of philatelic interest, but carriers of political and ideological messages. On the one hand, postage stamps are complex ichnographic pieces issued by governmental agencies. It is worth asking ourselves if such pieces are not, in fact, designed with certain meanings. On the other hand, by analysing the processes, actors and guidelines involved in stamp design and issuing, we can learn how these meanings were created, discussed and embedded, and how they relate to the ideological and political developments of the issuing country. In this way, the present research is not just about stamps *per se*, but about using stamps as sources in a study of *official national imaginaries:* a series of notions and doctrines about the nation, its features, historical development and core identity, which are promoted by states and political elites.

Puzzles

Today, postage stamps can be considered as 'old' but, in a wider perspective, they are relatively new objects, intrinsically related to four features of the modern world, namely: (a) the increase of literacy, (b) the expansion and modernization of communications and transport systems; c) the massive migrations at both internal and international level; and d) the rise of central/national bureaucratic administrations. In this sense, stamps are modern products, directly linked to the Industrial revolution and the expansion of capitalism (Altman 1991; Reid 1984; also Hobsbawm 1973; 1975).

Stamps were introduced as part of an 1837 extensive reform of the British postal system, proposed by Sir Roland Hill in order to increase efficiency and to discourage fraud in the postal services. In the new scheme, the sender would pay the postal fare by purchasing a small stamp and then gluing it to the envelope (Daunton 1985; Muir 1990).

This is a key fact: stamps were designed to be nothing but simple fee-payment devices for postal services. As such, they should be quite a minor issue within the postal service, especially when compared with the actual difficulties involved in receiving, transporting and delivering mail across increasingly large distances. Furthermore, and again from a purely administrative point of view, the physical and visual aspect of stamps should be a matter of (even) less concern as, in order to fulfil their function, stamps would only need to bear the amount paid and the identification of the postal authority. No other information or element is needed; in fact, a simple black-and-white stamp resembling a seal should suffice to pay and send a letter (McQueen 1988, 81). Of course, some security measures could be introduced, like graphic patterns aiming to render counterfeiting difficult. Even so, stamps could still be quite simple.

However, everyday experience makes it pretty evident that stamps are far more complex than that. As a matter of fact, "minimalist" stamps (those bearing only the face value and the issuing authority) are very difficult to find. Independently of the issuing country, almost all postage stamps boast rich, appealing and colourful designs, which can include several symbols, complex depictions and in many cases, written messages as well. What is more, stamps are devoted to topics such as flora and fauna, historical events, connoted persons or geographical places – which in most cases, are not related at all to the postal service in any discernible way. It is not uncommon to find stamps so aesthetically rich that they resemble true artworks in miniature. This is not a coincidence: stamps are, indeed, created by especially hired artists and designers. All this dedication seems odd (to say the least) for a piece of paper with, arguably, the same role as an invoice. Therefore a first puzzle is: *If stamps are just devices for the payment of a postal service, why are they so aesthetically rich?*

This leads to a second puzzle. Evidently, someone had to take decisions about the iconographic elements and messages inserted in stamps. The fact is, virtually each sovereign entity of the world had specific governmental agencies in charge of stamps, devoting quite important material and human resources to the matter. Some of these agencies just contracted out and oversaw the work of external suppliers, but others designed stamps by themselves, and some others even monopolized the physical production of stamps (Dobson 2002, 2005). In most cases,

these governmental agencies still exist today, even in times when paper mail (and consequently stamp use) is arguably in sharp decline.

This type of close control by a governmental agency over a product can only be seen in items with fundamental political significance, such as national currency and passports. In fact, even today one of the very first actions of any new sovereign entity (or one claiming to be so) is to issue their own passports and/or IDs, banknotes, and stamps. The justification for the first two is clear, as they will help to define the membership in the nation and set the economic system of it, respectively. But why should postage stamps, being merely small devices for the payment of a very specific service (postage), receive the same attention? *Why, all around the globe, do governments maintain agencies specifically devoted to designing stamps, and consider them as objects of high political relevance?*

These puzzles cannot be explained by just looking at stamps as administrative or postal devices. We must look for other functions that explain both their iconographic richness and political importance. What else is a stamp, besides a fee-paying device for postal services? What other functions could account for both its visual features and their relevance for governments? Of course, the goal of profiting from philatelic collectors is one explanation but, in my opinion, only a partial one.

Stamps themselves offer some hints to answer these questions. The "extra" elements in any stamp –that is, those apart from the face value and the issuing authority– are almost always meaningful: they try to communicate something to the user, by means of images, symbols and written messages. Furthermore, many such messages relate to topics, characteristics or history of the nation that issued the stamp. Thus a promising way to answer these puzzles is to analyse stamps not as simple fee-paying devices to send written messages, but as messages *in themselves:* that is, to see stamps as carriers of political and ideological contents.

Goals, research question and hypotheses

My aim in this research is not limited to performing a study on the iconographic or written messages carried by postage stamps. This is necessary to prove, for instance, that stamps are able to "narrate" nationalist stories, or even to promote straightforward propaganda. In fact, this has already been achieved in some cases, with very interesting results, as we shall see soon.

However, a study of this kind would not fully explain the core reasons for stamps being used for such role. Why stamps precisely? Moreover, a purely semiotic research would not prove that messages in stamps are the outcome of a conscious effort and not just, for instance, the

autonomous work of an inspired artist. In sum, the analysis of stamp images can prove they are carrying messages, but not why those particular messages were carried.

In sum, my goal is to explain ideological messages in postage stamps as products of a process of creation and diffusion of national imaginaries. Therefore, my research question is: ***How, and why, have postage stamps been used to promote a specific doctrine about the social, territorial, political and historical features of the issuing nations?***

To answer this question, I must focus on both stamps and national imaginaries. This implies a twofold task: on the one hand, to explain how and why stamps have been used to spread ideological messages; on the other, to study the processes, actors and goals involved in sending such messages through stamps. Accordingly, my hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1) *Besides their administrative and postal role, postage stamps work as "carriers" of ideological messages on behalf of the issuing nation.*

h1a. *In most cases, stamps are carriers of an official national imaginary, promoting a particular account of the history, features, composition and development of the issuing nation.*

Hypothesis 2) *The creation of such an official national imaginary is directly related to the political and nation-building processes endured by the state. Therefore,*

h2a. *The messages on postage stamps will promote the ideology, goals and actions related to the specific nation-building doctrine pursued by the ruling political elites,*

h2b. *The messages on stamps will change according to the hierarchical, structural or ideological transformations of those ruling elites,*

h2c. *Besides the ruling elites, other groups and institutions with relative power within the state will try to influence the messages about the nation that are presented in postage stamps.*

Methodological considerations

Different methodologies could be used in this study. The course of action here depends mostly on the research approach; in this sense, my options are first, to focus on the messages carried by postage stamps; second, on the historical and political processes leading to these messages; and third, a workable combination of both.

<u>Methodological option one: a focus on messages in stamps</u>
In this case, two methodological options are obvious: discourse analysis on the one hand, semiotic analysis on the other. Certainly, discourse analysis methodology has been extremely useful for studying political movements (see for instance Van Dijk 1997b) and is certainly applicable to nationalist studies. However, to take a formalistic approach and focus on discourse only, would not necessarily guarantee a deep understanding of the characteristics, goals and strategies of the political actors or institutions involved in the creation and diffusion of national imaginaries.

Both Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the so-called functionalist approaches have tried to overcome such limits, by analysing discourses as social practices (De Cillia et al. 1999; Van Dijk 2008; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Jacobsen 2007). In CDA, discourses are understood in a broad way –as communications– and studied in terms of their dialectical relation with the institutional, political and social framework in which they are taking place (Van Dijk 2008). In this sense, CDA incorporates into the analysis the relations of power and the institutional setting that exists in any society. When applied to nationalism studies, this methodology could be very fruitful for determining how the nation is constructed and reframed through discursive practices (see for instance De Cillia et al. 1999).

A further development has been discourse semiotics, where, in the same way as words, visual representations are seen as directly influenced by the existing cultural and historical circumstances, and able to be used by individuals or groups according to their beliefs, interests and goals (Kress et al. 1997). This extends CDA methodology to messages different from those written and spoken.

This would certainly allow us to detect whether stamps have nationalist content or not, helping me to test my first hypothesis, for instance. It would provide us with a clear view of the audiences, levels of communication, strategies and even particular means used in the nationalist discourses, such as the use of "we" (De Cillia et al. 1999). Nevertheless, to answer my research question, I would still need to prove that such nationalist discourse is part of a coherent strategy

to reach some goals. That is: to focus exclusively on the "discursive construction of nationalism" will not tell us enough about the particular rationale of the involved actors, when engaging in such a process. Therefore, the methodology for my research should be much more focused on the actors and processes involved in the production and promotion of national imaginaries (see hypothesis 2 and sub-hypotheses).

Furthermore, my goal is to see stamps as products (as "carriers") more than as discourses *per se* (see hypothesis 1). Therefore, I only need to identify broad ideological contents in them, in order to propose a typology. For that, I do not need to embark upon such a sophisticated analysis as those proposed by CDA or semiotics. Furthermore, in this research I am actively trying to avoid the "specialist" point of view when studying stamp images. Instead, I am trying to take the view of the standard postal user: the average citizen that sees a stamp when sending and receiving a letter, putting some attention to it for a brief moment, identifying the most basic meanings of it, and then going back to her/his own business. That is: throughout the analysis, I am actively trying to take the place of a normal person looking at a 'banal' piece of ideology.

Methodological option two: focus on the politics of stamps

Any national imaginary involves a set of ideas about the nature and features of an inherently political community, that is, the nation. In this way, we can study how the core ideas about it are first created, then promoted through the discourse and activities of the political elites and governmental institutions. Such a top-down, general analysis has been taken by a number of scholars, with fruitful results,[1] and moves from the ideological core of nationalism (so to say: from the national imaginary itself) to its outcomes like nationalist movements or policies.

However, the inverse path can also be taken, especially when studying particular modes of promotion of nationalist ideas. For instance, we can first study the outcome of a policy, or a specific product of a process, as the point of departure of the analysis, trying to determine what it 'says' about the nation. Then we can trace its development through political actors and institutions, identifying not only the actors involved but also their goals and interests, as well as their negotiations and interrelations. In this way, we can understand in more detail the processes involved in the diffusion of national imaginaries through specific means, and what is more, *to account for more actors than just the political elites*. For this detailed analysis, process-tracing seems to be the most promising methodology (see Bennet 2008; Checkel 2005; Venesson in Della Porta and Keating 2008, 223-239).

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[1] For instance, the classic works by Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1983, 1992) Kedourie (1985) or Berlin (1979) follow the same path from the ideological genesis of the nation, to the particular expressions and policies of it.

Methodological election: mixed methods

It should be clear by now that my research demands the combination of both approaches and therefore, of more than one methodology. In order to test hypothesis 1 and sub-hypothesis h1a, I need to determine the main types of messages that stamps 'carry'. Therefore such an analysis must be as comprehensive as possible, in both the temporal and the spatial sense: it should include stamps from diverse periods and issuing states.

To study most or all stamps issued through postal history its simply an impossible task, because as Child (2005, 110) notes, no less than a quarter of a million different stamps have been issued around the world, by around six hundred different postal authorities. Therefore, I will rely on a sample, randomly extracted from the Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue (Scott Publishing 2010). It will initially comprise 1000 stamps, issued between 01 Jan 1909 and 31 Dec 2009. The 100-year period surely is enough for the analysis and in any case, it was only during the "short 20th century" that mail and stamps became truly universal, both in terms of worldwide geographical coverage and intensive use by common citizens. Then, these 1000 stamps will be subjected to a further selection, in order to find the most representative items for the analysis.[2]

It is important to note that the sample study and its typologies are undertaken for descriptive and analytical purposes, and not for inferential ones. Also, I must insist that stamps themselves are not the focus of the present research, but only useful sources for the study of diffusion of national imaginaries. The typologies and analysis made should be understood in that sense.

Therefore, the analysis of a stamp sample is made, first, to prove hypothesis (h1) and its sub-hypothesis h1a; second, to underpin further the value of postage stamps for academic research in ideological propaganda, and nationalism in particular. Then, the study of national imaginaries, as reflected on postage stamps issued by specific countries (chapters 6- 7) will be completed with an analysis of the actors and processes involved in the creation of these imaginaries, by means of process-tracing and comparative analysis. This will help me to test hypothesis (h2) and its sub-hypothesis. For the case studies I will rely not only on stamps themselves, but also on official documents (memos, organization manuals, etc.) and, when available, semi-structured interviews with public officers, specialists and artists involved in stamp design and issuing.

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[2] See "Types of stamps selected" in Ch. IV. After the selection, the total number of stamps analyzed was 691.

Research outline

A research as presented above will involve the following steps:

A. *Determining nature*: Explaining briefly the political rationale involved in using symbols and objects to convey ideological and particularly nationalist messages.

B. *Determining capacity*: Specifying the features of postage stamps that make them suitable to carry ideological messages, nationalist ones in particular.

C. *Determining factual use*: Offering convincing proofs that stamps are actually used as carriers of ideological messages.

D. *Determining agency and rationale*: Understanding which actors, institutions and procedures intervene in the design of stamps, particularly regarding the ideological and political implications of it; which are their goals; and how they are related to the production of official national imaginaries in specific moments of nation building.

The thesis follows this general pattern. It begins with the present introductory chapter, which outlines the goals, methodologies and conceptual framework of my research. The second chapter comprises a literature review on the creation of national imaginaries, and on the use of political/nationalist symbols. This will deal with Step A above.

The third chapter will deal with Step B above. It will include a brief historical introduction, the main regulations involved in postage stamp depictions –the ones set by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) for instance– and finally, the specific features of stamps enabling them to be carriers of national imaginaries.

Chapter Four will present a sample-based quantitative study of messages on stamps. This will allow the study of the different messages that stamps can carry, in order to determine how often nationalist messages are present vis-à-vis other types. Then, Chapter Five will introduce a typology of nationalist messages on stamps, explaining in detail the different categories, and then offering the results of its application to the stamp sample. Both chapters deal with Step C above.

The final chapters will include the process-tracing analysis for each of the selected cases, explaining in detail the production and diffusion of official national imaginaries in stamps. This deals with Step D above. Finally, some general conclusions will be offered.[3]

Selected cases and rationale

I followed the most-different systems logic when choosing my case studies. In this system, an observed outcome is studied for two or more cases, which should be as different as possible in all other aspects (see Della Porta and Keating 2008, 214-217). The heterogeneity of systemic factors allows the researcher to isolate the single causal explanation(s) that lead to the same outcome in such different situations (Przeworski and Teune 1970, 35).

In my case, it was essential to study and compare units with contrasting nation-building processes and socio-political environments; particularly regarding the existence, or non-existence, of competing nationalist narratives, particularly those of ethnic and/or regional minorities vs. the official "national" one; the overall political regime; the relative power of the regional or local governments vs. the central authorities, and the international environment. Therefore, I selected as contrasting cases the post-war UK and the post-revolutionary Mexico, stated as follows:

> **United Kingdom.** After the Second World War, and particularly from 1950 to 1970, the UK initiated a process of both economic reconstruction and socio-political transformation. In the internal realm, a revival of local allegiances challenged the traditionally English-centered idea of history and identity of the British Islands. Particularly by the end of the sixties, this was accompanied by gradual changes in the powers and relative autonomy of the constituent parts of the Kingdom *vis-à-vis* the central authorities in London. However, the Monarchy as an institution of limited political power but of undeniable influence and symbolic importance, was key in maintaining a sense of nationwide political unity. Finally, there were changes in the structure and composition of the metropolitan authorities as well, mostly due to intra-party crises, political scandals, and the arrival of new elites to power as a result of free parliamentarian elections.

> At the same time, the role of the UK in the world was changing rapidly. On the one hand, it faced being a diminishing international power, even to its most important colonial territories or in areas considered as traditional zones of influence (e.g. Suez Canal). Furthermore, an

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[3] Some arguments and findings of this research have been published already, e.g. in (Hoyo 2010a) and (Hoyo 2012). Preliminary results of my stamp sample and/or case analysis were also presented at diverse conferences.

influx of migrants coming from both the present and former colonies created resistances among many sector of the British society. Finally, supranational integration efforts in the Island's immediate vicinity (continental Europe) created a political dilemma among the British population and their elites, regarding the question of integration, or whether further isolation should be sought.

Mexico. After the 1910 Revolution, the new political elites embarked on a deep transformation of Mexican politics, economy and society, explicitly aiming for national unity. The post-revolutionary political regime was built around a unified and centralized party (PRI),[4] which would control the access to local, state and federal power structures over the following decades – despite Mexico being formally a multi-party presidential democracy with periodic elections. Furthermore, even though Mexico is nominally a federation, the very predominant political, economic, social and cultural position of Mexico City was nothing but strengthened after the Revolution. Finally, all through the 20th century, the diverse central governments promoted a nationalist doctrine based in the notion of *mestizaje:* the ethnic, cultural and historical mixing of Amerindian and Spanish populations. Such doctrine was a remarkable success in creating a unified Mexican national identity over very heterogeneous populations and territories.

Due its immediate vicinity, the United States has been determinant in the politics, diplomacy and the nationalist narratives of Mexico. Nevertheless, Mexico has never been more than a middle power of limited international activism, mostly focused in its immediate surroundings (e.g. Cuba, Central America) while the larger, American / Latin American regional integration processes have been very slow and mostly limited to economic cooperation and cultural affinity.

In this vein, the UK and Mexico cases are ideal subjects for a most-different system, as they contrast greatly in a set of conditions of key importance for the promotion of an official national imaginary:

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[4]PRI stands for *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Revolutionary Institutional Party). It was named as National Revolutionary Party upon its foundation, then as Party of the Mexican Revolution, before adopting its current name.

1) Political regime: a consolidated, multiparty parliamentarian democracy, with a powerless but symbolically important monarchy vs. a strong presidential republic, with a "guided democracy" or a "predominant party" system;

2) Relation between central and local powers: gradual regional empowerment vs. increasing centralization;

3) Ethnocultural revival: gradual revitalization of local or group identities vs. intense promotion of a unified, national culture;

4) Inter-ethnic and racial relations: tensions caused by resistance focused on 'non-white' populations vs. the promotion of a national identity arguably based in miscegenation;

5) International setting: diminishing imperial power in the context of regional integration processes vs. a historically weak country in the vicinity to a superpower, in a regional context of weak integration processes, if any.

Following the most-different case logic, if I am able to determine that stamps were used in such contrasting cases to (a) promote an official national imaginary linked to the political and nation-building processes endured by each nation, (b) responding mostly to the ideas promoted and the goals pursued by the ruling elites, while (c) also subjected to influences by external groups, then I will be able to confirm my hypothesis 2a and sub-hypothesis. Furthermore, the use of most-different design systems to test the hypothesis offers a further advantage, as these systems are particularly useful to reach generalisable conclusions (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 216). This research also aims for it, as it is explained below.

Relevance of the research

The present research will offer three relevant contributions to the literature on nationalism. The first and most specific one, is about the study of stamps as carriers of nationalist messages. Academic studies on this topic are very few in number, especially if we take into account the large number of potential case studies and comparisons. Then, even among those few studies, it is difficult to find one taking a comparative, political science approach. Therefore my research will fill a gap in the literature, which nowadays is dominated by single case or small-n studies based on semiotic, anthropological or historical approaches. Also, by offering typologies of

messages on stamps made from the point of view of political science (chapters III to V), my research will enable future comparative research on the same or interrelated topics.

The second contribution involves my two cases. Literature on nationalism and national identity for both post-war UK and post-revolutionary Mexico is quite extensive; yet (and mostly in the latter case) historical and/or anthropological studies are dominant. The specific field of nationalist messages in images has been the realm of Art History, which tends to focus in areas like the fine arts, popular cultural expressions; or in institutions like museums, while visual items that were massively produced and distributed (including, but not limited to stamps) have received far less attention. Even fewer studies are based in a Political Science analysis, e.g. looking at the concrete actors, processes, and rationale that lead to the creation of such official, massively produced visual products. Thus this research contributes to filling in these gaps in both cases, but particularly in the case of Mexico.

The third contribution, and probably the most relevant one, is that my research can lead to generalisable conclusions regarding the production and diffusion of national imaginaries, analysed as complex political processes, comprising several actors involved in overall nation-building processes. I hope I will be able to contribute to the literature on nationalism by showing that the creation of nationalist imaginaries, including of symbols and stories, is not straightforward at all – a fact that the contemporary literature on nationalist discourse and symbols, and especially that on "banal nationalism", fails to address in its full extent.

CHAPTER II:

THE DIFUSSION OF NATIONAL IMAGINARIES

Introduction: imagining peoples

In this section, I will develop the theoretical framework that will help me analyse messages in stamps. First, it will present the central concept used in my research (e.g. 'national imaginary') and how it relates to other common ones like 'national discourse'. I will then explain some of the defining elements and components of a national imaginary. This theoretical discussion will help me construct the typologies and analytical categories I will use for the analysis of the stamp sample. Finally, I will explain the types of means and devices that are used to promote a given national imaginary.

Social and national imaginaries

The basis of my notion of national imaginaries is the work by Taylor (2004). For him, a *social imaginary* entails the "ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations". Therefore, it is "that common understanding that make possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2004, 23, see also R. M. Smith 2003).

Of course, a social imaginary is intrinsically related to a particular moral or normative order. If successfully promoted among (and adopted by) a given community, it "can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention" (Taylor 2004, 29; conf. Billig 1995). It encompasses not only the communication patterns and messages among the members of a community, but also – and most importantly – the core ideological and normative ideas that justify the existence of such community.

Therefore, a social imaginary is inherently political: it refers not only to the shared beliefs that support a regime, but also to the social order that is constructed and maintained according to such beliefs.[5] Not surprisingly, an imaginary is a key factor for the constitution and preservation of socio-political orders (Taylor 2004; see also Beetham 1991).

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[5] For Taylor, three conceptions are central for the imaginary of modern societies: the one of free market; that of the separation of public and private spheres, and the notion of popular sovereignty (Taylor 2004).

A national imaginary can be a direct product of the policies and actions of a given political elite. After all, both political control and institutional resources are essential to spread, maintain and/or change a series of foundational ideas of a community, especially when such a community is as extended and heterogeneous as the nation. , cultural policies, official media and particularly, the control of basic school education can be as important as the control of police or armed forces (Gellner 1983; see also Hobsbawm 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Berger and Luckmann 1967).

However, it is also true that the promotion of a given national imaginary does not guarantee its acceptance among the population. The ideas promoted by such elites and institutions must be related to what the population experiences in real life or at least, be significant for the beliefs, expectations, and communal values of them (e.g. Smith 1991, 2008, 2009). In this sense, completely foreign ideas with no direct relation with the culture, traditions and expectations of the existing (purportedly 'national') community, will most probably face rejection from it. The eventual acceptance of such 'foreign' ideas by the majority of the population is a possibility in the long run, but not certain. In any case, it will demand an extensive and sustained effort by the elites – which also face the risk of unwillingly promoting the creation of counter-elites that will take the defence of the 'true self' of the nation as their political banner.

In this sense, political elites do not monopolize the creation of national imaginaries: they operate in a socio-political medium that set practical and ideological limits on them regarding what an official national imaginary can be; what parts of it will be appealing for the population or not, and what ideas and actions will legitimize their rule or create challenges to it (Beetham 1991). Having said that, it is still true that the creation and particularly, the promotion of national imaginaries are heavily mediated processes, shaped by the goals and interests of particular elites, which try to select those features and events from the social, political and cultural environment, that will help them to advance their own goals and agenda. The 'product' (e.g. the official national imaginary) will still have to be implemented through state institutions and policies, therefore adding a further level of mediation. In this way, both the creation and production of official national imaginaries are not archetypically monolithic top-down processes, but political elites are still the dominant actors in it.

Imaginaries or discourses?

I prefer to use the term "national imaginary" instead of other closely related ones, such as "national discourse". This choice is made in order to avoid the conceptual confusion that we can find in this respect in the literature of nationalism. For instance, "discourse" has been used to indicate a very precise communication, made by a particular actor at a given moment – such as a speech made during a national commemoration, or in a parliamentary session. However, when understood in such a specific way, a single conversation, an interview, or a piece by an editorialist could also be considered to be cases of "discourse" (see i.e. Van Dijk 1997a).

Yet, by 'discourse,' we can also refer to a general pattern of communication shared by those belonging to a particular group, and/or engaged in a particular activity, as is the case when we speak of "academic", "political" or "international" discourses (Van Dijk 1997a; Jacobsen 2007). Finally, "discourse" has been widely used to refer not only to the communication activity and its codes (that is, to *words*) but also to the *ideas* that shape such communication and codes, or those that the actor involved is promoting, discussing or criticizing. This is the case when we speak of "socialist", "neoliberal" or "nationalist" discourses while, in fact, we are referring to the abstractions behind the discourses (Van Dijk 1997a). This last use would be the closest one to that of "imaginary".

However, "discourse" also tends to be associated with two types of messages: spoken and written (Van Dijk 1997b). This can be true if we take a fairly limited definition of this term, for instance when referring to party manifestos and leaders' speeches. However, when by 'discourse,' we are referring to ideological constructions, then we must acknowledge that such constructions can be promoted by means of messages of very different kinds –iconographic ones, for example.

What is a national imaginary?

I argue that nationalism can be studied as a particular form of social imaginary. According to a very widely held but debatable view, nationalisms can be classified on a continuum between two radically different versions: on the one side, those based on the innate moral superiority of the national community over its members (see Alter 1989; Berlin 1979; Kedourie 1985); on the other side, those linked to liberal conceptions (see for instance Acton 1907; Mill 1972 [1871]; Tamir 1993). A number of discussions and studies have been undertaken in this regard, but they

are not really relevant for this research.[6] Instead, I will start my analysis following Anderson's observation (2006 [1983]) that, regardless of its nature, the nation is always an imagined community, perceived as naturally bounded and sovereign.

Therefore, I will define national imaginary as *the system of ideas and beliefs that allows the internal identification, the constitutive identity and the external differentiation of the nation as a single group.* It allows the <u>internal identification</u> because it defines the shared, core features that any person (or object) must have to be considered part of the nation. It permits its <u>constitutive identity</u> by defining the core historical, social and institutional elements thereof. It allows for <u>external differentiation</u> of such a group and its members, by sustaining the claims regarding its essential difference *vis-à-vis* other nations of the world.[7]

If this is true, then for any particular nation we should be able to identify which specific ideas and beliefs account for its internal identification, constitutive identity and external differentiation (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]; R. M. Smith 2003; Taylor 2004). I will call these the "defining elements of the nation": human specificity, common genesis, and collective rights.

<u>Defining elements of the nation</u>
First and foremost, the <u>human specificity</u> of the nation is the basis on which the claims for its uniqueness are made: that is, of being qualitatively different from all other nations of the world ('bounded', in Anderson's terms - see 2006 [1983]). The particular attributes of such a human group are essential parts of any national imaginary, and relevant for all its three functions (internal identification, constitutive identity, and external differentiation). Such attributes can include, but are not limited to a given ethnic group, a set of traditions, the cultural and artistic expressions, a language and even a religion (see for instance Anderson 2006 [1983]; Hobsbawm 1992; Hroch 1985; Smith 1987, 2008).

It is important to note that, being part of an imaginary (that is, an *abstraction*) it is not necessary for such attributes to be objectively 'real'. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult to find any imaginary that accurately represents the demographic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, historical etc. realities of the nation it claims to represent. However, the most important factor of these elements is not their objective existence, but their social functions and acceptance: they are

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[6] For the authors that first argued towards such division, generally framed as "civic/western/liberal" vs. "ethnic/eastern/illiberal" versions, see (Kohn 1961; Meinecke 1970; Plamenatz 1973) . For just some of the subsequent debates on this point, see (Brown 1999; Brubaker 1998; Kuzio 2002; Yack 1999)

[7] Of course, this definition is based on previous notions developed by a number of scholars on nations, nationalisms and related fields. See for instance (Anderson 2006 [1983]; Bhabha 1990; Beissinger 2002; Berlin 1979; Billig 1995; Breuilly 1993; Brubaker 1996, 2004; Coakley 2012; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1983, 1992; Hroch 1985; Kedourie 1985; Kohn 1961; Schöpflin 1997; Smith 1987, 1991, 2009) among many others.

seen as defining and differentiating the nation (as 'markers' of it) and one treated as real, objective, and present.

Second, as a human community, the nation certainly needs a genesis. It is important to note that such genesis includes not only narratives about a foundational moment and a collective past, but also those ideas of a common present and a shared future: it is not just about a "history", but also about a "destiny" of the nation (see e.g. Coakley 2004; Smith 2009, 62-63). In this way, the national genesis permits one to incorporate the dead, the living and the unborn in a single, transcendental community (Talmon 1970, 1985). The strong parallelism between nationalist and religious ideas has been pointed out repeatedly (e.g. Anderson 2006 [1983]; O'Brien 1988; Smith 1999a; A. D. Smith 2003; also Voegelin 1989).

Common topics of the national genesis are, of course, foundational moments and myths (Hosking and Schöpflin 1997; Smith 1999b) but also key dates for the common history (independences, battles, peace agreements…) as well as its past figures: the founders and heroes of the nation. It should not be surprising then that to "stage the past" (Bucur and Wingfield 2001) has been a key activity of any nation-state. The fact that such narratives and "staging" can be full of partial interpretations of the past, myths, oblivions, and even plain inventions, (Hobsbawm 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; see also Renan 1996 [1882]) does not preclude it from being accepted as a source of legitimacy, identity and specificity for the nation – a community that, arguably, has existed well before and will transcend all its current members.

Third, the idea of a nation as a bounded, differentiated human community with a common genesis and destiny leads to the last element: such a nation is considered as a community naturally entitled to collective rights, not only cultural, but also territorial and political in nature. Regarding the former, the national imaginary of a nation is always bound to a land (Herb 1999; Hroch 1993; Knight 1982) even if sometimes it is rather imprecise, or even mythical (cf. Smith 1999a). In any case, such territory is considered as the "national" land, which belongs to the collective body and to it only. Certainly, it can be understood very formally, as a territory limited by borders. However, it can also be considered in a more geographic/naturalist sense: as a space containing not only populations, but also the objects and natural features that are also seen as 'part' of the nation.

Therefore, common topics in the national imaginary regarding the territory of the nation are its geographical features, particularly the "named" ones (see for instance Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009) or those that clearly identify the land in question: rivers, mountains, valleys, etcetera (see Cusack 2001, 2010; Lekan 2004; Nogué and Vicente 2004). In legal, but also (and

specially) in symbolical terms, these natural features are 'appropriated' by the nation – even if most of them probably predate not only the nation in question, but any human presence at all. The same applies to other natural resources and features like local flora and fauna: they are presented as 'belonging' to the nation, even representing it – despite the logical challenges implicit in such argumentation. Finally, man-made attributes are also commonly mentioned as "national", including features as technical as roads and bridges, as extensive as cities, or as small as single streets or monuments (Azaryahu 2009; Geisler 2005).

On the other hand, any nation is seen as naturally entitled to self-determine its internal organization. In practical terms, this implies the creation of institutions and norms of specific application to such groups, which can vary from informal authorities of limited power, to a degree of local autonomy, a formal federal arrangement or in some cases, full independence (see Canovan 1998; Canovan 2005; alsoYack 2001). However, in terms of collective imaginary, the rights of the nation to autonomously determine its internal organization are unquestionable and a natural consequence or the inherently unique, special character of the national community.

These three main defining elements – the social composition of the nation, its genesis, and its collective rights (both territorial and political) – can be found at the core of the national imaginary of any nation. Certainly, the particular form that these elements will take, will vary not only across different nations, but also in different periods of the *same* nation, according to the social and political transformations endured by it. But in any case: one of the most essential functions of the state is to *promote* and *consolidate* a shared view regarding the nature and specificity of the nation *vis-à-vis* other human groups; regarding its historical genesis and common destiny; and regarding the legitimacy of the structures and institutions governing that nation. In this sense, both the construction and the promotion of a given unifying imaginary (a *national* one) is one of the most essential tasks in modern nation-states, and a primary concern for political elites.[8]

Components of a national imaginary

The former sections allowed for a theoretical discussion regarding the definition of a national imaginary and its roles. They also offered some elements of the community (human specificity, genesis, collective rights) that any national imaginary should recall. Yet it is clear that if we want to study how national imaginaries are *promoted* (that is: in the practice), then these concepts should be specified much further.

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[8] We can here recall the Gellnerian notion of an 'unified culture' as a most vital component in the construction of the modern industrialist state (see Gellner 1983)

That is, if a national imaginary is a system of ideas and beliefs, then it should have some "objective" reasons, "visible" markers and "verifiable" facts that (arguably) can sustain the claim for the existence of the nation, as a bounded community with a common genesis and collective rights. This, of course, is in the discourse: as we argued above, such elements rarely are as verifiable and objective as presented in the discourse. However, they should be evaluated not according to 'scientific' standards, but rather according to political ones: that is, according to their acceptance among the target population; their capacity to define who belongs to the nation, and who is a foreigner; their ability to set a common history and a shared destiny for the group; and last but not least, the rights and privileges that the nation has as such. As subjective and constructed as they may appear, these reasons, markers and facts become essential *components of the national imaginary,* which are referred to and which specify the three elements of the national imaginary quoted above: its human specificity, historical genesis, and collective rights.

Certainly, a number of such components could be singled out – the existing literature on nationalism offers a good proof of it. It seems that not just each nation, but each national*ism* tries to create its own particular combination of criteria to define its own nation. What is more: all these components of the national imaginary are subjected to constant changes and interpretations for the same nation – even for the same elite! However, in any case: the nation will always need to have a set of ideas about the features defining it as such.

This topic would allow for a very long theoretical discussion. However, this is a research project focused on a very particular form of diffusion of national imaginaries. Therefore, I will group and classify the components of such imaginaries according to how they are promoted in the postage stamps of a given state, and also bearing in mind its usefulness for the construction of an analytical typology. Therefore, the following ten types of messages will be considered:

A. Messages about the **human composition** of the nation, especially regarding the ethnic or racial features of its members.

B. Messages about the **cultural identity** of the nation, including artistic manifestations deemed as those "authentic" and "proper" of the nation (traditional robes, music types, handcrafts, works of fine art, architecture...) as well as other cultural manifestations (traditional dances, customs, festivities) and further attributes, which are presented as "cultural markers" of the group, like a given language or, in some circumstances, a religious creed.

C. Messages about the **historical development** of the nation. This is a broad category that includes not only factual historical events, but also the national mythology, as well as the narratives about specific heroes.

D. Messages about the **individual accomplishments** made by members of the nation, which are 'appropriated' by it, and so presented as *collective* achievements or, at least, as proofs of some higher quality of the nation as a whole (e.g. valuable culture, moral or physical attributes, intelligence...). Most of these messages refer to the realm of sports, arts, and science.

E. Messages about the **natural attributes** of the nation, including typical flora and fauna, as well as representative geographical features (rivers, mountains, lakes…) or national landscapes.

F. Messages about its **territory**, including maps or references to the territorial composition and borders of the state, whether the actual, *de facto,* or claimed ones.

G. Messages about its **foreign relations**, including its activities and relations with other international actors (whether states or international organizations) and references to topics like international cooperation, promotion of peace, or international security.

H. Messages about its **political regime**, especially about the type of state it is (kingdom, republic, federation etc.) as well as its dominant ideology, governmental institutions, relevant political groups, and/or specific members of the leadership.

I. Messages about the **national economy and technological development** of the nation, for instance regarding its key economic resources, strategic industries, central banks, currency, and key economic/market institutions or practices; as well as its technological, engineering or material achievements, as long as they are regarded as common feats of the nation, or being applied to the development of it.

J. Finally, messages about the **national symbols** that are used by the nation-state (flags, coats of arms, anthems…) or about those symbols that, without being truly official, are commonly seen as representing or signifying a particular nation.

Later in this thesis (Ch. IV and V), these ten types of components of a national imaginary will be explained in detail and used for the analysis of messages in stamps. Of course, this does not mean that these categories are fixed or exhaustive: many others could be named, or some

categories merged. These are just the ones that are best fitted to analysing national imaginaries as promoted in stamps.

How to spread a national imaginary?

We can speak of a number of means and devices that represent the nation, but here I will differentiate between two main groups. Firstly there are national symbols properly speaking, which are specifically designed and solely used to signify the nation as a whole for both national and foreign audiences. Secondly there are carriers of nationalist messages, which are objects with a primary goal that is different from representing the nation but that, due to their use, characteristics and/or official character, also represent or "act for" the nation. In simple terms, national symbols are created to be precisely that and nothing else, but carriers of nationalist messages are objects that have been adapted to such a role.

National symbols

Any nationalist movement is, by definition, a project involving a large community. Because of this, it depends largely on the establishment of shared recognizable symbols, as a means to identify the purported nation as well as the political movement allegedly speaking on its behalf. In this way, it is essential for any nationalist movement to establish and promote recognizable symbols, which can be identified by both members and outsiders as referring to the same collective body. The most common national symbols are flags, coats of arms, anthems and state seals.

As Whitney Smith points out, no other national symbol has had the durability and intensity of use of the flag (Smith 2001, 522; see also Elgenius 2007; 2011b). Every sovereign entity, or one claiming to be one, seems to be obliged to have its own. A flag is not only a means to identify the actual members of a given human group (such as those taking part in an international sporting event) or to mark its territory; it also represents the very identity and specificity of the nation in terms of an imagined community. In this sense, flags are considered as embodiments of the nation and treated not only with reverence, but even with an adoration more proper for a religious or totemic ritual (see Marvin and Ingle 1999). Not surprisingly, flags and other national symbols are deemed so transcendental, that most states issue laws regulating their use, and impose heavy penalties for any lack of respect towards them –an act that, not by chance, is called "desecration" (Smith 2001).

Furthermore, flags also represent means of expressing general notions about the nation they represent. Every iconographic element of a flag is meant to represent a given concept or ideal related to the core identity or history of the nation –or at least, their official versions (Elgenius 2007, 2011b). Even the simplest flag, like the all-green one of Gadaffi's Libya, was made to say something about the nation it stands for.

This does not mean that all flags are truly "original" and unique. In fact, it was the original tricolour flag of the Republic of the United Netherlands that set the model for many later flags (Elgenius 2007, 23; 2011b, 35-36). Together with the later French revolutionary flag, it became a typical symbol of modern republican regimes, which tend to follow the tri-colour pattern or some variation of it (Hobsbawm 1990; Elgenius 2007, 2011b) and so become symbolical assertions of the ideological influence of the French revolution.[9] In this way, flags not only represent the modern nations, but also their specific egalitarian ethos:

> The national flags of Europe are intimately linked to the formation of nations and states. Flags are used to legitimise sovereignty and to illustrate distinctiveness... compared to earlier practices of identification, [flags] reflected the egalitarian ideas of the modern nation, in contrast to the symbols of earlier societies. By definition, the national flag was to be available to all citizens and not exclusively to a small privileged group […] Moreover, [the flag] became an instrument of political action and a symbol of 'independence', 'liberation' and 'freedom' (Elgenius 2007, 26).

In this way, we can conceive of flags, anthems and other national symbols as visual proofs of what Anderson (2006 [1983]) called the "deep, horizontal comradeship" of the nation: they are out there not only to be revered, but to be used by citizens. Children regularly hoist flags at school; adults use their national flags not only in political parades, but also in other public events like sport competitions and even in the private realm – to extremes like the use of the Danish flag in birthdays, weddings, Christmas and funerals (Jenkins 2007). In some cases, the use of flags is so common that it surpasses their 'banalization', in Billig's (1995) terms, and reaches to the level of their open commercialisation, as the countless uses of the American flag makes evident.

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[9] Tricolour flags in Europe contrast with the "cross flags" of Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Scotland and Switzerland, which are inspired in the Christian tradition or in monarchical iconography (see Elgenius 2011b, 2007) Some later flags took the cross pattern as well (Finland, Iceland, Euskadi, Dominican Republic…). Only a small number of flags show truly original designs: Brazil, the post-1994 South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Libya, Nepal or Seychelles, along with a few others.

The national symbols are matters of key political importance and of course, of contention. They cannot be just designed and used; they must be appealing, to 'resonate' among the population (Smith 2009, 31-40). A flag that is not accepted by the members of the nation as representing their common ideals, values and identity, will fail in their role of unifying such a community; what is more, it will probably be a matter of conflict. In the same vein, a national symbol that explicitly or symbolically excludes important sectors of the population, most probably will be opposed by them –like the 1928-1994 flag of South Africa, which clearly hinted to the European colonies and populations that became part of it, but did not have a single reference to natives.[10]

Yet, it is true that in many cases, the most important factor for national symbols to become divisive or unifying, is not as much their particular aspect but the ideology and discourse of the political groups identified with it (Kolstø 2006). In this sense, it is not uncommon to find that, when a nation endures a political change, its national symbols are modified or even totally substituted by others, as a way to make clear the rupture with the immediate past –which was the case, for instance, of many former Socialist countries (Elgenius 2007, 25-26).[11]

In sum: flags are the national symbols *par excellence*. However, they are not the only ones. A further case is that of coats of arms, which due to their iconographic properties can, in fact, be much more richer in meanings and messages than flags. However, their "circulation" is much more reduced, generally restricted to the nation itself and to specific devices like coins, passports, or official stationery. Only in few cases are coats of arms as well-known as the flag of the corresponding country (USA, for example).

Most national anthems have a quite limited diffusion beyond the frontiers of the nation, and their lyrics can face language barriers. In this way, knowledge about them and their significance tend to be restricted to their own national community. Only some anthems are easily recognized worldwide, due to historical or geopolitical reasons (France, United Kingdom, USA…) but in most cases, their only moments of international attention are during international sports competitions.

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[10] The flag was in fact an older version of the Dutch flag, known as the *Prinsenvlag* or Prince's Flag (16th century) with three smaller flags embedded in the center: the Union Jack, the flag of the Orange Free State, and the one from Transvaal.

[11] In a similar way, the apartheid-linked South African flag was substituted in 1994 with a new one, which arguably is meant to denote the commitment to the construction of a community based on national reconciliation, toleration and multiculturalism (South African Government 2010). Conversely, it is not uncommon that the opponents of a given regime make use of previous flags. One recent case is the utilization of the old (monarchical) Libyan flag by the revolutionary forces against Gadaffi.

Finally, we must acknowledge a rather obvious yet often overlooked case. The main way of representing a nation is by naming it, and the name of the nation is not just a word. As John Stuart Mill stated, the possession of a common name is essential in creating a shared identity. Not only it creates a sense of 'commonness' among existing individuals; it also allows the creation of a shared history: "the past achievements in arts, arms, politics, religious primacy, science, and literature, of any who share the same designation, give rise to an amount of national feeling" (Mill 1977 [1861]; see also Smith 2009, 46).

A nation's name is the national symbol *par excellence*: it makes reference to the sum of territory, culture, history, institutions, population and all other features of it. In everyday life, that word can also be used in quite symbolic ways: a banner with the name of the country may have the same representative character and emotional charge than the official national flag, and can be used with the same purposes.

In this sense, the name of the nation *per se* is charged with powerful symbolic meanings –especially if it evokes historical or mythical connotations. Not surprisingly, the negotiations on how exactly a nation should be named can be very complex, even between members of the same nationalist movement, and can escalate to the international level – for instance, if the same name (or other official symbol) is claimed as their own by a different community. For example, in 1991-1992 the successor state to the Socialist Republic of Macedonia adopted the name "Republic of Macedonia" and a flag with the Vergina sun at its centre – a 16-ray stylized star or sun, which was found in 1977 as decoration in tombs of royal members of the old Kingdom of Macedonia.

These decisions were vehemently opposed by Greece, which alleged that such use by the new state of such symbols was nothing but the expression of territorial, historical and political revisionism, and a direct threat to Greek sovereignty.[12] The conflict escalated to include even an economic blockade by Greece, copyright claims on the Vergina sun, and the pressure on foreign governments, the (then) European Community and other international organizations to not recognize the new state. The issue was temporarily settled in 1993 by agreeing on a "provisional denomination" for it, as the *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* (FYROM). With that name, the state became a member of the United Nations (UN Security Council 1993). Yet, a

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[12] The Greek objections to the use of such symbols by Macedonia were first, that the Vergina sun was found in a place that lies well within the borders of the contemporary Greek state; second, that both the name and flag were already in use as the symbols of a political entity, the northern Hellenic region of Macedonia; third, that the Sun had long been one of the main cultural symbols of the Hellenic republic. Greece also denounced the depictions in coins minted by the new state of cultural features located in Greek territory (Danforth 1995; Roudometof 2002; Zahariadis 1994; also Elgenius 2011b, 74-76)

definitive name with full international recognition is still a pending matter. Regarding the flag, the FYROM accepted to change it on 1995: the current design is still inspired in the Vergina sun, but stylized to the point that it is unrecognizable.

Of course, all these tensions and negotiations are not just about design and taste. They were part of a larger conflict regarding the legitimacy of the new state, and regarding which political entity should legitimately represent the Macedonians as an ethnic group (Zahariadis 1994; Roudometof 2002; Danforth 1995). In this sense, the conflict was not so much about national symbols in themselves, but rather about their meanings, perceptions and political implications.

All things considered, national symbols are useful and widely used as identification markers, and they serve as useful vehicles for ideological internalisation (see Kolstø 2006, 677-678). However, they offer only a very general idea of the community they represent, "condensing" a broad range of meanings about it (Eriksen 2007). They make reference to very essential notions only, leaving wide spaces for interpretation and even contention within the community. And perhaps this is not a liability but an advantage: as Eriksen states, flags must be "as empty a vessel as possible" so everyone within the community can "feel similar before the flag" (Eriksen 2007, 5).

Therefore, national symbols are not only devices for internal identification and external differentiation ('us' vs. 'them') but also symbolic means for the integration of all members and sub-communities in an overarching national community. In this sense, official national symbols are essential in the creation and preservation of a system of beliefs, so allowing for the creation of social bonds, codes of conduct, institutional legitimacy and political authority within a community (Smith 2001). However, as said above they are also limited regarding the amount of information they present about the nation: they are meant to embody it, but not to tell too much about it. Therefore, official national symbols are unfit to send particular messages about the nation, or regarding specific topics about it. That is why a second category of devices representing the nation is important.

Carriers of nationalist messages

When referring to specific "carriers" of nationalist messages, probably the most obvious case mentioned will be media, both paper-based and electronic. Certainly, traditional printed media were (and still are) essential for both national movements and states when promoting nationalism ideas and propaganda, or even just to create a general idea of 'us' as a different community

(Anderson 2006 [1983]). Later, the development of electronic media made it possible to cover much larger distances and reach a wider public, including the non-educated or illiterate one. It should not be surprising then that radio and TV broadcasts have been intensively used for national identity construction in a number of ways, for example through the promotion of "mass rituals" (Price 1995) or by means of a constant recall of the existence of the nation promoting a type of "mind framework" about it (Billig 1995). Last but not least, electronic media have been used for straightforward nationalist indoctrination (Sükösd and Bajomi-Lázár 2003; Reljić 2001; Sofos 1999; Herschfield 2006).

However, beyond paper-based and electronic media, there are other devices that also carry nationalist messages: they are not national symbols properly speaking, but at the same time, they still denote the nation and, what is more, they have an official character – a fact that is not always true for printed and electronic media. Two instances of this are Anderson's examples of maps and museums.

Official maps are not just some pedagogical tools to indicate the territory, borders and geography of the nation. They are also symbolically used to refer to the nation as a whole (Anderson 2006 [1983]; Balakrishnan and Anderson 1996). Maps are rarely "neutral" as, in many cases, they represent both ideologies and factual power relations, and also have been used as part of official propaganda, particularly regarding territorial and/or population claims (see Harley 1988; Herb 1997). In some further cases, maps are made part of the official national symbols, appearing in flags or coats of arms. In the same vein, state-sponsored archaeological and historical museums are a further case. Even if they are not national symbols in the way flags are, they still represent the nation by showing particular sets of artefacts of it and/or narrating an official history about it (Reid 2003; Anderson 2006 [1983]; Kaplan 1994; Lomnitz-Adler 1995).

However, there are certainly many more instances of means and objects able to carry an official view of the nation, and they range from the most evident to the subtler in terms of their messages. Very clear cases are national pavilions at international fairs and universal expositions. Even if they are arguably made to fulfil cultural, topical etc. goals, in fact they are comprehensive official representations of the nation, and the respective national governments are very careful when selecting the topics, objects and messages to be displayed at them. This attention is fuelled by the fact that the viewers of such "performances of the nation" are, in most cases, foreign audiences (Tenorio-Trillo 1996b; Switzer 2003; Wyss 2010).

There are other, more subtle ways to promote official ideas about the nation. Art is a particularly effective one. Through their works, artists (particularly those of the visual arts) have

performed five key "collective functions" for the national community: the didactic emulation, celebration, commemoration, crystallization and evocation of its origins, features, heroes and deeds (Smith 1993). Of course, it can be argued that artistic manifestations could only become regarded as 'national' ones, if they resonated with popular ideas of what 'our' culture is. In that sense, national art cannot be considered as an outcome of elite's tastes alone (Leoussi 2004).

In this sense, the creation of a given national imaginary is not always a matter of elites and political intention. Yet it is also true that political elites had had a direct influence in the *promotion* of specific artistic manifestations, as their control over cultural institutions has enabled them to choose which ideas and manifestations should be presented as "authentic" and "national". A clear case are state galleries and national museums that present carefully selected pieces and topics as examples of "national" art (Switzer 2003).

Yet the promotion of specific topics and works as 'our national art' also goes beyond the walls of museums and galleries, reaching into the public space itself. A well-known case are murals –monumental paintings in public spaces, commissioned by governments to present carefully and didactically a particular vision of the features, history and cultural features of the nation: they are there not just to be appreciated, but to be 'learnt' by the masses. The same can be applied to further artistic expressions like music and cinema, when state-sponsored agencies are involved (see for instance Bohlman 2008; de los Reyes 1986; Herschfield 2006; Turino 2003; Vaughan and Lewis 2006).

Architecture has been a recurrent form that has been used to promote nationalist ideas and propaganda. One instance is that of monumental works, commissioned by governments not only to fulfil a public service (i.e. train stations, bridges, ministerial offices) but also to be pieces of "national art" which will embody and portray the culture, symbols and history of the nation (see Hirst 2005; Lasansky 2004; Switzer 2003) This effort to use architecture to spread certain views of the nation has been applied not only to new constructions, but also to the restoration of historical sites (e.g. Taylor 1998).

There is a final type of carriers of nationalist messages, which are neither as evident as maps nor as physically fixed as museums or monuments. They are even subtler than national art, perhaps because they are perfect examples of a 'banal' object (Billig 1995) but also because they perform a very different primary function than 'standing for' the nation, while still having an official nature and being able to carry messages about the nation. Banknotes and coins are an extremely interesting case.

Currency emission has long been regarded as a prerogative of states: banknotes and coins are the official means of exchange within a national market, and they are thus produced and controlled by central state institutions. In this sense, currency circulation within certain territory, and the acceptance of it by a given society, can be held as proofs of an "really existing", distinctive and sovereign national community (Hewitt 1999; Helleiner 1997) as well as an unifying factor for the population of a multinational state (Gilbert 1999) In this sense, currency:

> [...] works explicitly and implicitly to define, establish and circulate the aspirations of a nation in the sense of an aggregation of persons claiming in an organised way to represent a racial, territorial or cultural bond of unity [therefore being] a key stage in the process of transforming an 'imagined community' [...] into an actual body with executive power. (Pointon 1998, 232)

We can certainly think of banknotes and coins as ideal carriers of nationalist ideas: they are official products of compulsory use that will inevitably reach almost every single person within the national territory, and that are designed and issued by a monopolizing agency of the central state. In this sense, several studies have been made on how currency iconographies had been used to promote certain ideas and narratives about the nation, by means of the historical figures, symbols, places and objects depicted on them (i.e. Gilbert 1999; Gounaris 2003; Hewitt 1999; Penrose and Cumming 2011; Pointon 1998; Roubanis 2007; Schwarzenbach 1999; Unwin and Hewitt 2001).[13] Nationalism in currency has found renewed attention since the introduction of the euro, and its relation with the creation/consolidation of a supranational European identity (Fishman and Messina 2006; Fornäs 2007; Helleiner 2002; Hymans 2004, 2006; Mak 2002; Risse et al. 1999; Shanahan 2003). As a matter of fact, by looking at almost any euro coin or banknote currently in circulation, we can see a complex interrelation between national and supranational commitments – something that was achieved only after complex negotiations (see for instance Calligaro 2011; European Communities 1999)

Just by parallelism with currency, it should be evident by now that postage stamps can also be considered as carriers of nationalist messages: they are as capable of carrying messages as money – or even more so in some aspects, as we shall soon see. However, how have stamps been received in the academic world? In the next chapter, I will discuss the state of the academic

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[13] In turn, some authors held the opposite view by arguing that we can find more commonalities than differences when comparing banknotes of different countries; in other words, that banknotes denote more supranational influences than national ones (see Hymans 2004).

literature regarding nationalist and ideological influences in stamp depictions. What is more, I will discuss the features that make postage stamps ideal carriers of nationalist messages. All this will be preceded by a brief background section on the development of mail and postage stamps.

CHAPTER III:

STAMPS AND THEIR MESSAGES

Mail and stamps: an overview

In this section, I will offer an introduction to the history of postage stamps, of mail traffic, and of the international organization that regulates it: the Universal Postal Union (UPU). This background will allow the reader to appreciate not only the importance of mail and stamps in the development of nation-states, but also to see how states have been well aware of potential of stamps when used for ideological propaganda.

Stamps and mail: historical overview

Postage stamps are intimately linked to modernity. Complex, massive postage systems were not needed in societies where literacy was the privilege of an elite, when most messages were of official nature, and displacement through long distances was very limited for most persons. In that situation, traditional courier systems (e.g. private messengers) were more than enough for the needs of their few users, namely local and central governments, ecclesiastical bodies, guilds and even some middle-age and Renaissance universities (see Codding 1964, 3-7; Golden 2009; Campbell-Smith 2011).

Then, as the power of monarchies and royal houses grew in Europe, they demanded courier systems devoted to their exclusive service. Louis XI of France was the first king to issue a decree creating a Royal Postal Service in 1477, and the desire to control both internal and international messages eventually led to declare the postal services of most kingdoms as Crown monopolies (Daunton 1985; Codding 1964).[14]

But the demand for new, much more extensive and efficient communication systems came with the Industrial Revolution and the concomitant technological innovations: the extension of communication and rail networks, the technological improvements in printing and transport technologies, the growth of literacy, and the massive migrations through increasingly large distances (Hobsbawm 1975, 1987; Golden 2009). For this scenario, the traditional courier

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[14] Civilizations outside Europe also developed efficient courier systems. The extensive post system of China was mentioned by Marco Polo, while archeological evidence points at the existence of a post system during the twelfth Dynasty of Egypt, ca. 2000 BC (Codding 1964). In the Americas, the Aztec empire had a similar system, called *paynani,* devoted to official matters only (Carrera Stampa 1970, 13-16) (see also Ch. VII)

systems were not only slow, but very inefficient when handling large number of items, and also prohibitively expensive for most persons: a letter could cost a common worker his entire day's wage (Golden 2009, 21).

For instance, in the early 19th century England the fee for a letter through courier was not calculated according to the weight of the letter, but to the number of pages and the distance to be travelled. In this way, each page sent to a location 15 miles beyond London had a cost of 4 pence. To avoid paying the high amounts implied, users tend to write in very small characters or made use of clever tricks, like writing in two directions within the same sheet (see Ill. 1). Furthermore, most letters were sent just folded and closed with a wax seal, because the envelope itself would also count as a page (Golden 2009, 34)
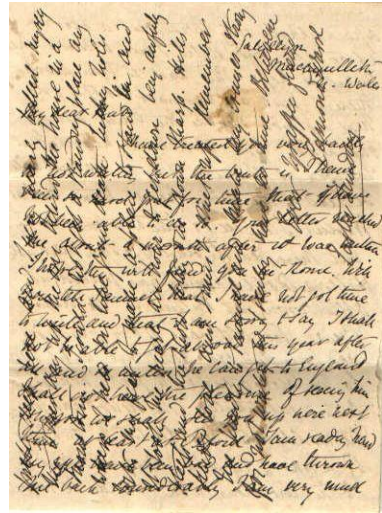
Ill. 1 - Bidireccional letter

Yet, the most important hindrance was: in such system it was not the sender but the *recipient* who had to pay the fees directly to the courier. Therefore, after travelling for days, in many cases letters had to be returned because the addressee was not able or willing to cover the expenses. The system also promoted the smuggling of letters through unofficial means, the corruption of royal post officials, and the abuse of free postage services ('franking privileges') by members of the parliament (Reid 1984, 226; Codding 1964; Daunton 1985; Golden 2009; Campbell-Smith 2011).

To solve this situation, between 1835 and 1836 a teacher and social reformer, Mr. Rowland Hill, made a detailed research of the costs involved in the British postal services. He

Ill. 2 - The Penny Black

found that the cost associated with transport itself was extremely low, while those related to the procurement, rate calculation and delivery of the letter were by far the highest. Therefore, Hill proposed a thorough reform of the postal services in his 1837 pamphlet *Post Office Reform: its importance and practicability.* The new system was based on three premises: a substantial decrease of postal fares; the introduction of fixed fees according to weight; and the pre-payment of all postage services (Codding 1964; Daunton 1985; Muir 1990).

In the new system, the sender would be responsible for paying for the shipping, by purchasing certain items in the post office according to a fixed fee (one or two pennies), which

could then be used to send a message. One of these items was a standardized postal stationery. The sender would purchase it, write on it, then seal and send it; the postage fare was already included in the price of the stationery itself. The second item was a label or bit of paper "covered with a glutinous wash" (Sir Rowland Hill, quoted in Golden 2009, 87) that the customer could buy for the corresponding fixed fee, then glue it to letter or envelope that s/he had brought. Both postal stationery and the "bits of paper" would be evidences of payment for the postage fares of the entire journey.

In this way, the first postage stamp nicknamed "Penny Black" after its value and colour, was issued in 1840 (see Ill. 2) depicting a bust of the Queen Victoria (Altman 1991, 5-10; Muir 1990; Reid 1984, 226-229). Interestingly enough, even Sir Rowland Hill himself anticipated that the postal stationery option would be vastly preferred by customers, while the stamps would just be an auxiliary means. Precisely the opposite happened: the postal stationery (known as a 'Mulready' following the designer's name) was almost unanimously rejected by the public, and heavily ridiculed in the contemporary press due to its design, so it was withdrawn after just some months. In turn, 'humble bits of paper' caused instant excitement, to the point that the printing houses were in problems to fulfil the demand (Golden 2009, 101).

Overall, the new system was an immediate and overwhelming success: 112,000 letters, four times the normal number, were dispatched just on the first day, the 10th of January 1840 (Golden 2009, 83). In just one year, letter traffic in UK changed from 75.9 million letters in 1939, to 168.8 in in 1840. Twenty years later, 564.0 million letters were being dispatched plus 82.8 million further items, such as books and newspapers. In terms of mail per capita, the change was from three letters per annum in 1939, to nineteen in 1860 (Daunton 1985, 79-81). The penny postage also promoted the (now customary) celebration of specific dates through written messages: for instance, on Valentine's Day 1850, around 200,000 letters passed through the General Post Office in London (Golden 2009, 223).

It is therefore not a surprise that such a system was quickly implemented in the rest of the British Empire, and copied by other countries all around the world – the first of these being Brazil in 1843, thanks to the advice of its consul in London (Altman 1991, 8). By 1853, forty-four countries had postal systems based on Hill's model, and so were issuing their own stamps (Cusack 2005, 592; Reid 1984, 226-229). In this sense, the new mail system and its stamps were part of an extended revolution, a "modern wonder" (Trammell 2010) where (arguably) everyone could take a piece of paper, write a personal message, and send it whether locally or to formerly

unreachable places, all for a minimal cost. It also gave a strong impulse to the distribution of printed materials from newspapers to serials and pamphlets (Golden 2009).

The new, efficient mail transport network and postage system allowed the messages to be delivered in a matter days, or just some hours in many cases. In this sense, family and personal messages that were formerly restricted to very important matters and selected occasions (e.g. deaths) now could be sent on a continuous flow, and deal with common, everyday life issues. Furthermore, mailed appointment inquiries, visit announcements, notes of gratitude… became a custom within English society (Golden 2009). These were not only matters of courtesy, but key forms of human interaction in societies experiencing accelerated processes of urbanization: in 1851, the urban population in Britain surpassed the rural for the first time in history (Robbins 1998, 287). In this sense, Hill's system not only led to a democratization of written communications, but also enabled a sustained dialogue among persons across both long and short distances. In many ways, this is comparable to what electronic media have created in our era (Golden 2009).

Yet, despite its enormous success and clear advantages, the new system, and its iconic stamps, also faced strong criticism. Many sectors within the Victorian society were deeply concerned by its potential for spreading amoral behaviour, from unlawful love affairs to massive spreading of rumours, political agitation, and criminal offenses like blackmailing, all made possible by the anonymity of the new prepaid letter (Golden 2009, 153-192). Similar challenges were faced when Hill's system was adopted in other countries (John 1995).

Finally, some worries were related to stamp themselves, their depiction of the monarch, and manners and traditions at this regard - certainly not a minor issue for the British society of the time. Some gentlemen found quite distasteful that in order to glue the stamps, they should "lick the Queen's neck" –a matter of public debate and scorn in the England of the 1840's (Golden 2010; 2009, 104; Williams and Williams 1956, 19). Yet, behind these matters of taste/distaste, this was just a forecast of the symbolic and political significance that a postage stamp would achieve as small representations of State authority.

It is therefore not surprising that from 1850, any old or newborn state, or those political entities aspiring to become one, have issued their own postage stamps. Nowadays, Michel estimates lists "about 644,000 stamps" in its catalogue (MICHEL 2011). This number looks impressive, even excessive; yet it seems to correspond to the extension of mail transit. In 1980 alone, just before Internet and e-mail started their worldwide expansion, more than 300 billion

letters and parcels were delivered through standard post services. What is more, despite an overall decrease in postal traffic since 2000, it is still truly massive today (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Worldwide Mail Traffic		
Years	**Items**	**Value**
1980	Number of letter-post items, domestic service	299,946,608,042
	Number of letter-post items, international service - dispatch	8,655,140,550
	Number of ordinary parcels, domestic service	2,108,067,057
	Number of ordinary parcels, international service - dispatch	54,938,240
	Total:	310,764,753,889
2000	Number of letter-post items, domestic service	434,253,923,837
	Number of letter-post items, international service - dispatch	7,500,036,881
	Number of ordinary parcels, domestic service	4,673,689,628
	Number of ordinary parcels, international service - dispatch	35,733,536
	Total:	446,463,383,882
2008	Number of letter-post items, domestic service	411,576,637,348
	Number of letter-post items, international service - dispatch	5,229,640,223
	Number of ordinary parcels, domestic service	5,539,440,750
	Number of ordinary parcels, international service - dispatch	46,543,882
	Total:	422,392,262,203
Source: Made using data from (Universal Postal Union 2011c)		

Towards an international convergence of mail (and stamp) practices

Even in the early 17th century, despite all the obstacles mentioned above, international postage traffic (mostly official) was important enough to create demands for international treaties regulating it. Particularly contentious were the topics regarding the costs and duties of 'transit mail', namely the mail that must cross the territory of a given state, in order to reach its final destination in a third one. One of the first treaties in this respect was signed in 1601 between Spain and France, regulating mail flux from Spain to the Netherlands or Rome. It established the foundations of the future international systems (including the current ones): first, all mail originated within a given country should be handled by that country only and regardless of its final destination; then, that in the case of transit mail, the postal system of the transit state should be paid for the handling of it (Codding 1964).

This system of bilateral postal treaties worked for a while. However, by the mid-19th century (that is, right before and after Hill's reforms in the UK) its disadvantages where too evident. Each bilateral treaty set different rates, making total fare calculation very complex and unpredictable: the final rate would depend on the international route taken, and this could not be

known by the user until the very moment s/he was sending the letter. In this way, "a letter from the United States to Australia would be charged 5, 33, 45, 55, 60 cents, or one dollar and 2 cents per ½ ounce, depending on which one of the six available routes was used" (Codding 1964, 17) Other difficulties sprung from the different weights (and weight units) used by the different countries involved when calculating mail fares.[15] Therefore, there were increasing pressures for an international agreement that could define general standards.

The first Postal Conference (Paris, 1863) was attended by delegates of 15 countries, mostly European ones. It had some success in setting technical guidelines for international mail handling. Then, in 1874, a further Postal Congress was called, to be held in Berne (Switzerland) this time. It was attended by 21 countries. The goal of the Bern congress was more ambitious: not only to draft an international treaty on the matter, but also to set a true international postage regime, to be overseen by a technical institution, which initially was named the General Postal Union, GPU (Codding 1964).

The Berne Postal Treaty entered into force on 1st of July 1875, when most independent states already had their own national, Hill-based postal systems – which included the state monopoly on postage services and stamp production (Frewer 2002, 2; Reid 1984, 229). In fact, one of the agreements at the congress was to set the pre-payment of services as the standard not only for national, but for all international mail as well – therefore making postage stamps truly international. Since then, the GPU (renamed UPU in 1878) has held a series of Postal Congresses every 3-4 years, having its main headquarters at Berne, and has also become increasingly institutionalized – especially since its incorporation into the UN system in 1948. Nowadays, the UPU is the oldest international organization still in function, and includes 191 member countries (Universal Postal Union 2011b). Following the GPU-UPU example, other international organizations have been created to deal with inter-regional mail.[16]

A topic that became important and contentious was that of membership. In the original UPU Constitution there was no clear prevision on this matter, so colonial empires took advantage of it. By the time of UPU's Rome Congress (1906) there were 17 colonial territories recognized as members. It was only until the 1947 Congress in Paris, when it was already clear that UPU would become part of the UN system, that UPU's Constitution was amended to

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[15] For instance, not only the gram and the ounce were used, but also the German "loth". See (Codding 1964, 17).
[16] For example, the 1911 South American Mail Union, transformed into the Pan-American Postal Union in 1921, and consecutively extended until the current Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal (UPAEP). Other, more modern examples are the *Conférence européenne des administrations des postes et des telecommunications* (CEPT, founded 1959) and the *Conference des Posts de L'Afrique de L'Ouest* (CPAO, 2001)

include only sovereign nation-states as new members (Codding 1964, 36-37, 80-81). Today any UN member may become a member of UPU just by declaring such an intention, while any non-UN country can also do so "provided that its request is approved by at least two-thirds of the [UPU] member countries." (Universal Postal Union 2011b)

Some other entities have achieved similar status, even if this has been discouraged. For instance, the Postal Administration of the United Nations itself was recognized as a valid postal authority, but only as a special case, after a direct request of the General Assembly, and by means of a bilateral agreement between the UN and Switzerland, which then would act as the UN representative in UPU. Moreover, UPU's Executive Council resolution CE 8/1968 stated that the UN/Switzerland agreement "should be restricted in its application exclusively to the UN Office at Geneva as part of the UN Secretariat [and] should in no way constitute a precedent for similar requests" (quoted in Universal Postal Union 2010, xxix). In this way, the UN can issue its own postage stamps, and they can be used for mail – but only if it is sent from one of three offices: Geneva, New York, and Vienna.

Other entities that lack full international recognition (i.e. Republic of China (Taiwan), Nagorno-Karabakh, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus…) certainly have their own postal administrations and stamps, and run their local mail services. But as those postal administrations are <u>not</u> recognized by UPU, and their stamps are *de jure* not valid for international services.[17] Such entities must then set agreements with third states, to use their postal systems for sending international mail. For instance: it was common that a letter from Taiwan had first to be sent to Hong Kong or Japan, where the corresponding postage stamps of Hong Kong or Japan would be affixed, and only then could the letter complete the transit to mainland China. If there were any Taiwanese stamps left, they were overprinted or obliterated (Chien-Hsun 2008; Universal Postal Union 2009a).

One relevant function of the UPU is regarding postage stamps. The organization intervenes in three aspects: first, by defining the minimal, technical characteristics that all postage stamps should have, such as the name of the issuing authority (Universal Postal Union 2009b, art. 8, par. 3.1) with the United Kingdom as the only exception.[18] Second, by receiving

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[17] For instance, in the 1979 Congress (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), the UPU adopted the resolution C 5, which declared illegal the stamps issued by Northern Cyprus, and therefore instructed all UPU member countries "to refuse to handle any mail bearing the illegal postage stamps issued or to be issued by the so-called "Turkish Cypriot Postal Administration" of the so-called "Turkish Federated State of Cyprus"" (Universal Postal Union 2011a, 118).

[18] This because, as the inventor of the postage stamp, the UK retained the privilege to present a portrait of the Sovereign in lieu of the country's name or other symbol thereof (see for instance Altman 1991, 6-7; Jeffery 2006, 49). This was officially recognized by UPU (see Universal Postal Union 2009b, note to art. 8, par. 3.1).

reports and claims regarding invalid or fraudulent use of stamps, and letting other postal authorities know about it. Third, by regulating (to the degree UPU is able to) the contents of stamps themselves.

Problems regarding invalid postage stamps are a very common matter for UPU. Typical cases of concern are those plainly fraudulent stamps ("illicits") that bear the name of a given country but are designed, printed and sold without its authorization. Most of these forgeries tend to display very attractive motifs such as art masterpieces, exotic flora and fauna, or iconic figures of sports and pop culture: Michael Jordan, James Dean, Capitan America, American TV series...[19] Further 'illicits' are devoted to trendy topics, including those that are quite politically risky for the real country: for example, in 2002 Tajikistan reported bogus stamps issued with its name but devoted to Osama Bin-Laden (Universal Postal Union 2002). There are also plenty of "stamps" from countries, regions and postal authorities that simply do not exist at all, such as Moresnet or those issued by the "Ukrainian Antarctic Post" (Universal Postal Union and FilaNotes 2003; Damen 2011; Altman 1991, 36).

Besides such commercial forgeries, made to profit from inexperienced collectors, there are other more complex cases presented at UPU. These involve postage stamps issued by the postal authorities of existing, yet not fully recognized political entities –like those produced by secessions or nationalist revolts. These are relevant because stamps *are universally recognized as proofs of sovereignty,* as the UPU explicitly states (see Universal Postal Union 2009a).[20] Therefore, official postal authorities will report these issues to UPU, declaring them illegal so they would neither be accepted by other member states, nor imply any political recognition of such entities. The first case was in 1979, for the stamps issued by the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (nowadays Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) (see Resolution C 5/Rio de Janeiro 1979: Illegal issue of postage stamps, in Universal Postal Union 2011a, 118) but similar cases have been presented until very recently (i.e. the Azerbaijan denounciation of stamps of "Nagorno Karabakh Republic", Universal Postal Union 2010, A.39).

However, the most relevant topic for our case specifically concerns stamp *depictions*. The possible use of stamps for political propaganda has been a theme long acknowledged by

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[19] See for instance (Universal Postal Union 2007a, 2007b; Universal Postal Union and FilaNotes 2003).

[20] Art. 8 of the Universal Postal Convention, as amended in the 2004 Bucharest meeting, states that postage stamps are "a manifestation of sovereignty" which "shall be issued and put into circulation solely under the authority of the member country or territory" (Universal Postal Union 2009a). A further paragraph to the article was added stating that postage stamps of a given country should be always available "for postal prepayment and/or philatelic purposes" in its territory, and "be accessible to all citizens" within it. This probably reflects the preoccupation regarding bogus stamps. See (Universal Postal Union 2005; cf. Universal Postal Union 2009a) .

UPU and a matter of discussions in different Congresses. For instance, the Japanese delegation to the 1957 Ottawa Congress proposed that the UPU officially asked its members to refrain from issuing stamps whose designs could be used "as means of propaganda regarding an international dispute in course" (UK Foreign Office 1957; see also Bonacina 1998, 209-212). Czechoslovakia proposed a declaration on the same lines. In turn, the UK Foreign Office instructed its delegation to abstain in a vote on the matter because, on the one hand, support for such motions "could be quoted by Communist governments (and others) as justifying interference with [UK] mail bearing stamps and postmarks which we regard as innocuous but which they might find distasteful", but on the other hand, a vote against "could be wrongly construed a support for political propaganda of this nature" (UK Foreign Office 1957). The UK delegation voted accordingly.

Yet, the topic of propaganda in stamps would not disappear from debates at UPU, but it was only recently that it took some measures to regulate contents of stamps, at least in a very minimalist form; the Convention now states that postage stamps shall "be devoid of political character or of any topic of an offensive nature in respect of a person or a country" (Universal Postal Union 2009a). However, there is no clear mechanism of enforcing this principle.[21]

In sum: from the 19th century onwards, all around the world a series of central postal systems were established, and such centralization, even monopolization of the service by state authorities, was later recognized as the basis of the international postal system. The need to harmonize standards led to the creation not only of treaties, but also of an international organization that could ensure the flow of mail across borders, setting standards for it. Finally, and in spite of its mostly technical nature, the UPU could not avoid the fact that postage stamps were able to carry and spread ideological messages. But why have stamps been used for that? And in these cases, what do they say?

Stamps as means of propaganda

Therefore, it is time for us to inquire about the features of stamps that enabled them to be used as means to spread messages. To do so, we will start by presenting a brief literature review in this respect.

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[21] Moreover, the content of postage stamps must "be closely linked to the cultural identity of the member country or territory" issuing the stamp, and "be of major significance" to it; otherwise, it should contribute "to the dissemination of culture or to maintaining peace". In case a foreign person or event is depicted, these should have "a close bearing on the country or territory in question" therefore avoiding potentially insulting stereotypes (Universal Postal Union 2009a).

A (minimal) state of the art

As Eric Hobsbawm once stated, postage stamps have been the "most universal form of public imagery other than money" (Hobsbawm 1983, 281). For decades they were an extremely common object in the life of almost every individual, and noticed both as a means of sending letters and as iconographic pieces in their own right. It was also widely acknowledged that stamps were representatives of a nation-state: as the poet W. B. Yeats once famously stated in front of the Irish Senate, stamps should be considered "silent ambassadors of national taste" (quoted in Jeffery 2006, 46; see also Morris 2005, 76-81).

It could be expected for stamps to be considered as worthy of some scholarly attention, especially when looking at the impressive number of stamps issued and used everywhere in the world and for such long periods, which allows for almost infinite comparative and historical studies; the multiple ways in which they can be studied, and by several academic disciplines; and the number and quality of sources available (stamps themselves, but also related sources such as catalogues or studies) thanks not only to the information, archives and publications available from the national postal authorities, but especially to the astoundingly dedicated, organized and meticulous work of a number of collectors, associations and individual philatelists all around the world.

Yet the surprise is: postage stamps have been overwhelmingly ignored in the academic world. In the best case, they appear mostly as supporting elements – for instance, as occasional illustrations in books otherwise dedicated to a different topic. In very few cases they have been considered as sources in themselves (see Reid 1984; Deans and Dobson 2005). It seems pretty clear that, for most scholars, postage stamps are considered nothing but a hobby and not a matter worthy of serious academic consideration.

Ironically, it has been the philatelic community itself that has been most aware of the potential of stamps for more than just philately. They know very well that "stamps are created as souvenirs of important events, symbols of national aspirations, and icons of what a country esteems as important and noteworthy" (Baumann 1998, vii). Significantly, the only academic sector that has recognized to some extent the ability of stamps to "tell a lot" about a country, have been those of pedagogy and learning sciences (e.g. Moffatt and Rich 1950; di Napoli 1980; Nuessel and Cicogna 1992; Wood 1979, 1980).

Aside from the above, few scholars in the social sciences have used stamps for research. Yet, those that did so, made it pretty evident that stamps are outstandingly rich academic

sources, particularly for the study of political, ideological and/or nationalist propaganda. When analysed in this way, stamps have been called "paper ambassadors" that carry "a certain picture of the world" (Altman 1991); true "windows of the state" (Brunn 2001; Raento and Brunn 2005) or "self-portraits" of it (Navarro 2009); and "portraits" or "official representations" that present the nation in a particular way (Kevane 2008; Schwarzenbach 1999). In the same vein, Leclerc (1994) has argued that stamps are true pieces of an "official mental picture", while Newman (1989) makes the point about colonial stamps being pieces of a sort of 'visual orientalism'. Finally, Covington and Brunn made a very accurate description of stamps as small pieces of visual imagined communities (Covington and Brunn 2006).

Despite all these acknowledgments, we find very few comprehensive, extended academic researches – resulting in a thesis or a book, for instance – that study stamps as vehicles for ideological propaganda (e.g. Bonacina 1998; Child 2008a; Navarro 2009; Scott 1995; Siebertz 2005) and some of these yet are not available in English. More conceptual approaches to stamps as propaganda means are even fewer in number (e.g. Reid 1984). Further studies also use stamps as academic sources, yet only in combination with currency or similar items (e.g. Morris 2005; Schwarzenbach 1999; Wallach 2011; see also Earle 2007) and it is very noticeable that in such cases stamps tend to have a subordinate role in the analysis: for example, only six pages and some scattered references in Morris' (2005) otherwise very interesting book.

Shorter comparative studies (i.e. journal articles or book chapters) also exist, but they are still surprisingly limited in number when taking into account the endless possibilities for synchronic or diachronic comparisons offered by stamps. Among the examples, A. Adedze (2004a, 2004b) and M. Posnansky (2004) have made quite interesting albeit brief comparisons of stamps issued by African states, while M. Kevane' study (2008) on the stamps of Sudan and Burkina Faso is a very important contribution on the field, especially regarding the development of typologies and categories for comparison. In the same vein, Brunn (2001) was able to identify twenty-four major themes in his detailed study of the first stamps issued by the successor states to the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and even more when comparing the stamps issued before and after the transition from USSR to Russia (see Brunn 2011, 33). Finally, more focalized comparisons also exist, for instance regarding the competing messages in stamps issued by the two Koreas (Jonsson 2005) or the Federal and the Democratic Republics of Germany (Myers 2000).

Additional comparative studies have focused on topics rather than on countries. These kinds of studies have shown how, by comparing stamps of different countries, we can clearly

detect the ideological and political narratives regarding a given topic or problem. The most studied field so far is that of the use of stamps for advancing territorial claims (i.e. Altman 1991, 39-42; Beck 1983; Child 2005, 2008a; Davis 1985; Pierce 1996; Reguera 2007; Wachman 2005) or even as war propaganda (Herman 1988; Lauritzen 1988). It is very interesting how women and gender roles have been presented in stamps (Bushnell 2011). Other comparative studies include those on music and music-related topics, analysing how they create representations of national cultures (Covington and Brunn 2006); on the depiction of science scientists in terms of a national discourse or "popular iconography" (DeYoung 1986; Jones 2001; R. A. Jones 2004); and how stamps from different countries present narratives about disabled persons, their integration (or not) into their societies, and related policies (Swan et al. 2006).

Of special interest for my case are studies of how political transitions are reflected and narrated in postage stamps. The recent article by D. Hammet regarding the political messages and ideological implications in the stamps of South Africa, pre- and post-Apartheid is very important (Hammett 2012), as is Brunn's work, both the multi-case comparative study of post-socialist republics just mentioned (Brunn 2001) and his most recent contribution, a detailed analysis of the topics presented in the stamps issued by the Soviet Union vis-à-vis those of the post-soviet Russian Federation (Brunn 2011).

Single-case studies have been quite valuable, as they can tell us not only about depictions in stamps, but also how and why those depictions and topics were selected. The extremely thorough research by Siebertz (2005) on the use of postage stamps as propaganda means in different Iranian regimes, and by Navarro on the stamps of the Franco regime in Spain (Navarro 2009), are probably the most complete projects of this kind, both products of doctoral dissertations. Sadly, they have not yet been translated into English.

Shorter texts have been very important as well. An early work by Donald Reid on Egyptian stamps (Reid 1972) is not widely known, despite being one of the first serious academic attempts to use postage stamps for historical analysis. The core arguments of it would later be developed and presented in his much more known 1984 article (Reid 1984), which became the inspiration of the "new wave" of studies about stamps from the late 90's onwards. Such wave includes Igor Cusack's article on the stamps from Portugal and its colonies, and the ethnic, racial and ideological implications of their depiction, which has been one of the most influential writings on this topic (Cusack 2005), together with those by H. Dobson (2002, 2005) and D. Frewer (2002) about the Japanese case and the very complex political negotiations, debates and interests involved in the selection of stamp topics. Also, the diverse studies by by P.

Raento and S. Brunn (2005; 2006; 2008; also Raento 2009) have produced very insightful analyses of the stamps of Finland, mostly taking a semiotic approach. During their work, they were able to identify sixteen thematic categories of messages in Finnish stamps (2008, 2005) ranging from tourism to war.[22]

Van den Muijzenberg's study (2000) on the topics and political meanings of Philippine stamps, is very interesting and complete, particularly regarding the selection and representation of national heroes. Its limited distribution as a chapter in a locally-edited book has meant that it has received far less attention than it deserves. The same applies to Gounaris' (2003) research on Greek stamps and currency. The study by H. McQueen provides us with a critical insight on what kinds of persons, stereotypes and symbols have been chosen for Australian stamps − and which ones have been left out (McQueen 1988). More recent contributions explore new paths, such as stamps with sport or sport-related topics, and their relationship with particular ethnic, national and/or local identities, or local politics (Adedze 2012; Osmond 2008; Osmond and Phillips 2011).

Finally, there are case studies that look at stamps of specific moments of a single nation, for instance for stamps of Germany during the Nazi period (Lauritzen 1988), Perón's Argentina (Child 2008b) or Saddam Hussein's Iraq (Reid 1993). The use of very specific cases has sometimes limited the knowledge of otherwise very valuable studies, like the one by Hoisington (Hoisington 1972) on the stamps of Vichy France. Finally, there are some other studies dealing with somehow special but still telling cases, such as the 'underground' stamps of the *Solidarność* movement in Poland, which were used as means to contest the official narratives of the communist regime (Evans 1992).

In this sense, among specific members of certain academic circles, there is interest in stamps and their potential for research purposes. However, despite all the works mentioned above, the literature of this kind still remains scattered and surprisingly limited, especially when taking into account how many countries, periods, cases and/or topics could be analysed by means of stamps, and how many methodologies and academic disciplines could take advantage of this.

One problem faced by the scholarly literature in the field is how to classify messages on stamps. Of course, in the philatelic world, a number of classification systems and typologies

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[22] The complete list of topics is the following: 1) Tourism, Leisure, Recreation; 2) State; 3) Nature; 4) International References; 5) Health, Welfare, Well-being; 6) Economy; 7) Individuals, 8) Women, Children, Difference; 9) Arts & Culture; 10) Transport & Communications; 11) Folklore, Customs, Rituals; 12) War, Security, Weaponry; 13) Sports; 14) Education, Science, Research; 15) Religion; 16) Cartography (Raento and Brunn 2005, 2008)

have been developed – but of course, all of them are made having the collector's needs in mind. Therefore, these tend to be extremely technical, market-oriented, and focusing in characteristics of great importance for the philatelic community, but of little use in an academic research: perforation, paper quality, subtle differences in colour, even glue type…

In the existing academic works there is a preference for a semiotic reading of stamps. This imposes limitations on a further analysis of the ideological implications of the messages involved. For instance, the works by Raento and Brunn (Brunn 2001; Raento and Brunn 2008, 2005) are very important, yet some of the categories they use for stamp analysis are of limited use for my purposes (e.g. tourism) while some others should be treated in much more detail, or should be read in a completely different way –like those of 'state', 'individuals', or 'folklore'. In this sense, the typology developed by Kevane (2008) is much more useful for my case, and some of his categories were incorporated in my own typologies (see Ch. 4-5) even if in rather modified form.[23] Scholars have used other classifications, of course; yet many of these are made on a case-by-case basis, regarding very particular needs (see for instance Covington and Brunn 2006; Maisel 2010) or, quite the opposite, they are excessively general, like the very early work by Stoetzer (1953) – which nonetheless must be recognized as the first serious attempt to classify ideological and political messages in stamps.

Another related and very important criticism is that most studies tend to assume a very linear, top-down approach regarding stamp messages; that is, they assume stamps are reflecting the ideology and interests of the state and its political elites only (see Altman 1991; Bonacina 1998; Brunn 2001; Evans 1992; Lauritzen 1988; Raento and Brunn 2005). This hypothesis is plausible, of course. However, it is also plausible that the selection and production of topics and messages in stamps could be the outcome of much more complex processes, involving many actors and not only elites. In this way, in order to assert that depictions and messages in stamps are the result of a conscious and politically-driven effort by the state and/or an elite, it would be necessary to study how such messages were produced, who (and how) intervened in them, and the goals and interests involved. Very few studies address this question (Dobson 2002, 2005;

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[23] Kevane studies his sample using two typologies. The first ("broad") include "Collector's items for philatelic market", "International-oriented" and "National-oriented" stamps. The second typology (dealing with "National-oriented" stamps only) include stamps with messages about "Christianity", "Colonial Power", "Commemoratives and Political", "Development", "Ethnic", "Icons", "Multi-ethnic", "Political person", "Non-political person", "PanAfrican", "PanArab/PanMuslim", "Presidents" and "Women" (see Kevane 2008). Like Kevane, I will use two typologies to study my stamp sample. However, from the very beginning I am excluding those items made for the philatelic market only; then, my first typology is broader, including several other categories of ideological messages. Finally, my second typology is also focusing on nationalist-related messages, but it has been constructed using a different theoretical framework. Therefore, many of the final categories and the definitions used are different.

Frewer 2002; Navarro 2009; Siebertz 2005) and yet, their findings seem to confirm that the selection of topics and design of stamps is everything but linear: it is a very complex process indeed, involving several political and governmental actors, the interests and goals of whom must be conciliated.

A final criticism, which is very relevant for my case, is that most of the studies have taken postage stamps as the *object* of their research, but not as the *source* for it. In other words: the attention to stamps *per se* has precluded a more detailed analysis of the implications of messages in stamps. In this vein, a semiotic-based study of stamps can tell us a lot regarding stamps themselves, and their iconographies but it will not be able to explain the reasons for putting precisely those messages on stamps, instead of others.

In this sense, we need to look not just at the topics and messages presented in stamps, but at the political/ideological meanings and implications of such topics and messages. By using such political "readings" of stamps, classifying their messages accordingly, and then tracing the actors, processes and goals involved in their production, we will be able not merely to look at stamps but also to *use* them as extremely useful sources to analyse larger socio-political processes –in my case, the promotion of official national imaginaries.

Stamps as carriers of messages: the classic arguments

So far, the existing literature (see above) has focussed upon two principal features of postage stamps that could explain their ability to spread ideological messages: their *official character* on the one hand, their *international scope* on the other.[24] And there are certainly good reasons for these claims, as we will see next.

Official character

The first argument is quite straightforward, and it has been mentioned in the previous chapters: stamps have been long and universally recognized as official documents of a nation-state, in the same way as banknotes, passports, tax stamps, or official stationery. Such nature is now explicitly recognized by international organizations, including but not limited to UPU. This is not only because stamps display the names and sometimes the official national symbols of the issuing nation-state, but also because they have always been issued by specific governmental agencies, which exert a state-wide, legal monopoly on their production – a rule with very few

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[24] See for instance (Altman 1991; Brunn 2001; Deans and Dobson 2005; DeYoung 1986; Dobson 2002, 2005; Frewer 2002; Navarro 2009; Raento 2006; Raento and Brunn 2005, 2008; Schwarzenbach 1999).

exceptions.[25] Since its very inception, the international postal regime has been based, precisely, in the state monopoly of national postage services on the one hand, and the acknowledgment of postage stamps as official documents on the other.[26]

International scope

As stated above, in many cases stamps have been studied in combination with currency, particularly banknotes. There are some clear parallels, of course. However, one of the main characteristics of almost any national currency is, precisely, to be the standard means of exchange within a given national territory. Of course, exceptions to this are economic/monetary unions like the Eurozone or the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (East Caribbean dollar); also, some states choose to adopt a foreign currency due to economic hardships, to establish special zones where other currencies can be used (at borders, special touristic places, etc.) or just due to functionality reasons, like the use by some microstates of the currency of their larger neighbours.

Yet, the former are exceptions to the rule that each nation-state ought to have its own national currency, for its use as the legal means of exchange within its borders; and that such currency will be used almost exclusively there. In this sense, most currencies are both nationally and territorially circumscribed, and banknote and coin depictions are made having such national background and jurisdiction in mind (see Gilbert and Helleiner 1999; Helleiner 1997; also Pointon 1998).

Postage stamps are quite different in this respect. They are not only able, but are specifically designed to travel both within and beyond the borders of the issuing state. In this

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[25] Among the few cases of stamps issued by entities different than nation-states, are those early ones issued by colonization companies (e.g. East India Company), autonomous provinces, or foreign representations. However, most of them were issued for limited periods of time and thanks to special agreements. Nowadays, it is possible for territorial units of a given nation-state (states, provinces, etc.) to reach agreements with their central postal authority, so the latter will allow them to produce and issue stamps; however, such stamps will still be legally acknowledged as "national", so UPU will treat them as issued by the nation-state, not the sub-national entity. The same applies for some particular cases like Bosnia-Herzegovina, which counts as a country but has two completely independent postal administrations (Republika Srpska vs. Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) or to sui generis cases, like the United Nations or the Holy Sovereign Order of Malta, among some others.

[26] This state monopoly over postal services has been widely discussed in academia, think-tanks and international organizations since, at least, the seventies (e.g. Priest 1975) and until today. A particularly recurrent matter is the organizational reform of postal services: some specialists promote the creation of supranational postal institutions, while others claim for the complete privatization of all postal services; in fact, the European Union is very actively promoting the liberalization of the different public postage services of its members (see Crew and Kleindorfer 2006; EU Commission 1991; Montero Pascual 2005). Yet, the fact is that such mail service liberalization/privatization has been highly unequal among EU members. Some countries already reached a full privatization in their services, e.g. Deutsche Post / DHL in Germany. In many other cases, this has been a very complicated and slow process, even in those cases where agreements have been already signed (i.e. Crew et al. 2009). Furthermore, it is interesting that, even in the aforementioned case of Germany, the new, private company still works as a *de facto* monopoly.

sense, stamps are almost the only official document with intrinsic international scope (the other being passports and related travel documents). Of course, the user of postal services is obliged to utilize only the stamps of the country from which he/she is sending a letter. Yet, the fact is that those stamps, once glued and postmarked, will be valid for the entire journey of the letter, including the portions over foreign territory and until its final destination, wherever it is (see Ch. III).[27]

We can now appreciate the potential of stamps for spreading messages beyond the borders of the issuing state. For a given individual or family, and during most of the 20th century, it could be quite normal to receive letters from overseas, with their corresponding (foreign) stamps attached. In contrast, the same individual/family will probably face many more restrictions to access to foreign currencies, except maybe in some regions (borders, touristic zones) or in certain professions.

The international scope of postage stamps has been very clear not only to individuals, but also to those national authorities in charge of issuing stamps (Deans and Dobson 2005; Dobson 2002, 2005; also Hoyo 2012). In turn, this means that such authorities have strong incentives to look after the meanings and messages that their postage stamps carry carefully, particularly those regarding symbols, public figures and/or historical developments (battles, territories, war heroes...) which can be of a very sensitive nature for other nation-states and populations abroad. That is the reason why many states have guidelines for stamp design that explicitly forbid topics that might create unrest in another state (see for instance Dobson 2005).

Despite these controls, examples of international outrage, even diplomatic incidents caused by depictions in stamps are not uncommon in postal and international history. The UPU itself has been involved in settling many such disagreements and claims (see Ch. III). Some of these debates are unintended, e.g. stamps with depictions or messages that can take different, even opposite meanings depending on the socio-cultural context. For instance, in 2005 a stamp series was issued in Mexico to honour local comics. Five stamps within this series were devoted to *Memín Pingüín,* a classic among Mexican comics. Its story is built around a Cuban-Mexican boy, who is a kind of mischievous permanent hero and a model of ingenuity, kindness and

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[27] There have been postage stamps series that were explicitly and legally limited for use in internal or international mail. However, these are not very common. There is a 'softer', but more relevant factor in this respect: postal rates can define which particular stamps are used for internal or external services, as the natural market of the cheapest ones is the mail to be sent within the country itself, while the most expensive stamps will probably be used for international services only. In this sense, the value can be a strong determinant in the actual circulation of specific stamps (Nuessel and Cicogna 1992). However, it is also true that you can use several, even dozens of low-value stamps to pay for an international letter – a fact that in postal history is not as uncommon as we could think, in many cases resulting from stamp supply shortages, or inflation periods.

righteousness, despite the difficulties he and his mother face due, first, their disadvantaged social conditions and, second, the mistreatment and even openly racist attitudes evidenced by some other characters.

Nevertheless, it is also evident that *Memín* is drawn in a very stereotypical way, especially regarding his ethnic/racial and cultural features (see Ill. 3). When these stamps were issued they provoked a wave of outrage in the United States, especially but not exclusively among African-American and immigrant organizations. High-profile figures like Rev. Jesse Jackson became involved, publicly demanding the US government to press Mexico to withdraw these stamps and to issue a formal apology. Mexican postal officers, public intellectuals and even the President's speaker replied by arguing that, within Mexican society, Memín is in fact a kind of role model for children's behavior, even promoted in schools and families as such. Yet this did

Ill. 3 - Two of the "Comics in Mexico" series, featuring *Memín Pingüín* [WNS MX014.05 & 16.05]

little to stop the outcry (see for instance Fears 2005; Associated Press 2005; Krauze 2005; Child 2008a, 1-2). The stamps were not retired despite the protest, and in fact the scandal made them highly valued pieces for collectors.
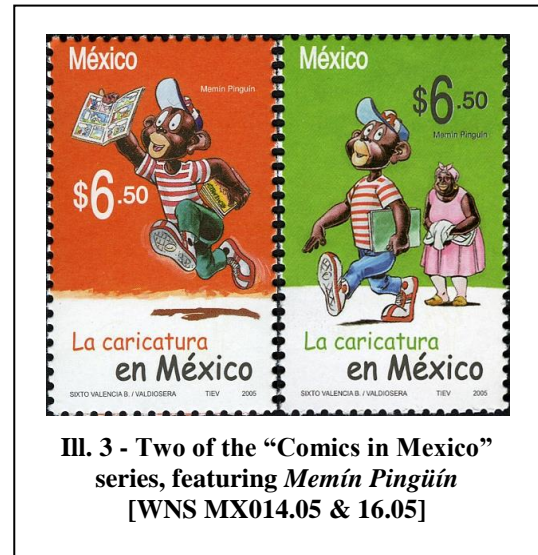
But not all are incidents and 'honest mistakes'. In fact, many stamps have been openly utilized to send messages directed to specific foreign states and populations. Those from Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution (see in this respect Siebertz 2005) are classic examples of such directed international propaganda, as the examples in Ill. 4 make clear. Yet they are not the only ones. This topic will be analysed in much more detail later; for now, it is enough to note that the state institutions involved in the design and distribution of stamps, are well aware of their international scope, and so try to manage both the advantages and risks offered by stamps in terms of spreading messages abroad.

Ill. 4 - Post-1979 Iran stamps. Left to right:
1980, "Let us liberate Jerusalem" [Scott 2064]; two commemorative stamps for the takeover
of the US 'Spy Den' (the Embassy), issued 1983 and 1989 [2139, 2396];
1988, bombing of schools by "the Zionist" regime of Iraq [2307]

Stamps as carriers of messages: further reasons and factors

The official character and international scope of stamps have been, in one way or another, already singled out by several scholars (see "state of the art" in Ch. III). Yet, we can detect further reasons to explain the use of postage stamps to spread ideological messages. Some of them have been alluded to by single authors, while others are mine.[28]

Straightforward but versatile

First and rather obviously, when explaining the ability of stamps to carry messages, we should take into account their physical characteristics. After all, factors as simple as the size (that is, the available printing surface) and production numbers are quite determinant for the type and amount of information that stamps can carry. Furthermore, the processes and patterns that are followed in stamp production, usage and distribution have an impact not just on messages in stamps, but also on the 'exposure' that individuals can experience to such messages.

On the one hand, the physical characteristics of stamps are relevant, insofar as they put special demands on the designer as well as on the nature of messages sent. For instance, most banknotes offer a quite large space to print designs and slogans and, what is more, this can be done on the two sides of the notes. In contrast, postage stamps are both far smaller in size and can be printed on one side only. This poses a serious limitation not only for the quantity of messages and depictions that can be placed on stamps, but also poses some technical restrictions

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[28] Some basic arguments of these chapter were presented in (Hoyo 2010a).

regarding their quality: for instance, some complex or very detailed designs are just unfit for the small area of a stamp (Scott 1995).[29]

Yet, this "small area" restriction also has one advantageous consequence: it forces designers to be concise, clear and direct when presenting meanings and messages (Scott 1995; also CdeM Designer 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010). They need to present such messages by means of easily recognizable symbols, distinct images and short texts, clearly emphasizing or "telescoping in" the central topic of the stamp (Osmond and Phillips 2011). Moreover, the small area of stamps force the designer to rely mostly upon images, not texts. Images are extremely useful when simplifying ideas and/or presenting stereotypes, from "us" but especially of "the other". (See for instance Burke 2001, 129-131). As Scott (1995, 13) correctly states, "the stamp probably has a more concentrated ideological density per square centimetre that any other cultural form". Postage stamps tend to carry *very concise, straightforward messages*.

On the other hand, we must be aware that stamps can be issued in large series, and each of such series can include diverse stamps of different face values. In fact, stamp series comprising dozens of individual values, each presenting a different design, are extremely common. Stamps can also be issued at diverse particular moments, commemorations for instance. This multiplies the number of different messages sent through stamps. By contrast, banknotes have a limited number of denominations available (from six to eight, generally) and commemorative currencies, whether banknotes or coins, are issued only for very special occasions as their production is rather complex and expensive.

It is true, as Hymans (2004, 7) points out, that banknotes should be regularly updated due to both inflation and forgery attempts. Yet, the same applies to stamps. Furthermore, due to the material they are made of, coins have a very limited chromatic range and their designs tend to be quite simple. By contrast, the number of completely new stamp series issued each year in any country, far surpasses the issues of any new currency series in it. In this way, and despite their small size, stamps are able not only to carry a number of different iconographies and topics, but also do so for a large number of occasions, therefore being more *versatile* as means to carry messages – especially when compared with currency.

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[29] This was mentioned several times by those in charge of the management and actual design of stamps, during the interviews performed in Mexico City. See (CdeM Designer 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010).

As argued above, the Industrial Revolution and the development of communications were determinant in the creation of a centralized and monopolistic postal system for each nation-state. This was further strengthened by the creation of an international postal system (headed by UPU) explicitly based on such an arrangement. In this sense, the territories covered by the central postal system became almost synonymous with the territory of the state itself: even the most isolated corners of the nation were supposed to be reachable by postal routes.

Just as important as the geographical scope of the national postal system was its social and local penetration. Postal offices were set up everywhere in the state; not only the capital and cities, but every town was eager to have at least one. In the smallest settlements, an appointed local representative (the store owner, the local priest...) was in charge of the postal services, e.g. collecting mail from the locals and receiving the incoming mail from the postman, who arrived according to specific schedules. Even in the most isolated and sparsely populated areas, where normal postal offices or representatives were unavailable or impractical, postal services were delivered first by means of carriages, and later by the introduction of mobile post offices in trains, buses and even ships.

The postal system was therefore not only instrumental in the creation of supra-local identities; it was also essential for the promotion and expansion of central institutions. For some regions, the postal service (in any of its forms) was among the first, if not the very first institution of the central state that was regularly present. In turn, postmen were representatives of such central authority, and so they were legally protected and invested with some powers (Bahamonde et al. 1993; Caizzi 1993; John 1995; Campbell-Smith 2011).[30]

It can rightfully be said that the postal system was not just a symbol or consequence of the construction of a supra-local identity, but actually an active promoter of it. As a matter of fact, the postal system and its representatives (right from the main postal office to the local one, as well as the mailman himself) have been recognized as one of the first, most basic, direct and visible expressions of a central ('national') state authority, organizing and controlling the flux of written communications over certain 'common' territory, as well as with other 'foreign' territories beyond, and enabling the common persons to reach other individuals beyond his/her immediate geographical and social sphere. In this sense, we can think of the central postal system as playing a key role in the creation of an imagined national community (see for instance

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[30] The role of postal systems in the creation of supra-local identities is not only reflected in the academic literature. It has also been used in fiction and even for Hollywood films (i.e. David Brin's 1985 novel *The Postman* and the 1997 film adaption of the same name).

John 1995, 369; Daunton 1985), together with the railway (Robbins 1998, 285; Hobsbawm 1987, 27). The central postal system was an institution of primary relevance in the creation of a national community, or at least in allowing such community to be imagined.

Finally, there is an essential feature of the mail system that sets it apart from many other governmental institutions. Particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, most central state agencies and representatives that individuals would be in contact with, were of mostly normative/repressive nature (police, army, judiciary, tax collecting…) but in contrast, the post office and its personnel were delivering a *public service*, doing it on-site and face-to-face with citizens;[31] and by means of a payment for each service, so the institution was responsible to the 'customer' for the adequate delivery of services and products.[32] We can think of the central mail system as one of the first modern, contract-based public service institutions.

These reasons made the postal office to become a truly public place; an everyday point of contact between the common citizens and a central state institution that supplied them with an essential service, and allowed them to interact closely. In sum, through its activities, the modern postal system became *a public institution of national (or proto-national) character* in both its geographical extension and its everyday contact with citizens; and together with the postman himself, postage stamps became its symbols.

...yet (relatively) individual

Finally, we must acknowledge that, in order to be useful propaganda means, stamps should have some significance for individuals. This "impact" factor can be extremely difficult to assess, and enormously variable across populations. Yet, we can still point at some general reasons for stamps being not only noticeable, but relevant for the life of common individuals.

The first is regarding the attention given to stamps and their depictions. We can argue, even if it can be difficult to prove, that in everyday life, stamps deserve at least some degree of acknowledgment, particularly among those individuals receiving mail. We can better explain this point, once again, by comparing stamps with banknotes and coins. In their everyday use, currency is anything but personal: most persons, when receiving any banknote or coin, will just quickly check its value, then store it or exchange it again in a very automatic and impersonal

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[31] As a matter of fact, this consideration of the posts as a public service was one of the main arguments used to justify the introduction and expansion of the penny postage. See (Golden 2009, 43-66).

[32] It is important to note that postal offices became truly public places, having a key role in shaping individual and social relations at the local level. Wherever one post office was created, it quickly became a local meeting point, a "hub of social and economic activity" (Golden 2009, 107-112) where large numbers of persons and social groups gathered.

way. In contrast, upon receiving a letter, the same person will probably read the name of the sender fist, then will take a look at the stamp –especially if it shows colourful, appealing designs or text messages of some attention-capturing nature. In this way, we can argue that (in very general terms) stamps can be objects that are not as unnoticed as, let's say, the small change we get in the store.

Furthermore, stamps can be issued in many different series, and each series can comprise a number of designs; such designs can be easily changed or adapted over time; and new stamps and designs can be created in quite brief periods. All this gives stamps a greater variety that leads to further attention by the postal audiences. In this way, stamps are objects that, for most people, should merit at least some attention.[33]

A final argument for the personal character of stamps is concerns the letters they are glued to. We must acknowledge that a letter is not just a piece of paper with some text written. It was, and still is, a very important channel for private communications, where individuals, or even whole families, have shared experiences and memories, exchanged points of view, or conveyed intimate thoughts. Personal letters are, so to say, very personal; and postage stamps were the means to have such communications. What is more, any particular stamp is intended to be used only once, affixed to a letter sent to a specific person, and then cancelled by means of a seal – so becoming an integral and permanent part of such a document.[34]

In this sense, and in spite of their massive production, in most cases stamps enjoy some attention, or even close observation by postal users, particularly addressees. They are varied and appealing enough to attract further interest on the part of the users. Stamps also acquire a rather imprecise, albeit noticeable, individual character once they are affixed to that letter. In this sense, and particularly when compared to currency, stamps have a *relatively personal character.*

Therefore: why stamps?

In sum, there are at least six features enabling stamps to become effective propaganda means. They are small but official documents issued by a nation-state, which are meant to travel both within and beyond the borders of the state. This give them (1) their official character and (2) their international scope. Then, the physical characteristics of stamps will permit (or rather require) them to present very concise, clear, and straightforward messages. Yet at the same time, the fact that stamps are issued in large series, possibly comprising several stamps each, allows

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[33] I am grateful to Prof. Rainer Bauböck for this observation.

[34] In many cases, the stamp used shares the destiny of its letter and envelope: a cabinet, a personal archive, or a garbage bin. In contrast, banknotes are meant to be used again and again, and by a number of anonymous persons.

for the creation of a multiplicity of these messages. This combination of (3) overall versatility with (4) individual concision can be a significant advantage when spreading ideological or nationalist messages.

Furthermore, stamps are intimately linked with a central and mostly monopolistic institution of the state, which extends through all the national territory and delivers a key service directly to all its inhabitants. This makes stamps to be (5) a symbol of a central authority that oversees the nation and connects the members of it, everywhere within its borders. Finally, not only because of their designs, but also due to (6) their relative personal character, for instance by being associated to individual/family messages, stamps attract attention among the users. In this way, those little pieces of paper are not only able to carry messages, but also to make people pay attention to them.

CHAPTER IV:

ANALYSIS OF A POSTAGE STAMP SAMPLE

In the previous chapter, we discussed the historical development of the postage stamp, and the reasons for it to be a carrier of ideological messages. But then, are stamps really used for that goal? And, if that is the case, which ideologies are more frequently alluded to?

This chapter will address these questions. For that I studied a random sample of postage stamps issued between 1909 and 2009. Such sample was both designed and repeatedly refined to include only stamps that were considered as valid for the purposes of my analysis, according to the methodological criteria explained below. Then, the selected stamps were analysed by means of a first typology, which comprised 10 analytical categories – which will also be explained. Finally, I will offer the results as well as some conclusions of the analysis.

A word about sources

The number of stamps issued around the world every year is so large, that none but the most specialized philatelic organization and/or private companies can afford to track it. It is probable that the only comprehensive source for world stamps would be the UPU archives, as all nations are theoretically obliged to send to its headquarters in Bern a specimen of every stamp they issue. Yet, as strange as it might appear, UPU did not produce an international catalogue of stamps until very recently, known as the WNS (World Association for the Development of Philately and Universal Postal Union 2011b).[35] It has the great advantage of being on-line and offering free access, and it also only lists UPU-validated stamps; however, it is limited to those issued from 01 Jan 2002 onwards and even for this period the catalogue is fairly incomplete (World Association for the Development of Philately and Universal Postal Union 2011a).

Philatelic catalogues, in turn, have the advantage of being very reliable. The international philatelic community is extremely careful and demanding, so the main commercial world stamp catalogues like Scott's, Stanley-Gibbons or Michel are very detailed and

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[35] According to its website, "Developed by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP), the WADP Numbering System (WNS) was introduced on 1 January 2002 with the aim of creating a database of all authentic postage stamps issued by UPU member countries and territories on or after that date". (World Association for the Development of Philately and Universal Postal Union 2011a)

trustworthy as sources, despite some important differences among them, for instance in terms of coverage and classification systems.

I choose as the main source for my stamp sample the Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue 2011 (Scott Publishing 2010). The rationale for selecting it among other universal catalogues was that Scott's takes a more restrictive stance regarding "bogus" stamps – that is, items that are primarily oriented towards to the collector community, being in fact souvenirs that cannot be considered postage stamps in any serious way. This was very important for my research, as I am focusing upon stamps of real postal use; so important, indeed, that I run a second selection by myself, according to some criteria as explained below.

In any case, Scott's catalogue has already been used, and with success, by other scholars working on the topic (e.g. Brunn 2011; Child 2008a). Yet I also used other catalogues, such as the abovementioned WSP, as well as Stanley-Gibbons ((Stanley Gibbons Ltd 2011) and Michel (MICHEL 2011) as supporting sources both to judge the "real postal use" of an item and to gain more information about it. Finally, some specialized philatelic sources, both paper-based and online, were consulted when necessary (e.g. Stampedia Project 2012).

However, the use of philatelic catalogues as main sources for an academic research implied some important methodological problems, which we should be well aware of. Such catalogues are obviously designed to fulfil the needs of the philatelic community – that is, to enable identification, classification and valuation of philatelic materials. For such task they employ criteria and classifications that are not really relevant for my purposes, such as perforation type, quality condition, or even glue and watermark differences. They also register subtle differences regarding the same basic design, like slight colour shade variations, or even minuscule graphic modifications invisible to everyone but the most devoted specialist. Moreover, most catalogues (even Scott's) also list items and materials that are not postage stamps *per se*, as we will see soon.

Being devoted to philatelic markets, Scott's does not take into account some facts that are basic, even common-sense for my research. For instance, the stamps are arranged according to issuing country, but what counts as a "country" can be very surprising. In this vein, all stamps issued by the Tsarist Russian empire, the modern Russian Federation, *and* the USSR are listed as issued by "Russia". Current stamps from the Czech republic still appear under the name "Czechoslovakia". Furthermore, the catalogues make no real distinction between stamps issued by different political regimes, no matter how different they are; while stamps issued by former colonial empires are frequently listed under the names of the modern, independent ex-colonies

(e.g. Angola appears as issuing stamps long before being independent, while in fact these stamps were issued by Portugal).

For these reasons, the use of philatelic catalogues demanded a careful, case-by-case examination of the individual items listed, to determine the actual country issuing the stamp. For the sample, I resolved this not only by checking basic differences (e.g. Czech Republic vs. Czechoslovakia, colonial Angola vs. independent Angola) but also by trying to establish a very basic differentiation between political regimes. For example, the Iran of the Shah is really not the same as the Iran of the Ayatollahs or Cuba before and during Castroism.[36]

A second, important consequence of using philatelic catalogues, Scott included, is that they do not present images of all the stamps listed. In a number of cases, when a given stamp series includes a large number of individual designs, all regarding the same basic topic (e.g. a 10-stamp series about 'our cities', each presenting a different one) then, in many cases catalogues present the image of just one of those stamps – generally the first of the series, a representative one, or the most visually attractive. The other individual stamps within that series are just briefly described as single-line text entries, and given a classification number. Therefore, even if a catalogue lists many stamps, the number of stamp *images* is far less. This had an impact on my sample, since what I need for analysis are, precisely, images. This forced me to work with only those stamps that Scott's had previously selected to be displayed.

We must acknowledge that probably there is no catalogue offering the images of *all* stamps issued in the world since the Penny Black. Even with the aforementioned limitations, Scott's physical catalogue (Scott Publishing 2010) comprises six volumes, with more than 1,000 pages each, while just those stamps issued by Latin American countries since 1843 total "over 50,000, with around 20,000 different designs" (Child 2008a, 4). As a matter of fact, even some country-specific catalogues cannot display all the images the stamps issued by that single country.

A final, yet very important consequence of using philatelic sources for my research is the risk of sample bias. The typical philatelic classification is based on stamp series *issued*, while not taking much into account the distribution or real usage of such series and their individual

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[36] Again, this regime differentiation was extremely basic. I just do not have the capacity to differentiate between the political regimes of all countries during the 20th century. So, as a rule of thumb, I made such a differentiation only when it was necessary for sample purposes, and evident from the political and historical points of view: e.g. when there was a revolution or at least, a political crisis so deep, that it transformed the ideological, social and/or territorial structure of a whole state –e.g. leading to independence, a new political system (kingdom to republic, for instance) or provoked a shift in alignments during the Cold War.

stamps.[37] Therefore, series issued for brief periods only, or having a limited print run, are listed side by side with series printed by the thousands, and lasting years or even decades. In simple words: *commemorative stamps may be overrepresented vis-à-vis ordinary stamps* (further details of this will be given next). This is important because, due to their very nature, commemorative series are far more prone to ideological influences.[38]

This is an intrinsic shortcoming of the sample. The only way to overcome this would be to account for the proportion of commemorative versus ordinary series, for all series of every country, and for any given point in time, and not taking into account the issuing, but the real usage of such stamps (that is, their distribution to postal users). Sadly, even the most advanced philatelic catalogues and associations cannot offer that information; in fact, for many countries it simply does not exist.

Nevertheless, it should be clear that this research is neither about how many stamps were available at a given moment, nor about commemorative vs. ordinary series ratio. In fact, as I have insisted before, this research is not even about stamps *per se*. It is about using stamps in research on the diffusion of official national imaginaries. Therefore we only need to determine *if,* and *how,* stamps are actually carrying messages of the kind and, if that is the case, how political and institutional actors are trying to influence those messages. For that, philatelic catalogues such as Scott's (Scott Publishing 2010), albeit imperfect, are still the best sources available.

To produce a valid, random sample of stamps, I first generated four long, independent series of random values,[39] which then were combined to produce 1,000 unique numerical codes, each corresponding to a given "postal item" in Scott's catalogue. Each of these would then be located, registered, and evaluated, in order to qualify it as a "valid stamp for analysis" or not, according to the criteria detailed in the next sections. After that, such "valid stamps", which accounted for 69.10% of the sample, were analysed in their depictions and messages, looking for ideological influences or meanings.

Postal authorities and stamps selected

A first step in the selection of valid stamps concerned the issuing postal authorities. There have been a number of entities, of every possible kind, that have issued postage stamps or similar

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[37] The value that a stamp reaches in the philatelic market is also not a reliable indicator at all to judge how much a given stamp circulated. Such value depends on a number of factors, including aesthetic ones, and also measures the availability of the stamp today, not when it was originally issued.

[38] Regarding commemorations and their role on nationalism, see for instance (Spillman 1997; Bucur and Wingfield 2001)

[39] This was made by using the RANDOM function in Microsoft Excel.

items. In fact, most philatelic catalogues include stamps issued by entities different from a nation-state, such as international organizations, private colonization companies, diplomatic offices abroad, colonies...

For the sake of consistency and given the focus of my research, in my analysis I considered only those stamps that complied with two general conditions. The first was that they should be issued by postal authorities that belong to any of the following groups:

1. Current Universal Postal Union members (see Universal Postal Union 2011b) and their predecessor states;

2. Colonies of a UPU member nation-state, and territories with similar status;[40]

3. Constituent parts of a UPU member nation-state, which were entitled by it to issue their own stamps.[41]

A second general condition was that such postal authorities should have a stable population of at least 100,000 inhabitants. The rationale for this population threshold is that, very frequently, very small countries and territories issue stamps in disproportionately large numbers – a fact that cannot be explained except by the desire to profit from collectors. An extreme example of this practice is Tristan da Cunha, which issues several series per year, sometimes totaling dozens of stamps, despite having less than 300 inhabitants in total. Others are stamps issued by real, national authorities (e.g. UK, Australia) but arguably for use in the Antarctic territories, even if there is no permanent population there. Many other examples exists. Yet, even in the case that any of such stamps were effectively used in mail (and there are cases) it seems evident that the number of people that ever received or saw a letter from such sparsely populated territories, is extremely limited.

A single exception was made regarding general conditions 1 and 2. The United Nations, which evidently does not comply with any, has been granted a special treatment by UPU regarding the validity of its stamps for actual mail purposes (as mentioned in Ch. III). Therefore,

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[40] For example, overseas dependences and non-self-governing territories, protectorates, trusteeships, mandates, occupation zones, and 'overseas territories' (UK). Stamps issued in the metropolis, but made for exclusive use of any of these zones, were also counted.

[41] This includes autonomous provinces or territories; the constituent states of a federation or confederation; self-governing overseas dominions (Aruba, Curazao, Azores, Madeira, Greenland…) as well as those considered as integral part of a given nation (i.e. Guyana, Réunion, Tahiti… for France); *British Crown Dependences*, which are directly subjected to the King or Queen of England, but are not formally part of the United Kingdom; or any other territories enjoying a similar degree of autonomy, and that have been granted the right to issue their own stamps by central authorities. However, it is important that such local issues are still regarded as "national" ones for most legal and UPU purposes – for instance, in terms of circulation and international recognition.

it was also included as a valid postal authority within the sample. Moreover, the UN postal services are busy in fact, in good degree thanks to the tourists sending letters from UN headquarters.[42]

The limits set above excluded several postal authorities, not all recognized, but many of them included in Scott's. Exclusions included *de facto* independent regimes, as well as states with limited international recognition (e.g. the Republic of China, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) which, not being part of UPU, face serious limitations for the recognition of their stamps as valid for mail services, particularly international ones. Also excluded were several small- and microstates (Vatican, San Marino, many island nations) and sparsely populated territories, as noted above. These limits help to ensure that the stamps included in the sample, are those with more probability of being actually used and seen by postal users – a topic that will be addressed further now.

Types of stamps studied

A second step in sample selection regarded stamp type. As any collector can attest, there are several types of stamps and philatelic items in the world; however, as this research deals with the creation and diffusion of national imaginaries, I need to consider only those stamps that complied with a "use and availability" criterion: that is, the actual *use of such stamps for postal services* as well as their *availability for the general public*.

At first sight, this may seem a platitude; but this is not so. As we will see, there are several types of "postage" stamps that do not have postage as their main role; quite a few cannot even be used for that purpose, and some are not even available in the country that (supposedly) is issuing them. Then, there are other types of stamps that in fact are used for postal services, but are limited to specific audiences or fulfil specific roles within the postal system, so the common citizen will seldom (if ever) see one of them.[43]

In sum: the postage stamps I considered in my sample were those that the common citizen would normally acquire and use for standard mail services in the postal offices of the issuing country, or would normally receive in incoming mail. In concrete terms, the stamps selected for analysis were of any or a combination of the following types:

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[42] Arguably, the UN is the only recognized postal authority whose mail is exclusively international; the Vatican (a formal UPU member) could be another instance. In contrast however, even microstates such as San Marino had working internal mail services.

[43] There are some other "postal items" listed in philatelic catalogues, but that are not relevant for my case, such as modern personalized stamps, marks of stamping machines, postal stationery, etc.. These were not counted among "valid stamps for analysis" – see "A word about sources" above, last paragraph.

a) Stamps of the *ordinary, commemorative or special* series,

b) *Postal, semi-postal and postal tax* stamps,

c) *Parcel* stamps of any kind;

d) *Special Delivery* stamps (i.e. for expedited services, early morning, 24hrs. etc.)

e) *Overprinted* stamps.

Ordinary, commemorative and special series

Together, these three categories: ordinary, commemorative and special stamps, constitute the bulk of postage stamps in the world, and they are, by far, the ones most used for mail envelopes.

Yet in strict postal service terms, the most important of these are the *ordinary series,* also known as "definitives", "permanents", or "regulars". These are the quintessential postage stamps, completely devoted to the postal service, and the ones that any postal office, mailman or retailer should have at hand anytime. These are also the very first stamps produced: the Penny Black and most of its successors were what today would be considered ordinaries.

A typical ordinary series includes several individual stamps, each in a different denomination according to the postal rates in turn. Furthermore, ordinary series are issued both in massive quantities and for long periods (years or even decades) while suffering only minor modifications during that period, like value adjustments, small graphic changes, or the inclusion of new designs in the same series – mostly to include new postal rates.

Regarding their topics and visual attributes, ordinary series can be divided into two subtypes. In the first, all stamps of the series use the same basic iconography, with very minor modifications. A prototypical case is the 1970-1980 "King Baudouin" series issued by Belgium (see below, Ill. 5) which finally comprised more than 40 stamps, all presenting the same basic royal head, being different only in their value, colour, and in some adjustments on the King's portrait.

Ill. 5 - Examples of ordinary series.
Left: Two stamps of the first "King Baudouin" series of Belgium.
Above: Some stamps of the "Mexico Exporta" series.
[(Hoyo)]

A second subtype is when the ordinary series is devoted to a common topic and follows some general patterns, but each particular stamp shows a different example, design or aspect of it. A classic case is the "*México Exporta*" series, in use for almost two decades (1975-1993), which promoted commodities produced and exported by Mexico. The number of individual stamps in this series reached several dozen (Hill 2008; also Scott Publishing 2010, vol. IV) and its motifs ranged from agricultural products like tomatoes, via the (inescapable) tequila, to heavy-industry products like oil duct valves.

Commemorative series are a "newer" type of stamps. It is generally accepted that the first was issued by Peru in 1871, to mark the 20th anniversary of the first railway of the country (Child 2008a, 47; 1991, 25) even if there are some discussions in this respect. Yet in any case, after their invention, they have been intensively used in postal services. As their name indicates, the main characteristic of commemoratives is that they are issued to mark specific events and celebrations. Because of this, they are issued for far shorter periods and in fewer numbers than those of the ordinary series; furthermore, each commemorative series tends to include a smaller number of individual stamps, typically two to four, but in many cases, the series comprise just a single stamp.

Commemorative stamps are of three subtypes. Some are issued to mark a particular anniversary of a given historical event (it, its 1st, 25th or 50th anniversary, centennials....). Some others are issued yearly, for events happening in a cyclical form (Christmas, May 5th, Party Day...) while a final subtype are those stamps commemorating an event that is currently happening, but will take place only once, for instance the "Anti-Apartheid Year" (held in 1978) or an international congress on a certain topic that is being held in the issuing country. Regarding

Ill. 6 - Examples of commemorative postage stamps. From left to right:
6th Anniversary of the Constitution, 1981 [Cape Verde 430]; Christmas 1984 [Colombia 938];
Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) [Pakistan 971]; Polish Armed Forces at Tobruk, 50th
Anniversary [Poland 3058]

their design, these stamps not only indicate the event or topic celebrated, but most of them also offer some extra information, whether in graphic, textual and/or symbolic form. Therefore, commemorative stamps tend to be iconographically much richer than ordinary series (see Ill. 6).

Finally, the *special* series are a rather general category of postage stamps, and the boundaries with the both ordinaries and commemoratives can be blurred. On the one hand, many special series comprise more individual stamps that the average commemorative series. Sometimes they are issued during longer periods (whether continuously or not) as well as in larger numbers, therefore being very much akin to a "small" ordinary series. On the other hand, sometimes they depict or reference topics almost as if celebrating them, or are issued with a rather irregular temporality, so being in this respect close to commemoratives. Not surprisingly, they are a matter of philatelic debate and some philatelists just avoid using this category altogether.

However, such "neither-commemorative-nor-ordinary" stamps are quite important for my case. So I will define as "special" those stamps that are devoted to specific topics (rather than dates or events) and are not meant to supplant the ordinary series, but to coexist with them for shorter periods (from some months to ca. two years).

Special series have the advantage that the issuer can "make a point" without the need of waiting for specific celebrations or occasions to take place. They can also present particular topics deemed important, but not suitable for having a full ordinary series. Finally, special stamps are also very suitable for addressing the individual in a very direct form, for instance by promoting some personal conduct (see Ill. 7).
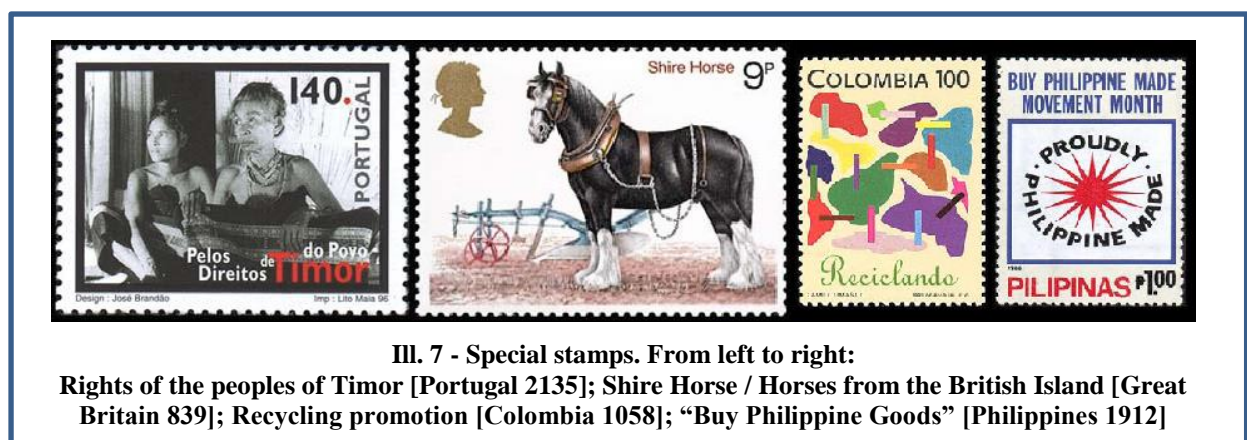
Ill. 7 - Special stamps. From left to right:
Rights of the peoples of Timor [Portugal 2135]; Shire Horse / Horses from the British Island [Great Britain 839]; Recycling promotion [Colombia 1058]; "Buy Philippine Goods" [Philippines 1912]

Other types included

Further types of stamps exist which are relevant for my research. Two, quite common ones are the "semi-postal" and "postal tax" stamps. In both cases, they charge the customer an extra amount, which is devoted to purposes different from the payment of postal expenses. Most commonly, this is to support the work of humanitarian organizations; however, they have also been used to raise funds in case of war, national emergencies, or to support particular projects (see Ill. 8). The basic difference between semi postal and postal tax stamps is that the former are optional (as the customer can ask for a different stamp without the extra fee) while the postal tax stamps are of compulsory use, as the letter cannot be sent without both the standard postage and the postal tax stamps glued to it.

Ill. 8 – Semi-postal and postal tax stamps. From left to right:
Annunciation. Surtax for child welfare (1983,) [Malta B48, semi-postal];
"Assistance to the heroic defenders of Madrid" (1938) [Spain/Issues of the Republic B106, semi-postal];
"Pro-City of the Children (1999) [Costa Rica RA118, tax stamp]
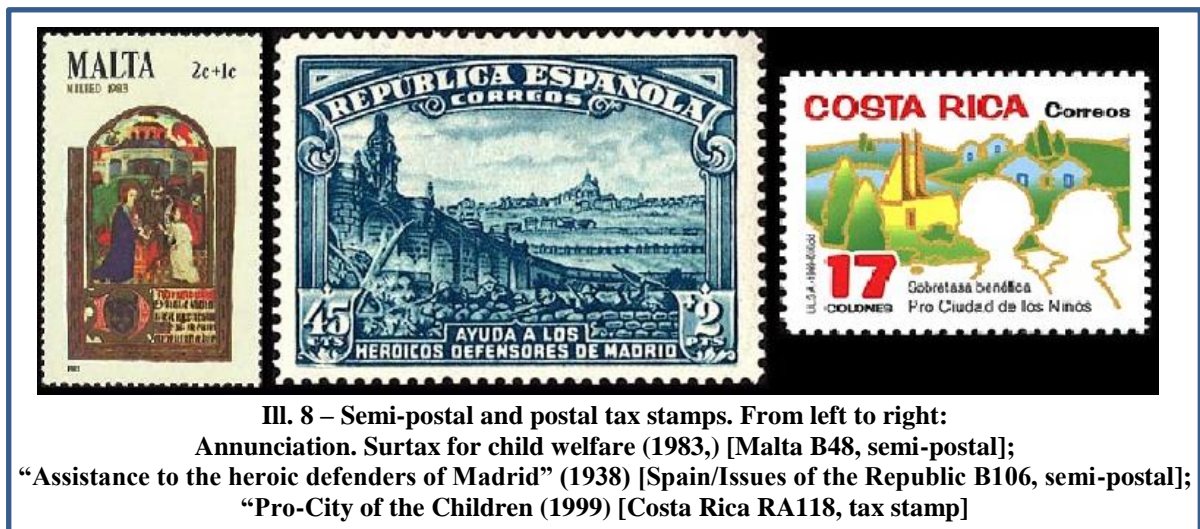
A further category includes those stamps issued to pay for the use of specific mail transportation means. Airmail stamps are the most common. In their beginnings, airmail services were restricted and quite expensive, so special stamps were designed for these, with higher values and clear "air mail" indications. Yet, as air transportation became common, so did airmail services, to the point that normally all mail will be sent in this way except for very local mail. Therefore airmail stamps are hardly seen anymore.

However, in postal history other means of transportation were used as well (see Ill. 9) so there are some examples of stamps for steamship, train, Zeppelin, pneumatic tube, postal rocket or even submarine mail services (see for instance García 1988).
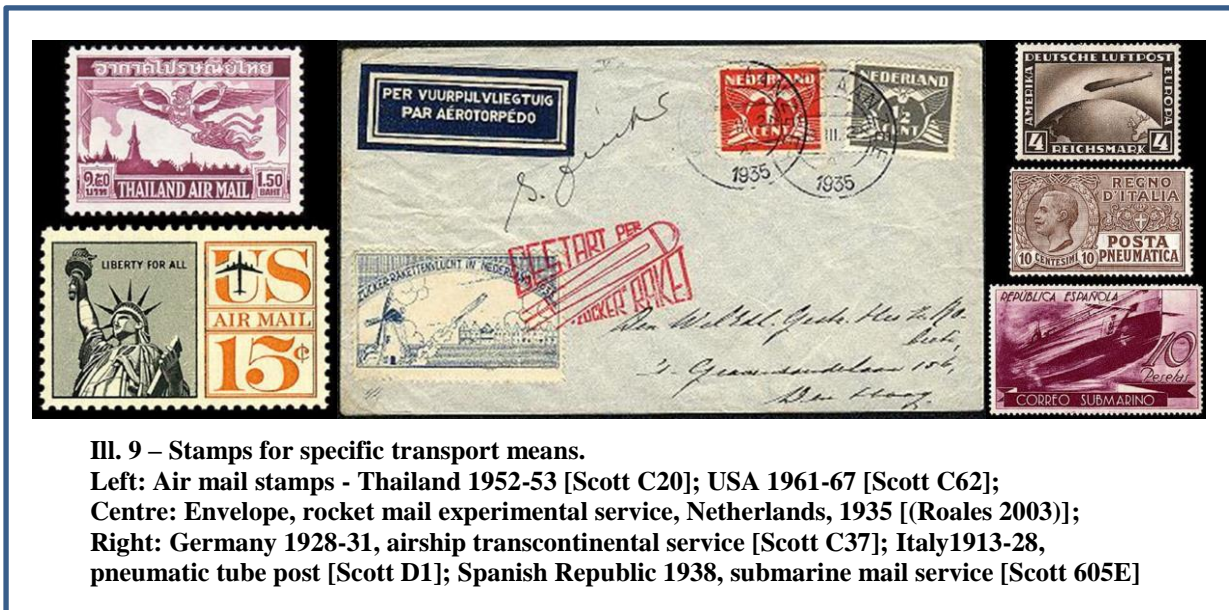
Ill. 9 – Stamps for specific transport means.
Left: Air mail stamps - Thailand 1952-53 [Scott C20]; USA 1961-67 [Scott C62];
Centre: Envelope, rocket mail experimental service, Netherlands, 1935 [(Roales 2003)];
Right: Germany 1928-31, airship transcontinental service [Scott C37]; Italy1913-28,
pneumatic tube post [Scott D1]; Spanish Republic 1938, submarine mail service [Scott 605E]

Meanwhile, parcel stamps were used to send packages, while special delivery stamps or similar stamps were used for urgent matters (see Ill. 10) I included these in the sample as they complied with the "postal use & general availability" criteria set above. However, these are not as common because, in many cases, normal stamps of higher value were used, together with adhesive labels with instructions (e.g. "expedite", "priority", etc.).

Ill. 10 - Parcel and special delivery stamps.
Left: Parcel post stamp, French Protectorate of Morocco, 1917 [Scott, French Morocco Q1].
Upper right: "Double" Parcel post stamp from Italian Somaliland, 1950 [Scott, Somalia Q25].
Lower right: New Zealand, special delivery stamp, 1936 [Scott SD2].

Finally, there are overprinted stamps. An overprint is a seal or inscription superposed to the original stamp, to indicate changes on it. Most overprints were used to introduce changes to the denomination of the stamp itself (e.g. to adjust for inflation) or to give indications of internal postal use: "insured", "official mail", etc. Yet in some other cases overprints are used to mark a specific event, in the way a commemorative stamp does (see Ill. 11, left). I accepted as valid stamps overprinted in this way, but still focused not on the overprint itself, but on the stamp depictions behind it.

A peculiar but very interesting type of overprints are those indicating changes in the postal authority itself, for instance after independence, military occupations, or during regime changes or revolutions. In many cases, while new stamps are issued, those belonging to the former regime are kept in circulation, but with the name or symbols of the former regime obliterated (see Ill. 11, centre and right). In this vein, they are telling examples of political or social developments in the issuing country. However, for sample selection purposes, in some cases I rejected such overprinted stamps as they could lead to equivocal results regarding the national imaginaries involved.
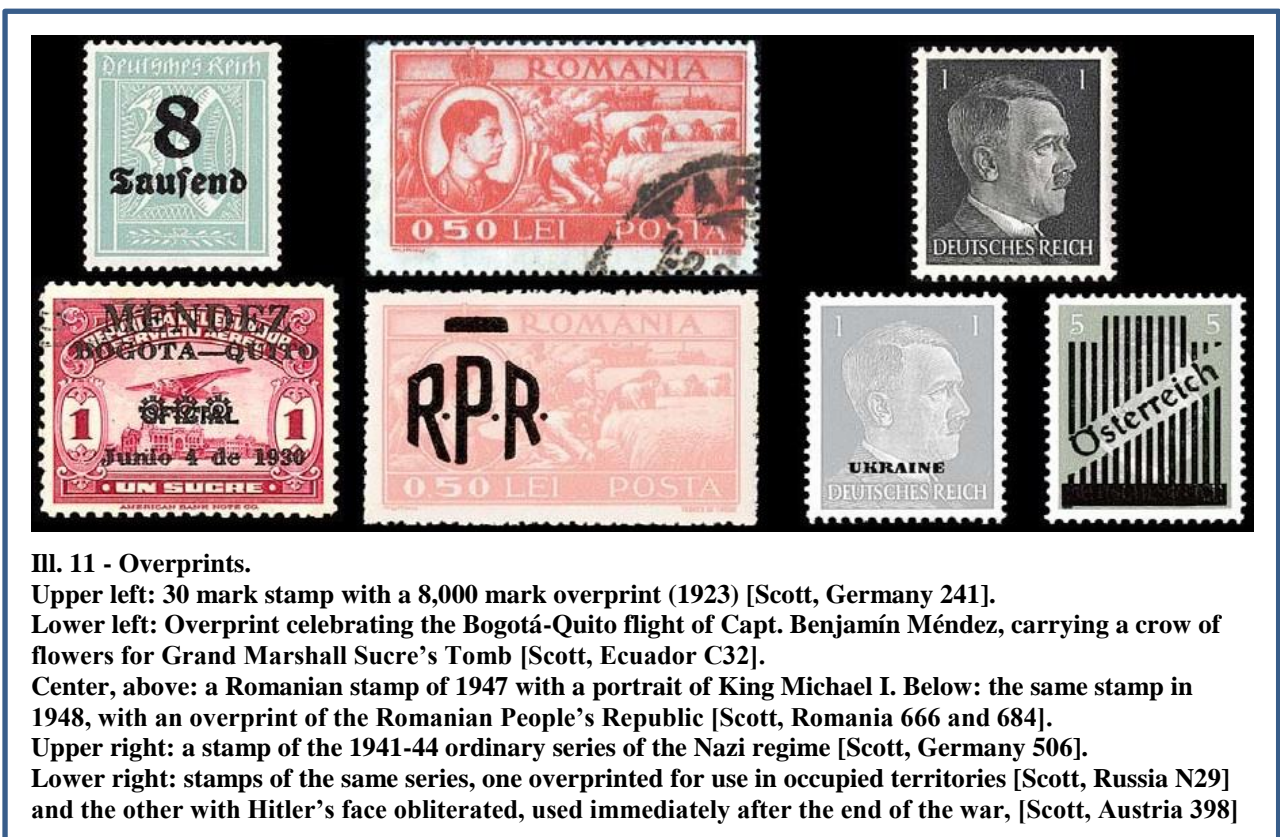
Ill. 11 - Overprints.
Upper left: 30 mark stamp with a 8,000 mark overprint (1923) [Scott, Germany 241].
Lower left: Overprint celebrating the Bogotá-Quito flight of Capt. Benjamín Méndez, carrying a crow of flowers for Grand Marshall Sucre's Tomb [Scott, Ecuador C32].
Center, above: a Romanian stamp of 1947 with a portrait of King Michael I. Below: the same stamp in 1948, with an overprint of the Romanian People's Republic [Scott, Romania 666 and 684].
Upper right: a stamp of the 1941-44 ordinary series of the Nazi regime [Scott, Germany 506].
Lower right: stamps of the same series, one overprinted for use in occupied territories [Scott, Russia N29] and the other with Hitler's face obliterated, used immediately after the end of the war, [Scott, Austria 398]

<u>Stamps excluded from the analysis</u>

The application of the "use & availability" condition (see 'types of stamps studied' above) meant that certain types of materials listed in Scott's (Scott Publishing 2010) were excluded from my analysis. First and most obviously are those pieces that are of philatelic interest, but are not postage stamps, properly speaking. Among these *non-stamps* are stamped envelopes, postal stationery, as well as the so-called "provisionals". The latter were seal imprints or seal-like marks in use before the introduction of stamps, and sometimes also after – in case of shortages, for instance, but almost in every case, their circulation was extremely limited.[44]

Obviously, I excluded stamps used for different goals than mail. Among these *non-postal stamps* are "tax stamps" (not to be confused with the valid "postal tax stamps" described above).

Ill. 12 - Non-postal stamps: Hunting stamp [Scott RW36]

Tax stamps were very common, and in some countries are still used to pay for a number of duties and obligations, such as hunting permits (Ill. 12).[45] Then, "charity stamps" have been issued on behalf of private or social organizations such as the Red Cross, in order to raise funds. However, unlike semi-postals, charity stamps do not cover the cost of mail services, so putting them on an envelope serves mostly a symbolic purpose.

Then, there is a last, but very large category of stamps that ought to be excluded from my analysis: namely, those stamps made mostly or exclusively *for the collectors' market*.[46] To establish a clear differentiation between these, and those stamps made for 'real' mail purposes, is not always easy: most modern stamps are, at least to some degree, aimed at collectors. Yet, there are some pretty evident cases. For instance, there are items that apparently retain all the features of a postage stamp (including issuing state, face value, etc.) but that cannot be used to send mail. What is more, some such stamps have never been produced in, or reached the territory of the state that supposedly is issuing them. Instead, they have been printed overseas (mostly in Europe) and were sold there directly to collectors. To conceal the fact that such "stamps" were never used in postage, many come from the printing office with a postal cancellation mark already put on them[47] so for the innocent eye, they seem as if they were once used in a letter. The most extreme cases are those stamps that, for religious or ideological reasons, could not be

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[44] Thus provisionals are among the most expensive philatelic items, reaching hundreds of thousands of dollars.

[45] In truth, during the early years of postage, some places (like 19th Century England) allowed tax and postage stamps to be used interchangeably. However, by the early 20th century, a clear differentiation between tax and postage stamps in terms of both aspect and functions was set.

[46] This important difference was previously pointed out by Kevane (2008)

[47] These are called "pre-cancelled stamps". Cancellation is the act of putting a seal on the stamp, to indicate it has been used for a postal service. This precludes further use of that particular stamp.

produced, sold or even owned in the nations that supposedly are issuing them – because that would constitute a criminal offence. Examples abound: for instance, beautiful, large stamps issued by very conservative regimes of the Middle East, presenting European art with nude figures; or the number of stamp series issued to celebrate the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana... by North Korea (see Ill. 13, right).[48]
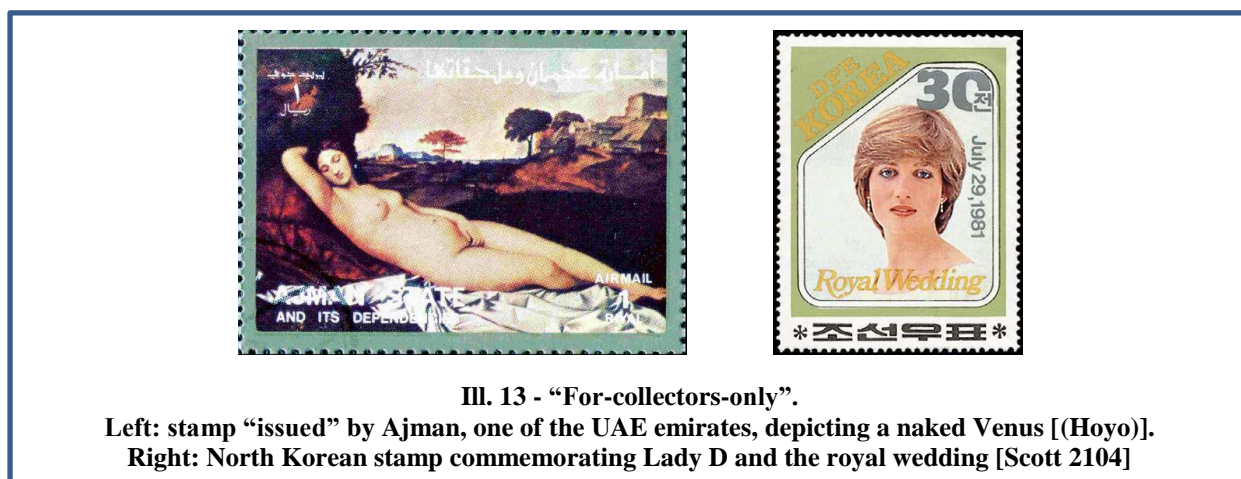
Ill. 13 - "For-collectors-only".
Left: stamp "issued" by Ajman, one of the UAE emirates, depicting a naked Venus [(Hoyo)].
Right: North Korean stamp commemorating Lady D and the royal wedding [Scott 2104]

In some cases, stamps of this this kind are plain forgeries or are issued by private companies without the consent of the country, and so they are routinely denounced to UPU by it (see Ch. III). Scott's catalogue (Scott Publishing 2010) tends to exclude the most blatant examples (see Ajman stamp at Ill. 13).

Yet in many other cases, stamps are included in Scott's Catalogue despite being of evidently limited postal use, or none at all, due to their topics or the very format of the stamp. Examples are the Lady Diana stamp above (Ill. 13), as well as a whole series from Guyana devoted to NBA players, one on each stamp.[49] Therefore, in my sample I did a further and much more restrictive case-by-case selection. Some stamps found during this process were astounding, like an exceptionally beautiful Mongolian stamp depicting cats and dogs, made entirely out of gold [Scott 2124]. Yet, I found it slightly difficult to believe that stamps like this were bought by people, just to be glued to a letter and dropped in a letterbox.

A fourth excluded category includes stamps *reserved to specific groups or institutions*, and therefore not available to common citizens. Common examples are official and army stamps,

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[48] Several states and firms make profit of these tactics, by means of concessions. A number of Caribbean and Pacific island-states, Guyana, Rwanda, Togo, Equatorial Guinea etc. are well known for doing this.

[49] A further indication of this "for-collectors-only" character is that, in many cases such stamps cannot be bought separately, but only as a complete series. Scott's catalogue offers hints in this respect in many cases.

reserved for governmental, diplomatic, or military use; stamps devoted to specific customers or industrial sectors that made intensive use of postal services, such as newspapers; and stamps used by the postal system itself, to indicate particular requirements or circumstances, like postage-due stamps.[50] The fifth and final excluded category are stamps issued directly by *private organizations*, such as colonization companies, or by modern courier companies.

Temporality

As my goal was to obtain a representative sample, I chose to set a 100-year periodization for it. Its specific limits (1909-2009) were set mostly by the sources, as the 2011 edition of Scott's catalogue included stamps issued up to December 2009 only. The lower limit was given by the 100-year period. In any case, 1909- 2009 is a very convenient period as it coincides with the development of airmail, which was a turning point in the further popularization and internationalization or mail services (Codding 1964, 56-61; BPMA 2005b). Furthermore, this period corresponds almost exactly with the "short 20th century", an era characterized by intense conflicts between states and political ideologies, the creation of international organizations and a number of independent states, and the further development of modern communication and transport systems (Hobsbawm 1994). All these factors led to an increase not only in the number of letters and stamp issuing authorities, but also in the actual use of stamps for mail (and propaganda?) uses.

Stamps according to their ideological messages

In this section, I will present and explain the analytical categories used for my first typology of messages in stamps, as well as the results of its application to the analysis of a stamp sample. The goal of this first typology was to trace general ideological messages, and therefore it was constructed in two steps: first, by asking if the stamps have any ideological message at all (yes/no); then, by setting a further categorization for each.

Operationally, this implies a matrix of two, mutually exclusive options ('non-ideological' vs. 'ideological') and then, further categories were developed for each of these options, two and six respectively. Each stamp of the random sample classified as "valid", would be then classified according to this typology. Its general results can be seen in tables 2 and 3 below.

The two categories that made for the 'non-ideological messages' group were called *minimalist* and *neutral*, also being mutually exclusive. Therefore, these were graded with a

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[50] Postage-due stamps were attached to an envelope, to indicate that the value of the stamps fixed to it was not enough to pay for the service, so the addressee would need to pay the difference.

simple Yes/No value (0/1). The six categories comprising the 'ideological messages' group: *Marxist, Religious, Civic, Supranational/Cosmopolitan, Colonialist,* and *Nationalist,* were also designed to be as distinct from each other as possible. However, during the sample analysis it became pretty clear that it is normal for most stamps to display several kinds of messages e.g. nationalist, supranational, and Marxist-oriented, all at the same time. Also, messages on stamps have a variable degree of visibility. Therefore, for each ideological category three values will be used: "0" when the particular ideology is absent; "0.5" when there are indirect, subtle or secondary references to it in the stamp; and "1" when there are relevant direct allusions or straightforward messages.

Throughout this chapter, as well as the next, the reader should be aware that I am looking at stamp *depictions* first and foremost, and not just at the issuing authorities. Therefore, a stamp issued by North Korea or Israel will not be put immediately in the Marxist or Religious categories respectively, unless they actually have such contents. In fact, I found that in many cases, the messages we would expect from certain authorities were just not there or were only secondary to others. Also, it should be noted that the name of the country, if printed a single time on the stamp, does not count towards any category even if it includes words such as "popular", "socialist", "Islamic" etc., as the name of the issuing country is one of UPU's requirements.[51]

Throughout this chapter, I have been as careful as possible to detect and count all the ideological messages present in each stamp. Nevertheless, I am well aware that my condition as a 'foreigner' means I could have missed a number of them. On the one hand, it was very common to find stamps in the sample, with messages in languages or alphabets that I was completely unfamiliar with. This was not a major problem at the end, thanks to the kind assistance of several native speakers and experts.[52] On the other hand, it is clear that many symbols, depictions and messages in stamps can be fully understood only within a given cultural / national context. To miss many of such 'local' messages and implications is an intrinsic risk of an analysis like mine, which is based on a large, universal sample. However, in terms of testing my hypotheses, this means that far from exaggerating, my analysis will probably *underestimate* the number of ideological messages that can be found in stamps.

Table 2 - General typology of messages and results

Chart 1 - General types of messages in stamps

Table 2: General typology of messages							
Non - ideological		Ideological frame (0, 0.5, 1)					
Minimalist	Neutral	Marxist	Religious	Civic	Supranat. / cosmopolit.	Colonialist	Nationalist

		Minimalist	Neutral	Marxist	Religious	Civic	Supranat. / cosmopolit.	Colonialist	Nationalist
Global results	Total of hits	691	691	691	691	691	691	691	691
	Grade=1	2	13	29	35	51	187	18	477
	Grade=0.5	n.a.	n.a.	7	8	6	31	3	74
	"1"+"0.5"	2	13	36	43	57	218	21	551
	Grade=0	689	678	655	648	634	473	670	140
% acc. to valid stamps, namely	% of 1	0,29%	1,88%	4,20%	5,07%	7,38%	27,06%	2,60%	69,03%
	% of 0.5	n.a.	n.a.	1,01%	1,16%	0,87%	4,49%	0,43%	10,71%
	"1"+"0.5"	0,29%	1,88%	5,21%	6,22%	8,25%	31,55%	3,04%	79,74%
691	% of 0	99,71%	98,12%	94,79%	93,78%	91,75%	68,45%	96,96%	20,26%

Chart 1 - General types of messages in stamps
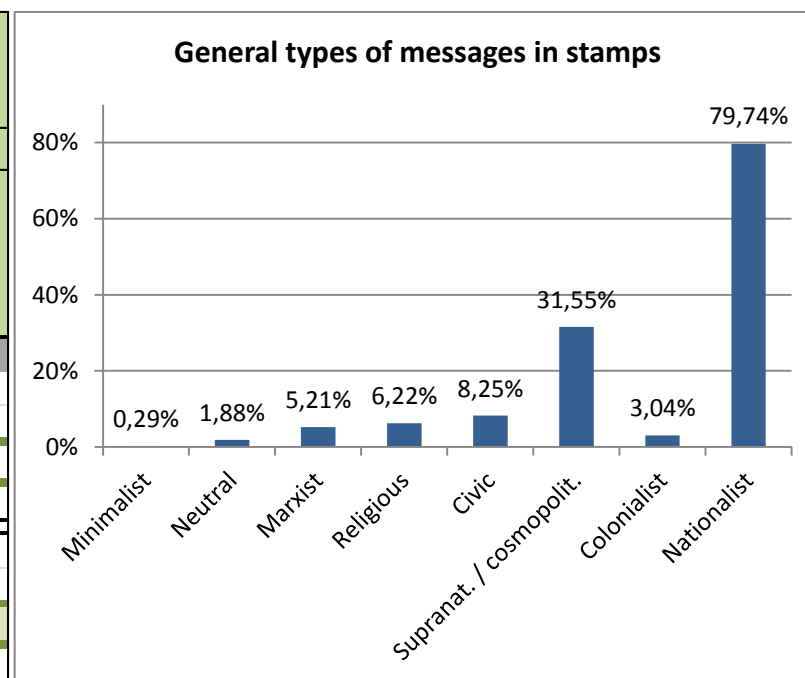
Table 3 – Ideological vs. non-ideological messages in stamps

Table 3 - Content in stamps		
	Ideological	Non-ideolog.
Cases	676	15
%	97,83%	2,17%

Non-ideological stamps

This first group includes two types: minimalist stamps, the most basic type of postage stamps; and stamps with neutral content, that do not have any identifiable link with a particular ideology.

Minimalist stamps

These are the most basic type of stamps, clearly devoted to postal services only, and displaying only the most essential prerequisites needed for any stamp to fulfil its postal role, namely the name of the issuing authority, and the face value (see Ill. 14).[53] Certainly, they can also include some other elements and messages of a purely indexical role (Scott 1995, 7-8), for instance to identify the purpose of the stamp (e.g. "postal service", "expedite mail" or similar), or the symbol or name of the particular currency used. Some minimalist stamps also include

Ill. 14 – Example of a minimalist stamp [Scott, Netherlands 107].

abstract and/or very basic decorations (e.g. monochromatic or dichromatic line patterns) that do not form any recognizable shape and do not convey any message *per se.* These patterns are introduced to avoid counterfeiting and therefore, they can still be considered as performing a purely administrative role.
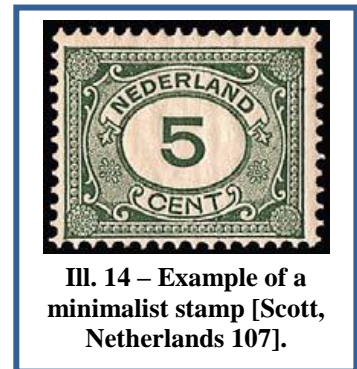
It could be expected that, due to their simplicity, minimalist stamps would form an important share of the sample. That was not the case, not even remotely: just *two* stamps in the whole sample were minimalist, comprising just 0,29% of the 691 'valid stamps' sample (see Table 2), the lowest proportion of all categories. A reason for such scarce numbers was the temporal limits set in the sample, as most minimalist stamps were issued during the 19th century. However, this is also other way to confirm that during the 20th century, stamps with ideological messages were the rule; what is more, as far as I could detect during my research, many countries have never issued a single minimalist stamp.

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[53] In fact, these are the minimal guidelines set by UPU for a postage stamp (See Universal Postal Union 2009b)

Some stamps are more elaborate than minimalist ones and yet, they are not ideologically charged. For instance, they can include messages regarding the postal institution *per se* or its services, like a postman and a "Post Day" slogan, asking for the use of postal codes, or just making promotion for the mail services.

Ill. 15 - Neutral stamps. Above: postal-related [Scott Uganda 1589] Below: with non-ideological elements [Scott Japan 2024]

Some other stamps go beyond the purely postal matters, by presenting iconographic elements that are not related to them but that, at the same time, cannot be linked to a given ideology. Examples are compositions showing a pattern of stars over a deep blue sky, and nothing else; animals or plants that are not ascribed, explicitly or implicitly, to whatever country, culture, etc. (e.g. a common flower in a jar);[54] complex abstract artwork or motifs that are just too general or vague to indicate even a minimal attachment to a given ideology (see Ill. 15).
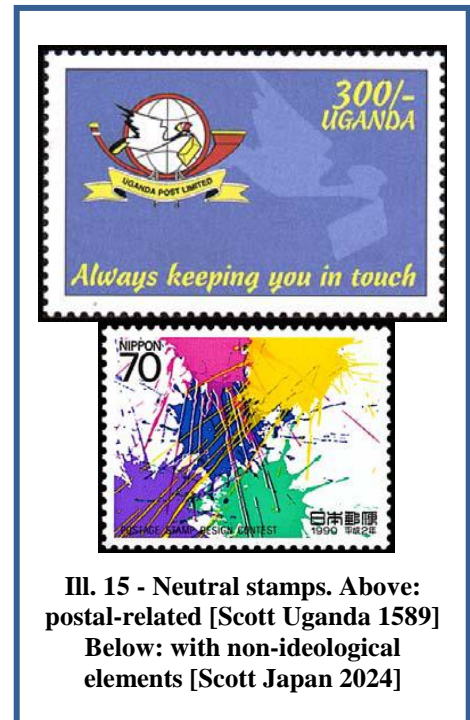
I am well aware that no depiction, particularly an artistic one, is "ideology-free". For example, we could argue that abstract art is linked to a particular moment and set of ideas in Western societies. However, in my research, I am trying to take the point of view of the "common user" of mail systems, not of the specialist able to detect subtle ideas in otherwise complex patterns. It was surprising for me to find, once again, that the number of stamps within my sample that fell into this category was very low: just 1,88% (see Table 2).

In sum: stamps classified as having non-ideological messages (whether minimalist or neutral) were just a very small percentage of the sample: 2.17% (see Table 3). This is an early indicator to support the hypothesis that stamps are, indeed, used as carriers of ideological messages. Next, we will see what such ideologies are.

Ideological stamps

As indicated by the title, these stamps show ideological influences on their iconographic or written messages. These can be, in the 'soft' versions, references to ideals or causes supported by the issuer of the stamp; subtle indications of what is deemed "good" or "valuable"; or even

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[54] Otherwise, these animals/plants would be included in the "supranational / cosmopolitan" category, if presented as having an universal connotation; or within the "nationalist" category and one of its sub-categories (like "natural attributes" or "cultural identity") in case they are presented as attached or 'belonging' the nation in any way.

messages framed (consciously or not) by the values and symbols of a given ideology and/or political regime. Yet, in the most extreme versions, we can find straightforward ideological propaganda, or plain messages supporting/attacking a given cause, idea, human group or even a third state. It was expected that most stamps would be in a middle point: not being openly militant, yet still promoting a given ideological framework and/or making use of symbols, slogans, depictions or "catch words" that denote it.

To analyse the stamp sample, I made use of a simplified division between ideologies, assigning a category to each. They should not be considered as "concept-making" but merely as tools for classification. Again, a stamp will be classified in such categories not regarding the issuing authority, but by judging the content of that individual stamp only.

Marxist-inspired content

These messages in stamps refer to principles, policies and values inspired in Marxist ideas. In the more straightforward cases, such stamps display symbols or slogans unequivocally associated with socialism or communism (the hammer-and-sickle, for instance) while many other stamps honour its leaders, ideologists and heroes. Also included are messages referring to the typical institutions of Marxist-inspired regimes (Parties, Party Congresses, Politburos...) as well as the policies and programs linked to such regimes, like the Five-Years plans or agricultural collectivization measures (see Ill. 16).

Additionally, stamps with artworks of clear Marxist influence in both style and meanings, such as the realist-style monuments to soldiers or workers typical of the Stalin era, or reproductions of Soviet paintings, were also included specially if such depictions were accompanied by text denoting socialist ideas. Historical developments and commemorations clearly associated with Marxism (such as the various Revolutions) were also included, as well as stamps with messages promoting causes and slogans framed in Marxist ideology, such as the "fight against global capitalism/imperialism", or towards the advancement of the "proletarian struggle". Finally, stamps making reference to Marxist international organizations were also counted.

Ill. 16 – Examples of stamps with Marxist-inspired content. Above, left to right:
Mauritania, 1974: 50th anniversary of the death of Lenin [Scott C150]; Bulgaria, 1949: Road
Construction, Worker's Cultural Brigade [Scott 647]; USSR, 1960: Belgorod cement factory - New
constructions of the 1st year of the 7-year plan [Scott, Russia 2335].
Below, left to right: Peop. Rep. of Congo, 1989: 20th anniv. of the Congolese Labor Party [830];
Czechoslovakia, 1955: 10th anniv of the liberation of Czechoslovakia: Stalin memorial [Scott, 691];
Nicaragua, 1985: 40th anniv. of the victory over Fascism (Fragment of "Rendition of the German forces",
by P. Krivonogov) [1460]

Of course, the postal authorities issuing such stamps were expected to be those of socialist or communist regimes. Yet, it was also possible to detect some influences in stamps of regimes that officially present themselves as members of a "third way" or "third world". I expected such stamps to be a sizeable part of the sample, even if I also anticipated these would show the influence of other categories such as "supranational/cosmopolitan" or "nationalist". The latter was confirmed – a "pure" socialist stamp was not easy to find, in fact. Yet, a very unexpected outcome was to find that stamps showing Marxist-inspired messages were just a small fraction: just 5.21% of the sample (see Table 2).

Religious content

Stamps from the sample were classified as religious when they displayed symbols, slogans and/or iconographies with clear and direct link with a given religious doctrine or institution. In this sense, the cross, the crescent moon and star, etc. count fully in this category, but only when used to denote that particular religion; when they appeared as surrogates or part of other symbols (e.g. within flags depicted in stamps) they were generally not categorized as religious *per se*.

In this category were included also depictions of pilgrimage, of religious leaders (as long as they were presented as such) or depictions of religious festivities or events. It is important to note that, in the latter case, it was the content of the stamp and not the event *per se* which was judged; in this sense, stamps celebrating Christmas were included only if they showed clear Christian content. For instance, Père Noël or a Christmas tree did not count, but a Holy Family did. Religious iconography was counted in the same way. A number of objects and places depicted in stamps can have a religious component or significance (oeuvres d'art, churches, etc.) but this does necessarily make them religious: they only indicate that the history or identity of the corresponding nation was framed by a certain religion. Therefore, the analysis of these cases was guided by how clear a specifically religious the message was.

Ill. 17 – Examples of stamps with religious content. Left to right:
Pakistan, 1979: Koran lighting the world and Mohammed's Tomb [Scott 480]
Israel, 1999: Rabbi Or Sharga / battle of Israel over Amalek [Scott 1372]
Philippines, 2002: Holy Family, used to promote the 4th World Meeting of Families [Scott 2809]
Sri Lanka, 2005: Vesak festivities / Ambulatory Meditation [Scott 1502]

Regarding the issuing authorities, certainly theocratic regimes made intensive use of these kinds of messages.[55] However, we can also find stamps of non-theocracies that still use many religious symbols. These ranged from states where a given religion has an official or clearly predominant political status, to those in which the history, culture and/or identity of the nation has been clearly framed by it (see Ill. 17). In fact, it was normal to find in stamps a mix of such religious messages with other categories (particularly nationalist ones).

In the random sample, stamps having religious messages were not very common after all. They only counted for 6,22% of the sample (see Table 2). Again, we must be aware that the most

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[55] The Vatican could be an evident case here; however its stamps (which tended to have very evident religious references) were not counted as valid for the analysis, as the state did not comply with the 100,000 inhabitants rule.

common religious symbols found (those embedded in flags) were not taken into account. Furthermore, it was detected that most religious messages issued by non-confessional states were related to specific moments of the history of the nation, or to objects of some cultural or historical significance. Therefore, we should bear in mind that these were references to a historical or cultural background, where a given religion played an important role for the nation, but not necessarily religious propaganda per se.

Civic content

This is a very particular and interesting species of messages in stamps, which make an explicit attempt to influence the behaviour of the postage users, by means of messages promoting values, conduct or practices that are considered as virtuous or as contributing to the common good. In this way, these stamps are true "instruments of good citizenship" (Child 2008a) promoting, for instance, the rights and duties of the members of the nation; co-responsibility of authorities and citizens in the governance and development of the polity; the well-being, safety, health, or education of the population, etc.

Therefore, stamps of this kind have a pedagogical quality, teaching or praising beneficial behaviour, practices or improvements among the population, such as literacy, road education, social tolerance, environmental protection, et cetera (see Ill. 18). Some others promoted organizations involved in such activities (see Child 2008a, 61-62). Also very common were those devoted to health and well-being issues, such as the promotion of vaccination campaigns, quitting smoking or childcare (see upper right and bottom left corners, Ill. 18). Some others made appeals for communal solidarity, whether in common projects or to face disasters or disease. Many of these stamps are of the semi-postal type. Finally, in some cases, the message went beyond a simple recommendation, to take a more institutional, even normative tone: some stamps straightforwardly reminded the citizens about their duty to pay taxes.

Such messages can be found in stamps issued by a number of different regimes, but tend to be more frequent in republican ones and particularly, in welfare states. Even if it was not selected within the sample, a very well-known ordinary series of German stamps, issued from 1971 to 1974 and very widely used, was of this kind [*Jederzeit Sicherheit* series, 1974-1085]. This series comprised eleven stamps showing messages ranging from fire prevention to workplace security.

Ill. 18 – Examples of stamps with civic content.
Above, left to right:
Brazil, 1948: Adult education campaign [Scott 658]. United Arab Emirates, 1976: Traffic week [Scott 64].
Brunei, 1994: World No-Tobacco Day [Scott 457].
Below, left to right:
Netherlands Antilles, 1976: One of the stamp series "different ways of carrying a child" [Scott B140].
Estonia, 1920: Help to injured soldiers [Scott B2]. Bangladesh, 1993: Promotion of popular participation in canal digging [Scott 423a]

Civic stamps can convey their messages alone. Yet, some others combined such messages with nationalist ones, therefore promoting a particular 'national understanding' of citizenship. In contrast, some others included references to supranational/cosmopolitan institutions, therefore presenting such 'civic' references as consequences of (or factors in) the internationalisation of these values and practices. Yet, the overall number of messages of this kind was surprisingly low: around 8,25% of the sample (see Table 2).

Supranational / cosmopolitan content

Messages in stamps of this type promote or make reference to topics that are intrinsically universal, or at least supranational, whether by their own nature or by the way they are presented in the stamp. In this sense, they appeal to ideals, values or developments that are deemed as desirable or useful for mankind, or to wide regions/communities at least.

Stamps included on this category were those that referred to 'mankind', whether literally or by means of symbols and representations with an intrinsic universal character, like world

maps or globes, especially those where political borders have been erased; messages regarding human rights; those addressing concerns of universal extent, such as pollution or climate change; and those that promote specific values and attitudes as both desirable and universal (friendship, tolerance…), as well as those dealing with promotion of peace or arms control issues (see Ill. 19). Stamps devoted to organizations or events promoting any aspect of supranational integration (political, humanitarian, cultural, sports, technical...) were also considered, as well as messages where the issuing nation-state supports, sponsors or celebrates such values, events and/or institutions.

Also considered were those stamps that present particular aspects, persons or things as having a universal value: for example, when the ideals or accomplishments of specific individuals, groups or institutions are depicted as "speaking for" or bringing benefits to mankind. This also applies to places, objects, environments, traditions and/or cultural features considered as representing, constituting the heritage of, or even belonging to the whole of mankind (e.g. UNESCO-protected sites) but only as long as such a character is made explicit in the stamp.

A further case of supranational / cosmopolitan messages was when the stamp alluded to events that happened beyond its national territory or inside a different national community, but that are still regarded as important for mankind and, therefore for the nation's own history and development. This can range from scientific or technological developments (see Hungary in Ill. 19) to political/historical events (e.g. the French revolution) and to artistic and cultural milestones.

Finally, this category also encompasses stamps that are addressed not to mankind, but to specific regions or human groups, as long as such messages have a multinational character and also promote integration (EU) endorse values or identities shared among the involved parties ("Hispanic World") and/or make reference to supranational/regional institutions (APEC, OAE). Stamps the messages of which have a more bi-national character will be judged on a case-by-case basis, as sometimes such messages are more properly related to diplomacy than to cosmopolitan or universal values; in some cases, they in fact hold messages quite contrary to these. Of course, colonialist messages do not count in this category.

Ill. 19 – Stamps with supranational/cosmopolitan content.
Above, clockwise:
United Nations, 1973: Disarmament decade [Scott 234].
Nepal, 2001: Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations [Scott 704];
Peop. Rep of Congo, Anti-nuclear Arms Campaign [Scott 692];
Chile, 1980: 75th anniv. of Rotary International [Scott 567];
Afghanistan, 1961: 16th anniv. UN [Scott 532].

Below, clockwise:
Denmark, 1999: 50th anniv. of the Council of Europe [Scott 1154];
Guatemala, 1954: 3rd Meeting of Central American Foreign Affairs Ministers,
Organization of Central American States [Scott C204];
Nigeria, 1978: 75th anniv. of powered flight [372];
Hungary, 1981: George Stephenson Bicentennial [Scott 2697];

Stamps with supranational/cosmopolitan messages turned out to be the second most important group within the random sample, accounting for 31,26% of the total (see Table 2). This high proportion was a completely unexpected outcome, even more noticeable because very few of the stamps in the sample were issued by the United Nations; it was nation-states themselves who were issuing stamps with such supranational / cosmopolitan values.

Colonialist content

This category involves messages making reference to an asymmetrical political relation between a power centre and a given territory, and/or those implying a cultural, ethnic or ideological superiority by the former over the later. Such stamps can be issued by the metropolis, by the colony itself, or both.[56]

Most such stamps make clear the power hierarchies by showing symbols or political figures of the colonial metropolis (like the Crown, the imperial coat of arms, or the Sovereign) or presenting the local representatives of such imperial power (e.g. Governors). Other more subtle ones had depictions linked to the colony itself (symbols, natural features, cultures, inhabitants...) and yet, their asymmetrical status regarding the colonial metropolis is stated or implied (see Cusack 2005; Jeffery 2006; Newman 1989). Finally, there are some stamps were a centre of power asserts its dominion, in one way or another, over a territory or even a puppet state, such as a South African stamp issued during the Apartheid era celebrating the creation of the Transkei legislative assembly (see Ill. 20, last stamp)

Ill. 20 - Examples of stamps with colonialist content. Left to right:
Gibraltar, 1938-49: George VI and the Gibraltar Rock [Scott 108].
Belgian Congo, 1935: 50th anniv. Foundation of the Congo Free State [Scott 159]
Portuguese Angola, 1972: 400th anniversary of the Lusiads [Scott, Angola 568]
South African Republic, 1963: First Meeting of the Transkei Legislative Assembly [287]
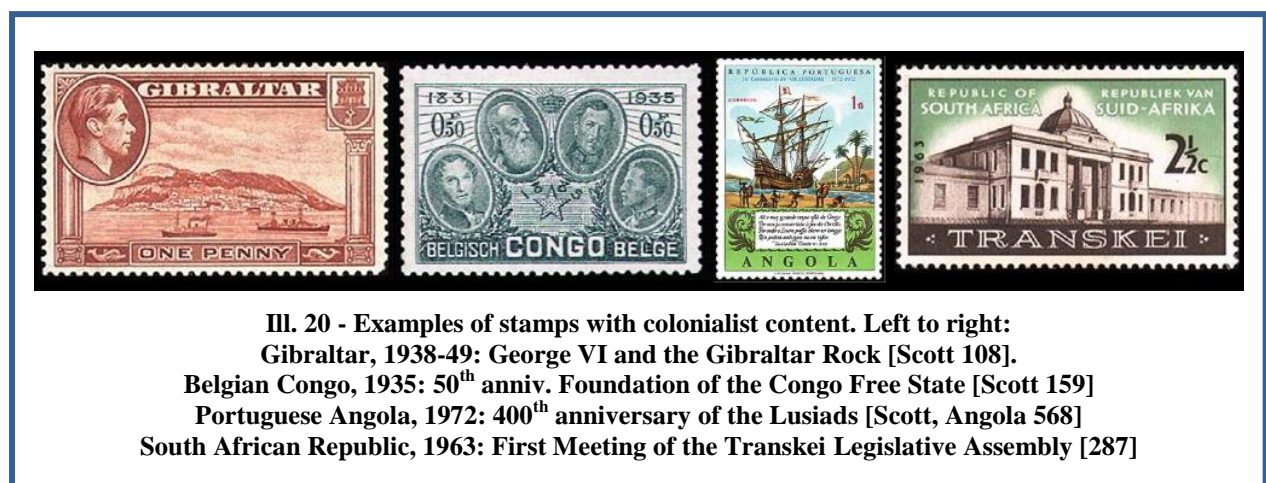
These stamps accounted only for 3.04% of those in the sample (see Table 2). This can be attributed to the fact that the number of colonies decreased very rapidly after the Second World

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[56] See 'Postal authorities and stamps selected' in this chapter, as well as footnotes 40 - 41.

War, and so their stamps were substituted by those of the newly-sovereign states. During the first decades of the 20th century, colonial stamps were certainly much more common.

Nationalist content

This final category of the "ideological messages" group is the most important for my case. Messages on these stamps make explicit or implicit reference to the nation. That is: apart from the name of the issuing state, they display at least one iconographic and/or written message related to the issuing nation and its features, presenting these as important, valuable or even essential part of the identity of the nation. This kind of messages was, by far, the most common of all: 79,74% of all stamps in the sample.

It was expected that a large share of the sample would have at least one nationally-related, or openly nationalist message – taking into account, as said before, that stamps are issued by nation-states through dedicated agencies, and that they offer unique opportunities as means of carrying messages (see Ch. III). However, such a high incidence was beyond my own expectations, and deserves further scrutiny. Therefore, in the next chapter I will introduce and apply a second analytical typology, allowing me to study nationalist messages in stamps in much more detail.

Hence... what do stamps say?

The results of the sample study confirm, in a quite convincing manner, that stamps have been used for something other than just paying for mail. Barely more than 2% of the sample corresponded to "minimalist" or "neutral" stamps – that is, those without any ideological content (see Table 3 above). This could be surprising, as common sense (and administrative arguments) would call for these, the simplest, fastest and cheapest stamps to produce, to constitute a considerable part of the sample.

Two partial reasons for this extremely limited representativeness of non-ideological stamps are, firstly, that minimalist designs are not the most attractive ones for collectors, so more elaborated designs were preferred. There is probably some truth in this; and yet, it still does not explain why the "collector-friendly" stamps should include, or be framed by, ideological messages precisely. Secondly, minimalist-like stamps were issued mostly before the time scope of my analysis. However, if that is the case, then we can think of very few reasons for *not* keeping such stamps in use, at least for standard mail services. The very fact that there was such a radical and generalized turn to issue stamps bearing ideological messages, is quite telling per se.

The rest of the stamps within the sample (97,68%) presented at least one ideological message, whether a direct or just a "framed" one (see Table 3). In this sense, we can confirm my first hypothesis (see Ch. I): postage stamps *have been intensively used as "carriers" of ideological or at least, ideologically-framed messages on behalf of the issuing nation.*

The sample analysis also evidenced a clear tendency for stamps to have <u>nationalist</u> messages, far more than for any other ideological category: this was the case for almost eight out of every ten stamps (see Table 2 and Chart 1 above). Moreover, the ample majority of such nationalist messages were not subtle or indirect, but clear or straightforward (that is, they were graded as "1" instead of "0.5" in intensity). Therefore, we can also prove the veracity of sub-hypothesis (h1a), at least in general terms – it will be further discussed and analysed in the next chapter.

An overall preference for nationalist messages was somehow expected in stamps, given the involvement of national authorities in their design and issuing of stamps; however, as stated above, such a clear majority was surprising. Likewise, it was not expected that <u>supranational/cosmopolitan</u> messages would rank second within the sample (almost a third) and especially so far above those with Marxist- or religious-inspired content (see Table 2 and Chart 1). Furthermore, the vast majority of such cosmopolitan/supranational messages were graded as "1". Hence, it is not unreasonable to think that postal authorities tried to present these particular messages in a quite straightforward way: after all, they would be soon travelling all around the world, representing the issuing nation. As a matter of fact, some studies have indicated that the official and international nature of stamps persuade postal authorities to show caution and restraint regarding the messages they append to stamps (see for instance Dobson 2002, 2005). If this is true, then there should also exist incentives for those authorities to promote universally shared values on stamps.

Three categories were far less frequent than expected: civic, religious and Marxist messages in stamps 8,25%, 6,22% and 5,21%, respectively. I expected higher percentages of <u>civic messages</u> in stamps, as they could be ideal forms to promote attitudes among citizens. Yet at the same time, the natural audiences of such civic stamps are the citizens of the issuing state, not the populations abroad. This might have accounted for their limited use. Even so, it seems that state authorities have not used stamps to promote civic values as much as they could have done.

It was also interesting to find so few openly <u>religious messages</u> in stamps. A partial reason for this is, of course, the comparatively small number of theocratic states that have existed

or still exist today. However, another explanation could be more plausible: including religious images in stamps could be a very sensitive matter for third states and communities abroad, so national postal authorities tend to proceed with caution in this regard.

Yet, the greatest surprise for me regarding this group was the scarcity of Marxist-inspired messages, specially taking into account the large number of socialist countries and regimes that have issued stamps and that the USSR was the individual postal authority that contributed the most to the stamp sample, with 19 stamps. I revised both my analysis and my sources, as Scott's catalogue (Scott Publishing 2010) was formerly known for excluding some stamps or series (such as the Cuban issues during US embargo, or some from Iran) and even to delete entire countries from the catalogue, like North Korea. The official explanation was, that those materials were not available for the US collector, so there was no point listing them; however, more politically-inspired considerations were always suspected. Yet, this policy was revised and, at least since 2008, *all* countries and all stamps are now listed in Scott's catalogue, including the three mentioned here, as well as individual pieces with very aggressive messages against the US.

Therefore, the low overall percentage of Marxist-inspired stamps still lacks an explanation. In many cases, socialist regimes seemed to choose quite neutral topics for their stamps. However, one fact seems quite significant: most "Marxism-only" stamps (that is, those not displaying any other ideology) were issued by two groups: African socialist regimes right after decolonization, or the USSR and its Eastern European satellites between the 1940s and 1960s. I cannot advance any informed explanation regarding the former, African cases. Yet, regarding the latter, we can clearly see the influx of Stalinism on such depictions - and this can be confirmed by the fact that from mid-50's on, we start to find stamps from those same countries with much more nationalistic content –even some with *exclusively* nationalistic overtones.

The last category, namely stamps with colonialist messages, had the smallest percentage among all those with ideologically-charged messages: barely above 3%. This was partially expected as, on the one hand, only some colonies ever achieved UPU recognition as postal entities (see Ch. III) and on the other hand, the number of colonies was very quickly reduced after the Second World War. However, it was interesting to find that few "pure" colonialist stamps were found: most of them combined colonial messages (alluding to the metropolis) with "national" (or more correctly, *proto*-national) messages, making reference to features of the colony itself, and even to its native political and/or patriotic figures.

As a whole, the findings of the stamp sample analysis fully support the idea that postage stamps have indeed been used to send ideologically-charged, or at least ideologically-framed, messages to postal users. In the same way, the findings support the notion of stamps being not only valid, but very useful sources for academic research on the topic, if methodological precautions are taken to exclude non-representative or valid stamps, such as those made for the collector's market only. Finally, these findings also suggest that, at least for some postal authorities, there seems to be a political intent when presenting or evading some topics on stamps.

Among all the categories of ideological messages we could find in stamps, nationalist messages formed an overwhelming majority. In the next chapter we will turn our attention to these particular messages to learn what they can tell about their nation or, to put it more correctly, what kind of national imaginary they try to introduce us to.

CHAPTER V:

NATIONALIST MESSAGES ON STAMPS

The last chapter made it clear that, at least with regard to their messages, stamps are indeed ideological. It also became clear that the most common content is the nationalist or at least, the nationally-related one. In this sense, hypothesis (1) has been proved true in general terms (see Chapter I). Yet, to fully prove that postage stamps are promoting an official account of the history, features, composition and development of the nation, I must further analyse their nationalist or nationally-related messages.

To do so, I will make use of a new typology, developed by following the concept of national imaginary, its functions, and its components (see Chapter II). In this way, each stamp of the sample where any nationalist content was identified (see Chapter IV) has been further analysed and classified in one (or more) of the following ten categories of nationalist messages:

1. The *human composition* of the nation;

2. its *cultural identity*;

3. its *historical development*;

4. the *individual accomplishments* made by members of the nation, then appropriated by it and presented as collective ones;

5. the *natural attributes* characteristic of, owned by, or 'appropriated' by the nation;

6. its *national territory*, in the physical and geographical sense;

7. the *foreign relations* of the nation;

8. its *political regime*;

9. the *national economy* and the *technological development* of the nation;

10. the *official symbols* of the nation, including its personifications.

Every stamp of the sample that was categorised, first, as valid for analysis, and second, as having ideological messages of the nationalist kind (551 stamps in total) was then further analysed using the 10 categories mentioned above, and graded in the same form as in the previous typology (Ch. IV): "0" when any message related to that particular category is absent; "0.5" when there are indirect, subtle or secondary references; and "1" when there are direct allusions to it.

Any stamp can include multiple messages, so different categories can get grades thanks to the same stamp. Such categories were designed to be as conceptually exclusive as possible, yet in some cases they were strongly related. Due to this, some exceptions and rules were introduced to avoid excessive overlapping of some specific categories.

Nationalist messages in stamps: analytical categories.

I will now categorize messages on stamps, while also relating them to the concept of national imaginaries. Therefore, for each category, an explanation and definition of the category will be offered and, when relevant, an explanation on how details on how it is related to the concept of national imaginary and its roles (see Ch. II). Then, the results of the sample analysis for that particular category will be offered. The chapter will close with conclusions of the use on stamps to promote official national imaginaries.

First category: human composition of the nation

An "official ethnic/racial stereotype" exists for most nations, whether this is made explicit or not. Such stereotyping has had extremely important roles for both the internal identification and the external differentiation of the community as, arguably, it made it easier to differentiate members from non-members of the nation or, even friends from foes. In saying this, I am not implying that such stereotypes are legitimate; merely that they have been politically useful: we cannot simply deny the historical influence of such ethnic/racial stereotypes in nationalisms. While in many contemporary nation-states such stereotypes are not politically correct anymore, this does not imply they have ceased to exist: the actions and discourses of many nation-states, political actors, and even common citizens are still constructed with a background idea, and even a mental framework, about how the members of our nation "are" or "should look like".

In turn, gender or age characterizations are undoubtedly relevant for most national imaginaries and nationalisms in general, and so have been intensively studied (see for instance Albanese 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997). Yet, regarding their roles in national imaginaries, both gender and age considerations are mostly relevant for the nations' constitutive identity. This is so

because gender or age cannot be used to separate "our" nation from foreigners, or to internally differentiate members from non-members: no nation is presented as exclusively composed of "young males". Yet in turn, gendered and/or age-related considerations can be (and certainly have been) used to promote an official identity of the nation, e.g. by presenting each member with specific attributes and roles: women as educators, family caretakers and keepers of the nation's most cherished virtues; men as its brave, strong defenders and leaders; children as the "future of the nation..."

Messages in stamps regarding the human composition of the nation are common, and many allude to ethnic/racial topics. Some are quite explicit in this regard, for instance by means of drawings or portraits that are nothing less but idealizations and stereotypes of 'how we look', as we will see soon. Some others take a subtler, yet upsetting form. Altman quotes the case of the very first ordinary stamp series issued by Australia in 1913. They had quite a simple design (see Ill. 21): a kangaroo in front of the island's outline, over a plain background that changed colours according to stamp values. The island itself was always in white though. "The Postmaster General of the time, Mr. Frazer (Labor), later stated that the map was white to make clear Australia's policy in regard to its population..." (Altman 1991, 56, quoting

**Ill. 21 –
"White Australia" stamp**

parliamentary records) In fact, the first aboriginal in an Australian stamp appear only in 1934 and since then, they have been seen presented only occasionally, and almost always in an unfavourable form *vis-a-vis* the white population (Altman 1991, 64-65; McQueen 1988, 91-93) even if the policy has begun to change in the last decade.

A further case of ethnic/racial exclusion can be found in the whole philatelic history of South Africa until the demise of Apartheid (see Scott Publishing 2010, vol. VI, 269-281; also Hammett 2012) which did not present native populations except on very rare occasions, and in very subordinate roles only. Finally, representations of indigenous peoples in stamps from Latin American countries vary greatly according to the particular case, and not always in proportion to the actual demographic share or historical importance of such populations for the particular country. In this sense, as important as who is presented in stamps is who is systematically excluded.

Gender/age dimensions are frequently present in stamps. A substantial majority of persons depicted in stamps are male; many of them are actual persons (whether alive or not) so it

can be argued this only reflects a male-dominated society and history, rather than a specific policy for stamps. However, when stereotypes are used to make reference to groups within the nation, and their roles in it (soldiers, teachers, workers, leaders…), these representations tend to also be overwhelmingly male (e.g. Frank 1997; Raento and Brunn 2005). Finally, men are also very salient as allegorical figures, used mostly to refer to and promote "manly" attributes such as strength or power (see Lauritzen 1988). As a whole, masculinity dominates in stamp depictions.

True, female characters have been always present in stamps, yet in clearly disadvantaged terms. Especially for those series that preceded the Second World War, almost the only females depicted were members of royal houses, religious figures, or feminine allegories. At least until the sixties, women tended to have lesser, traditional and/or supportive roles: they were presented in stamps as being the caretakers of the family, the safeguards of virtues of moral values, the child educators *par excellence*... (see for instance Raento and Brunn 2005; Cusack 2005; Navarro 2009). In fact, in some cases feminine characters were used to imply weakness, or to indicate the subordinate status of a group – such as in the stamps of the old Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1843) which, according to Vida Zei, used male references when alluding to the Serb population, while Slovenes and Croats "were systematically presented in combination with devalued social segments (such as women and children) and with a nationally unconscious frame of folklore" (Zei 1997, 74). In very few occasions were women "empowered" in stamps, for example by presenting them as part of the labour force or in management or leadership positions; quite tellingly, this happened mostly during periods of war or crisis (Raento and Brunn 2005, 155).

Ill. 22 - Women's auxiliary police forces [Scott, Somalia C85]

Depictions of actual women; of female figures of historical relevance for the nation; and of women having *empowered* roles in society, slowly became more common in stamps after the Second World War (Frank 1997; Navarro 2009; Raento and Brunn 2005). However, sometimes it is dubious whether all these represented a growing reality, a political agenda, or just a vague discourse. An interesting example, which was found in the random sample, is a 1963 stamp honouring the Women's Auxiliary Police Forces of Somalia (see Ill. 22). I lack information to fully establish whether the depiction of armed, marching police women in western-style uniforms and skirts, is representative of the reality of 1963 Somalia or whether is referring to a foreign corps or whether it is just an idealized image.

A further, less dubious example of female-devoted stamps was not selected in the random sample, yet is known to this author. A full ordinary series form Germany, issued in several phases during 1986-2003 and comprising 39 stamps[57] was devoted to renowned women (see Ill. 23). Among the many included were the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, the actress Marlene Dietrich, the 1928 Olympic swimmer Charlotte Lehmann, and the social worker and academic Alice Salomon, as well as several politicians and activists. This series clearly recognised women's role in the development of the German nation.

Ill. 23 -– Women in German history series (*Frauen der Deutschen Geschichte*)
[(Hoyo), various items]

Even if the topic is very interesting and relevant, I am (for now) unable to include such gender considerations in my typology, as this would necessitate increasing the number of categories: not only gender, but also youth representations, social class, etc. that can also be included in 'human composition' would deserve an analysis of their own. In any case, such an approach would be deserving of a deeper analysis, encompassing several sub-categories. I will focus instead on ethnic/racial depictions, including both genders.

Certainly, a number of stamps present human figures or actual persons, and that does not necessarily mean they are ethnic/racial official stereotypes or models. Many stamps presenting actual individuals refer to non-members of the nation (foreigners); and even for those that depict members of the nation, we cannot infer from a single portrait that she/he is intended to be a "typical national".

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[57]A separate, 1986-89 series was issued for Western Berlin, comprising 17 stamps (Scott Publishing 2010).

To avoid bias and erroneous generalizations, for a stamp to be considered and graded in this category, it must present at least <u>two</u> human depictions, and they should be referring to the nation itself, not to members of other nations. Single persons will only be counted if they are clearly presented as stereotypes or "models" of the countries' population (for instance, when they are drawings or sketches) and/or are presented as such by means of a textual clarification. A "1" mark will be given when clear ethnic/racial depictions or straightforward allusions are present in stamps; a "0.5" when they are subtle or clearly secondary within the stamp.

18,33% of those stamps identified as nationalist in the first typology had ethnic/racial depictions (see Table 4). This is a significant number, yet lower than expected. Around one third of those stamps were graded with "0.5". In this sense, while ethnic/racial depictions and messages certainly existed in stamps, they were not very numerous. However, some of them presented ethnic/racial stereotypes in a rather obvious manner (see Ill. 24).

Ill. 24 – Human composition of the nation, pt. 1.
Above, left to right: Ghana, 1998: Dipo girl [Scott 2040a]; Brazil, 1974: ethnic influences [Scott 1344];
Korea, 1961: 15th anniv. Girl Scouts [Scott 325];
Netherlands Antilles, 1976: "Different forms to carry a child" [Scott B140];

Below, left to right: Belize, 1998: 50th anniv. Organization of American States [Scott 1093];
Laos, 1962: Malaria Eradication [Scott 74];
Australia. 1999: International Year of Older Persons [Scott 1725]

Some stamps are straightforward in presenting what a given member of the nation looks like (Ghana in Ill. 24) or in placing emphasis upon the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the modern nation (Brazil). In others the ethnic/racial characterization is ostensibly not the main topic of the stamp; yet, the promotion of a given 'face' of the nation is still evident. For instance, the stamp from Korea commemorates 15 years of the Girl Scout association in the country, yet it does so by presenting a stereotypical Korean girl; that from the Netherlands Antilles tries to teach one

"how to embrace a child" (therefore also belonging to the civic category) but the child depicted clearly alludes to the African ancestry, which accounts for most of the islands' population.

The use of stereotypes can also be easily detected in the stamp from Laos, which allegedly is dedicated to an anti-malaria campaign, but in fact the central figure is a drawing of a what, we can infer, is 'a typical Laotian boy'. The Belizean stamp presents two of such idealized characters: a boy of African-ancestry ethnic features, and a girl with Mayan ones – which not by coincidence are the two main populations of the country. A slightly different case is found in the stamp from Australia: it uses the photo of an actual person, not an idealized model; and yet, both the protagonist and the two, smaller ones in the corner, still convey an implicit idea of 'how Australians look like.

Finally, sometimes such ethnic/racial depictions conveyed further, and very interesting messages. For instance, a stamp from Samoa, issued in 1970 to celebrate Christmas (see Ill. 25 below) presents a beautiful painting of a Holy Child, golden aureole included: a true Samoan baby Jesus. In this way, a Christian celebration, together with its main protagonist, is artistically reworked to represent a completely different ethnic/national community. Even more interesting is the stamp from Gabon: it allegedly celebrates the World Day against Leprosy, presenting a drawing of a (arguably) typical Gabonese settlement, which is full of (seemingly) sick Gabonese natives... yet the doctor seems to be white. In this way, and whether consciously or not, some stamps manage not only to represent the ethnic/racial stereotypes linked to a nation, but also the social roles associated with them.

Ill. 25 – Human composition of the nation, part 2.
Samoa, 1970: Christmas with (Samoan?) Holy Child [Scott 333];
Gabon, 1985: World Leprosy Day [Scott 575]

<u>Second category: cultural identity</u>

A wide range of things can be included within the umbrella notion of "cultural identity". For instance, it could include a number of artistic objects and products, ranging from fine art pieces to handcrafts, as well as clothes, films, monumental/architectonical structures, and many others. Then, these objects could range from traditional, even very old items, to modern products such as those representing so-called "pop culture". Finally, examples of a given cultural identity could also be products that have a deep, long-standing impact in the community's life and achieve the status of 'cultural markers' of a given community, such as traditional beverages or food.

In addition to objects, the "culture" or "cultural identity" of a nation also abounds with practices, such as traditions or dances, and even broader social phenomena that, because of being so deeply rooted in the community, are also regarded as 'markers' of its culture –e.g. a given language and sometimes, a particular creed (see e.g. Smith 2009, 27). Finally, in "cultural identity" we can also include the authors of works of cultural value (painters, writers, composers, architects...) as well as particular cultural events (fairs, festivals, carnivals) and even the institutions producing and promoting them.

Despite such a broad nature, when we think in terms of the defining elements of the nation (see Ch. II) we find that these cultural artefacts, practices and markers are always presented as part of the human specificity of the nation: they make it "collectively unique". Therefore, and not surprisingly, they are an essential part of any national imaginary. However, it is also true that such artefacts, practices and markers might *not* be exclusive to that nation, or not even truly "native" to it: most cultural phenomena and artworks demonstrate at least some foreign influence.

In this sense, cultural artefacts, practices and markers can rarely contribute to a clear, unequivocal external differentiation of the nation. However, they can definitively be used for the other two functions of a national imaginary (see Ch. II). On the one hand, they are at the basis of a constitutive identity of the nation: of that sense of being "collectively unique". No nation can even be imagined without some common cultural referents, even if the true "uniqueness" of such referents may be challenged. On the other hand, such cultural referents allow the individual to identify other members of the national community.

Of course, postage stamps can carry messages regarding the cultural identity of the nation; in fact, it was expected that this would be very frequent, especially regarding objects and practices. Cultural "markers", such as language or religion, can be more problematic, and therefore a religious figure or a given tongue or dialect did not count as "cultural" phenomena,

unless they were explicitly presented as a determinant or intrinsic part of the national culture. The same applies to persons, events and institutions: they will only be counted in this category when presented as contributing to the national culture and/or "belonging" to it.

The messages in the category were graded with '1' when they show a given cultural object, practice or marker as representative or significant for the national identity, and as '0.5' when such a motif is set as the background of the main action, or plays a secondary role in it. Of course, the messages should refer to the culture of the particular nation (the one issuing the stamp). Otherwise, such stamps were considered as supranational/cosmopolitan.

During the analysis, it was found that messages of this kind were indeed frequent: almost 45,01% of those stamps with nationalist content had cultural identity messages, making it the most common category of all (see Table 4). Furthermore, around 3/4 of these stamps received a "1" mark. Therefore, messages regarding a cultural identity are not only very frequent in stamps, but they are also very clear in their intention of spreading such cultural artefacts, practices, etc. as the particular, "national", identity of the issuing country.

Ill. 26 - Cultural identity messages, pt. 1: National architecture and painting in stamps.
Japan, 1969: Anrakuji Temple in Nagano [Scott 983];
Russia, 2001: Pokrov Cathedral of the Rogozh Old Believers, Moscow [Scott 6642].
Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 1978: Ri Am painting [Scott 1762].
Federal Republic of Germany, 1978: 'Easter at Walchensee' by Lovis Corinth [Scott, Germany 1283]

Ill. 27 - Cultural identity messages, pt. 2: National music in stamps.

Above:
Morocco, 1983: Music band (popular arts) [Scott 587].
People's Republic of Romania, 1981: Moldovan Folkdance [Scott, Romania 3009a]

Below:
French Polynesia, 1999: 150th death anniv. of F. Chopin [Scott 1396].
USA, 2004: Herny Mancini and the *Pink Panther* theme [Scott 3839]

Ill. 28 - Cultural identity messages, pt. 3: Literature and sculpture

Above:
Iceland, 1953: The *Reykjabok* [Scott 278]
Hungary, 1997: M. Kálman (writer) and scenes from *St. Peter's Umbrella* [Scott 3559]

Below:
Ivory Coast, 1989: *The Panther*, sculpture by Christian Lattier [Scott 873]
Argentina, Monument to General Julio A. Roca [Scott 477]
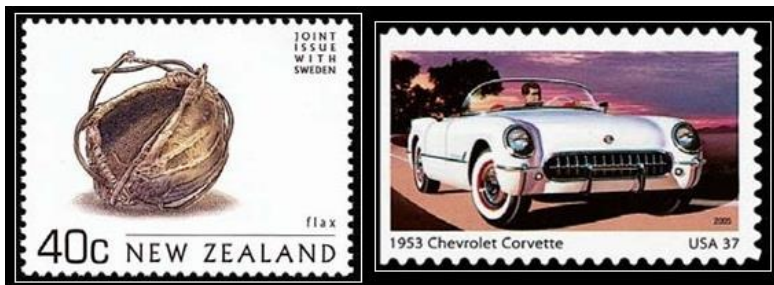
Ill. 29 – Cultural identity messages, pt. 4: Old vs. New.

New Zealand, 2002: Maori basket [Scott 1780];
USA, 2005: Corvette ("sporty cars of the 50's" series) [Scott 3933]

Ill. 30 – Cultural identity messages, pt. 5 – Traditions and cultural markers.

Gambia, 1972: "Lighted ship" celebration [Scott 283];
Paraguay, 2003: Tamas (traditional food) [Scott 2719

Ill. 31 – Cultural identity messages, pt. 6: Events and institutions.
Iran, 1991: Roshid International Educational Film Festival [Scott 2483].
Chile, 1998: 20th anniv. Music Week, Frutillar [Scott 773]
Australia, 2001: Opening of the National Museum, Canberra [Scott 1939]
Uzbekistan, 2005: 1000th anniv. foundation of Ma'mun Academy [Scott 6041

Cultural references are very frequent in postage stamps. Music, painting, literature and architecture are perhaps the most common motifs (Ill. 26 to Ill. 28) (see also Covington and Brunn 2006; Goodey 2011). Handcrafts are also common, especially those regarded as the most "authentic" and profoundly historical, such as the Maori basket (Ill. 29). Yet, icons of modern, pop culture are also honoured, such as the Chevrolet Corvette in the same illustration – which is part of a series honouring "sporty cars of the 50's" – as well as the stamp for Henry Mancini, who composed the world-famous theme tune for *The Pink Panther* (Ill. 27, bottom right corner).

Finally, it is clear that such cultural identity messages are most frequently personalized: it is not only the artwork, but the specific member of the nation who created it that is honoured. Sometimes, these stamps have some interesting implications, like the stamp on Ill. 27, issued by French Polynesia to honour Chopin: in the stamp, a Polish-born composer is linked to islands on the other side of the world, just by the magic of overarching French culture.

Particular traditions, celebrations and cultural markers were also present on stamps, even if not as frequently as expected. Some paid tribute to truly specific traditions, like the "lighted ship" festivity in Gambia; while others were related to cultural markers, for instance, food (Ill. 30). Specific cultural events and institutions (Ill. 31) were also present, even if less frequently.

In this way, is clear that postage stamps had helped nation-states to promote a particular, official view of the identity of the nation, as expressed in cultural products, markers, and traditions. Moreover, in many cases such references are mixed with further meanings and concepts. Some are openly nationalist, such as the monument to Gen. Roca in Argentina: it is both a monument per se, and a tribute to a national hero (Ill. 28, bottom right). In other cases, cultural objects are shown as having an essential role in the history of the nation and/or being proofs of its antiquity, such as the *Reykjabok,* one of the Icelandic sagas (also in Ill. 28), while some merely give a general idea of a long-standing national history, such as old buildings.

<u>Third category: historical development</u>

Just as in the case of "cultural identity", the term "historical development" of a nation can imply several things. For instance, it can refer to the development of the national community as a whole, focusing more on its institutions and collective feats that on its individual members – presenting particulars as subject to larger historical forces where the nation is the main actor. Nonetheless, it can also take the opposite tack: narrating the past by referring to particular individuals and their acts, and explaining how they impacted on the community. In other words, the narratives of the "historical development" of the nation can take a broader, *longue-durée* view of the past, or alternatively present it as a saga, centred upon particular leaders and their (heroic) actions. In many cases, official imaginaries will promote a carefully balanced version of both.

Messages in this category are relevant for all three functions of a national imaginary (see Ch. II), but particularly for its constitutive identity and external differentiation. First, these messages not only set a common past in form of a foundational moment and a series of heroes and common developments afterwards, but also point towards a common destiny of that community as a whole. Second, it also helps to present such a community as having *always* been different from others – that is, claiming an historical specificity, not just a recent one. What is more, such an approach makes it possible to single out historical enemies and/or allies among the foreigners.

A comprehensive approach was also followed when classifying messages in stamps for this category. Only two limitations were set: first, that stamps referring to <u>current</u> events would <u>not</u> be counted, unless such events were explicitly presented with a clear historic character (for instance, as part of a longer, comprehensive process) or referred to truly foundational moments for the nation happening at that very moment, such as independence. This limitation was set because many stamps are especially issued to promote current events (fairs, expositions, inaugurations) that lack a real historical character: my main interest here is in official versions regarding the common past and/or the shared future. A second limitation was that stamps honouring specific persons within the arts, sciences, or sports would not be counted here, if they were already counted on the same grounds in the "cultural identity" category.[58] This was done to avoid excessive overlapping.

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[58] This applies only to actual persons, not to objects. So for instance the stamp with Gen. Roca's memorial (see Ill. 28) was also counted here: it both commemorates a political hero (Roca) and presents a cultural product (a sculpture).

It was found during the analysis that stamps pertaining to this category were quite common too, comprising 33,76% of those stamps with nationalist content: the second most popular category. Furthermore, the vast majority of these messages were graded with "1" (see Table 4). This means that not only are stamps being intensively used to promote an official vision of the national past, but that such content is presented in quite a straightforward manner. Then, three main types of messages were identified in this category, namely commemorations as such; stamps devoted to individual heroes; and depictions with a historical meaning.

Ill. 32 – Historical development messages, pt. 1: Commemorations.

Left, above - Gabon, 1965: 5th Independence anniversary [Scott C37];
Left, below- Brazil, 1965: 400th anniv. of the foundation of Rio de Janeiro [Scott 994]

Centre, above - Turkey, 1969: 50th anniv. of Ataturk's arrival to Ankara [Scott 1828];
Centre, below - Slovenia, 1993: 400th anniv. of the battle of Sisak [Scott 175]

Right, above - South Africa, 1960: Centennial of S.A. railways [Scott 903];
Right, below –Cuba, 1964: 25th anniv. of the 'Postal Rocket experiment' [Scott 883].

A variety of events have been commemorated in stamps, as Ill. 32 demonstrates. Of course, those stamps that make reference to foundational moments are very common: whether the birth of the nation-state itself, like the stamp from Gabon (top left) or of specific entities or places within the nation, especially those that have been relevant for the nation's history as a whole, like Rio de Janeiro for Brazil (bottom left). Also, a very common subject of commemoration in stamps were those events of a political and/or a military nature. A rather straightforward case is the stamp from Turkey (upper row centre) issued to celebrate 50 years since the arrival of Ataturk in Ankara.

A more interesting case of the "official vision" of the national past through stamps is that from Slovenia, celebrating four centuries since the battle of Sisak, where the Holy Roman Empire soundly defeated the invading Ottoman Empire in 1593. The site of the battle lies in

today's Slovenia, and a good contingent of Slovenian forces took part in it. Therefore. it is no surprise that it is central to the official historical narrative of the country, as the stamp attests.

What is more interesting is that this same stamp does not make any mention of the fact that most of the army was made up of both Slovenian and *Croatian* forces. In fact, the Sisak battle is celebrated in Croatia as well as Slovenia, while it is still a matter of debate (and of national pride) which of these was the "true" protagonist of the victory. In any case, it should be taken into account that both Slovenians and Croats were not fighting in 1593 for 'their' respective nations, but as part of an Imperial Hapsburg army... however, the stamp only mentions this as an afterthought.

A further, common type of commemoration in stamps was that related to milestones in the material, technological and/or economic advancement of the country. Some examples are a South African stamp commemorating 100 years of railways in the country (Ill. 32, top right) as well as a very interesting stamp from Cuba, which commemorates the 25th anniversary of the launch of the "postal rocket". Some Cuban sources, even today, still claim it as "the first official test of a postal rocket in world" and celebrate it as a feat of domestic technology (see for example Oller 2009). However, it is often not mentioned that the experiment was a complete failure, with the rocket exploding on launch and burning all of its letters. Furthermore, by 1939, postal rockets had already been tested a number of times elsewhere, in Europe, the USA and even in India; some individuals had designed and tested semi-official services, for instance for isolated towns in the Austrian Alps during the winter (Glines 1968), and even issued commemorative stamps for that (i.e. Germany on the early 30's, see Harper 1998, 24; Kühndelt 1957). In this sense, the Cuban stamp is a very interesting piece of nationalist discourse trying to promote a debatable, even counter-factual historical narrative.

The second, quite numerous, kind of messages in this category were those stamps devoted to individual figures of the past – most of them being political figures, ideologues, or patriotic heroes, as Ill. 33 makes clear: the stamp from Philippines (left) honours José Rizal (1861–1896) a key figure in the struggle for Philippine autonomy from Spain, while Uruguay honours the popular hero Francisco de los Santos (centre left). While most of the heroes depicted in stamps are long deceased, in some cases recent ones are also honoured, likeYitzhak Rabin for Israel and Benazir Bhutto for Pakistan (centre right and right, respectively).

Ill. 33 - Historical development messages, pt. 2: National heroes
Philippines, 1996: 100th anniv. death of José Rizal [Scott 2458];
Uruguay, 1973: Francisco de los Santos [Scott 858]
Israel, 2005: 10th anniv. death of Yitzhak Rabin [Scott 1608];
Pakistan, 2008: Benazir Bhutto [WNS PK007.08]

A final, third kind of messages in this category were those not commemorating any event or person, but showing depictions or objects with historical relevance for the nation and/or that transmit the idea of the nation as a community with long-standing, deep historical roots. Some of these messages go back to pre-national times, such as the Iron Age menhir fields of Sweden (Ill. 34, left). Others refer to relatively more recent roots, for instance by presenting the tombs of King Alfonso VIII and his wife Eleanor, and therefore presenting a historical narrative that links the old Castilian kingdoms with modern Spain (Ill. 34, centre). Finally, some stamps just refer to the past by presenting figures and references with a historical "ethos", like the stamp from the United Kingdom (Ill. 34, right) presenting 'the Royal Scots regiment'. Surely, both the topic and the composition, particularly the very prominent Scottish flag right under the Queen's head, are not arbitrary selected: they constitute an attempt to link the Scottish past with the UK present.

Ill. 34 – Historical development messages, pt. 3: depictions with historical meanings.
Sweden, 1964: 'Ship' grave, Iron age, Skane [Scott 665];
Spain, 1969: Monasteries / Alfonso VIII and Eleanor tombs [Scott 1593]:
United Kingdom, 1983: The Royal Scots [Scott, Great Britain 1022]

<u>Fourth category: individual accomplishments</u>

The former three categories were inherently broad. This fourth category is much more specific: it deals with depictions and messages about achievements accomplished by teams or individual members of the nation, which are not just celebrated, but truly 'appropriated' by the nation. Therefore, they are presented in the imaginary as *collective* achievements: as a feat where the nation as a whole had performed a key role – even if this was not, in fact, the case. In this sense, outstanding cultural achievements, sporting victories, records of all kinds, challenging travels completed, scientific breakthroughs (see for instance DeYoung 1986; Jones 2001; Osmond 2008) and even the most unlikely events have been presented as national accomplishments.

A wonderful example of the latter is a 1959 stamp from Colombia (see Ill. 35) celebrating Ms. Zuluaga, the winner of the Miss Universe contest of that year.[59] However, the stamp is not just celebrating her (personal) accomplishment. The name of the issuing country is far more prominent (and set at a higher location) that her own name. Her figure is certainly central, but it is flanked by two symbols: at the left there is an orchid, the official national flower of Colombia, while at the right there is a coffee plant, another well-known symbol of the country (see for instance Colombia 2006). The overall message is that one member of the community has won the glory, yet that she has done it not for herself, but for the whole nation. It is not the person who is celebrated; it is the national community that wins through the achievements of its members.

Ill. 35– Example of 'appropriation' of individual accomplishments. Colombia, 1959: Miss Universe winner, Luz M. Zuluaga [Scott 607]

The same applies many other types of achievements accomplished by members of a given nation. And yet, we can always wonder if such membership really had anything to do with the feat itself. Truly, in some cases, it actually does, like in several international sports competitions (or in this case, Miss Universe), as the contestants are explicitly representing a country. Yet in other cases, in sports but particularly for scientific discoveries and inventions, it is quite possible that the individual was acting for his or her own very personal motifs: intellectual inquisitiveness, career advancement, even just the search for fame. And yet, in the national discourse, they all are celebrated not just as an individual's victory, but as "ours".

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[59] This stamp was not selected in the random sample. It has been included here just as an example.

In terms of the functions of a national imaginary, messages of this kind contribute mostly to the constitutive identity of the nation, particularly by providing stories of common accomplishments and role models for all members. Furthermore, these types of messages also contribute to the external differentiation of the nation in a particular way: the community is presented not just as a different community, but as 'superior' in some area; and this is because the message is not just that a given s/he did something, but that "we" did so through him/her.

Messages of this kind were not very common on postage stamps, accounting for just 5.44% of the sample –the lowest of all categories (see Table 4). One reason for this is methodological, as this category tends to overlap with that of "cultural identity" and, after a case-by-case analysis, in most cases it was decided to choose only one, in order to avoid overrepresentation because, in principle, all cultural figures of the nation could also be counted here. If such overlapping were allowed, the percentage would be significantly higher. Anyway, from the results it is clear that in almost every stamp, the majority of messages of this kind are also very explicit, as almost every single one was graded as "1".

Ill. 36 – Individual accomplishments. Left to right:
Sweden, 2000: Ludmila Engquist [Scott 2395a];
Italia, 2007: 40ᵗʰ death anniv. of Primo Carrera (professional boxer) [Scott 2828];
France, 1970; Alain Gerbault's solo trip around the world [Scott 1263];
USA, 1940: Samuel Morse [Scott 890]

As expected, most of the stamps in this category made reference to athletes, for instance the stamps issued by Sweden and Italy (Ill. 36). The first is for the Olympics, but focused on the then-sports star Ludmila Engquist. In this sense, it was anticipating Ludmila's victories as victories for all Sweden.[60] Then, the feats of adventurers and explorers are also celebrated in stamps, for instance the French stamp celebrating the solo sail trip around the world of Alain Gerbault (Ill. 36, third stamp). Finally, persons whose achievements were not sports or adventure-related are also present in this category, such as Samuel M. Morse.

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[60] This particular stamp probably caused some embarrassment to Swedish authorities afterwards, as in 2001 Engquist was found guilty of doping.

It is very common for postage stamps to show flora, fauna and landscapes: items of this type abound in most collections. Certainly, we could think that a picture of a flower or a little bird is not the best way to convey ideological messages. However (once we take stamps "for-collectors-only" out of the equation), we find that stamps for real postal use are overwhelmingly focused on *native* species of the issuing country, or those shared with only a limited number of neighbours – but in the latter case, the "national" character of such species will be stressed anyway. In contrast, valid postage stamps devoted to species of other regions of the globe, beyond the national boundaries, tend to be less numerous. Clearly, stamps tend to celebrate not just nature, but *our* nature (see Cusack 2001; Cusack 2010; also Lekan 2004).

In this sense, the official national imaginary takes species out of their environment and puts them into a national framework, as "part" of the nation, "representative" of, or even truly "belonging" to it. The same applies to landscapes (rivers, mountains, jungles...) that are presented as quintessential elements of the nation –despite the fact that such species, objects and features quite surely predate the creation of the nation-state in question, or even of any human community at all. To put it simply, they are *appropriated* by the nation, and not only in legal, but also in ideological terms, becoming part of ethnoscapes (Smith 2002).

These messages have a role both for the constitutive identity and for the external differentiation of the nation: they show what it "has", what is indigenous to it – even if, stated above, it can be the case that those resources and features (living species, minerals) can also be present elsewhere and, in any case, they exist quite independently of the nation. Yet, in the imaginary, they are presented as 'ours', to the point that some become icons (such the orchid and coffee plants on Ill. 35) or even official symbols of the nation, such as the maple leaf for Canada, the bald eagle for USA, and the cedar for Lebanon.

Yet, for analytical purposes, in this category I looked for messages regarding the *actual* natural attributes of the nation. This means that only real species and landscapes were counted, while other representations (e.g. flora and/or fauna used in national symbols, like the examples above) did not count by themselves.[61] Of course, mythological species did not count. Very general or extended species (e.g. "cats" in general) were not counted, unless it was very clear from the stamp that they were being allegorically 'appropriated'. Also, overlapping of natural

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[61] Otherwise, we would have to mark lions as flora/fauna of Finland, just due to its coat of arms. Exceptions were made when representations-of-representations were accompanied by some other message that clearly refer to them not just as symbols, but as actual parts of the natural environment of the nation.

sites/landscapes within this category, with those of category 6 (National Territory) was avoided as much as possible.

During the analysis it was found that 19,06% of the stamp sample presented depictions of this type (see Table 4) and two-thirds of them were graded as "1", suggesting an intention to present these 'national' species and features in a very clear manner.

Ill. 37 – Natural attributes, pt. 1: flora and fauna.
Somalia, 1955: Flowers – Adenium Somalense [198]; Madagascar, 1981: Angraecum Leonis [612];
UK, 1976: British Horses: Shire Horse [Scott 839]; Cuba, 1998: 'Catibo' snake [Scott 1479]

Most of these stamps presented flora and fauna. In some cases, the (arguably) "national" character was emphasized by text, like in the stamp issued by the Italian trusteeship of Somalia (Ill. 37, far left), which put the scientific name *Adenium Somalense* beside the plant; or that from Cuba (Ill. 37, far right), which specified the snake as "fauna of the Zapata swamp". Also common were stamps that presented environments and places (whether named or unnamed) such as the stamps from Namibia and Montenegro (ill. 38, left and centre). Finally, some stamps also "appropriated" rocks. For instance, the one from Brazil (ill. 38, right) categorises Tourmaline stones as a distinct type of "Brazilian gems", even if they are also found elsewhere.[62]

Ill. 38 – Natural attributes, pt. 2: Landscapes, minerals.
Namibia, 2006: Orange River landscape [Scott 1097]; Montenegro, 1943: Mount Durmitor [Scott 41];
Brazil, 1989: Gems from Brazil – Tourmaline [Scott 2198]

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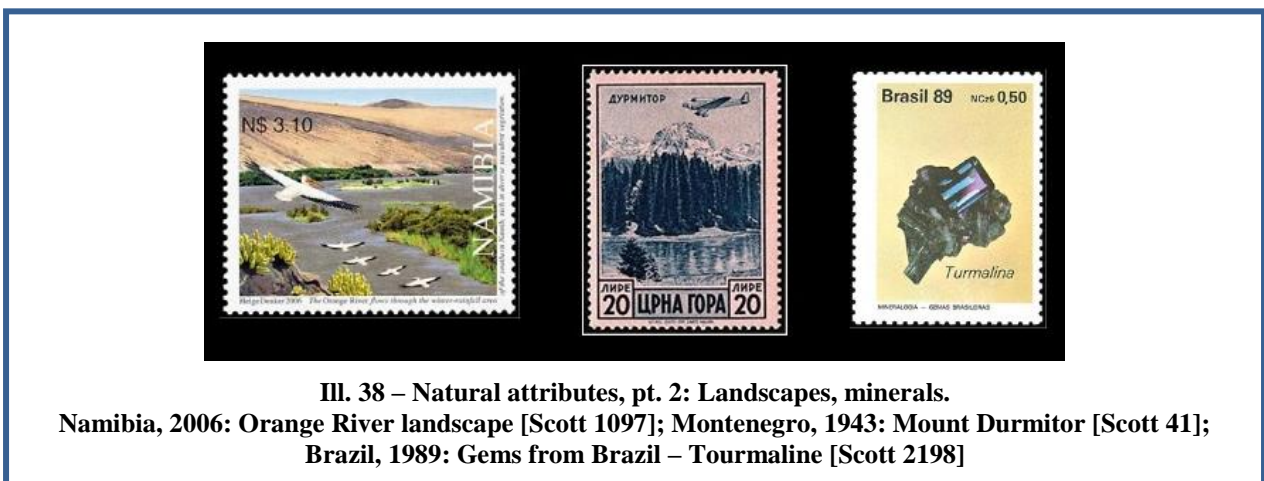
[62] Particularly in several locations in Africa and Asia - the name itself is Sinhalese. In discharge, Brazil is a particularly important producer, and the world's largest stone was mined there.

<u>Sixth category: national territory</u>

Territory is, of course, a key factor for any nation, any nationalism and any national imaginary. The demand for a national territory, a place that the national community can not only inhabit, but can treat it as "its own", is a constant demand for any nationalist movement. Many interstate conflicts have their root in the simple demand for "a place for the nation", or the ambition of enlarging such a place. In this sense, the nation is imagined as a bounded shape: a map (Anderson 2006 [1983]). Even if in the practice its boundaries can be imprecise or contested, they still *should* exist.

Territorial rights, in this way, are presented as an integral, undeniable part of the collective rights of the nation. The idea of a national territory helps to form a constitutive identity, as the national community is presented as inherently linked to a given land ("*our*" land). It also allows for external differentiation, as in many cases non-members are precisely those beyond its borders and, if that is not the case, then it should be because others are illegitimately occupying "our" land, or because other fellow nationals have unjustly been left out of it.

Unsurprisingly, geopolitical matters and territorial demands in particular are the best-studied topic in the literature regarding ideological messages on stamps (e.g. Beck 1983; Child 2008a; 2005, 127-136; 2010; Davis 1985; Deans 2005, 18-20; Nuessel 1992; Pierce 1996; Wachman 2005, 266-267) Yet, the representation of such territory can be complex. It can be made by means of alluding to, or depicting, the actual (political) borders of the national territory, or those zones claimed as rightfully belonging to it. A national territory can also be alluded to by pointing at representative zones. Finally, one can allude to the national territory by symbolic means or figurative speech only.

Therefore, stamps were counted in this category when they depicted maps of the nation. In this very frequent case I included maps with actual political borders, as well as those presenting claimed and/or unrecognized ones. I also included stamps without maps but referring to such borders in an explicit way, for instance by texts asserting sovereignty over a given area. Depictions of particular places were also counted, as long as such places were presented within a national context, or used (overtly or not) to assert sovereignty over a given region. Finally, other references to the national territory, or to representative/constitutive parts of it, were also counted – especially if these parts were claimed, annexed and/or integrated to the nation at a given point in time.

Stamps with nationalist messages included a territorial reference in 14,52% of the cases (see Table 4). Slightly more than half of these stamps were marked '1', meaning that territorial allusions were not only presented *per se*, but also in an overt form, or as background for other topics. Most of these stamps presented maps, therefore showing national territory and its borders in a quite unequivocal form (see Ill. 39). In some of these stamps, the map itself is the main motif, like in the Afghan one (far left). Then, in some cases the map is used to show the geographical position of the country, like the one in Samoa (centre left). In some other stamps, the national map is used as a background or accompanying element in stamps otherwise dedicated to a different topic, such those from Bahrain and Madagascar (right).
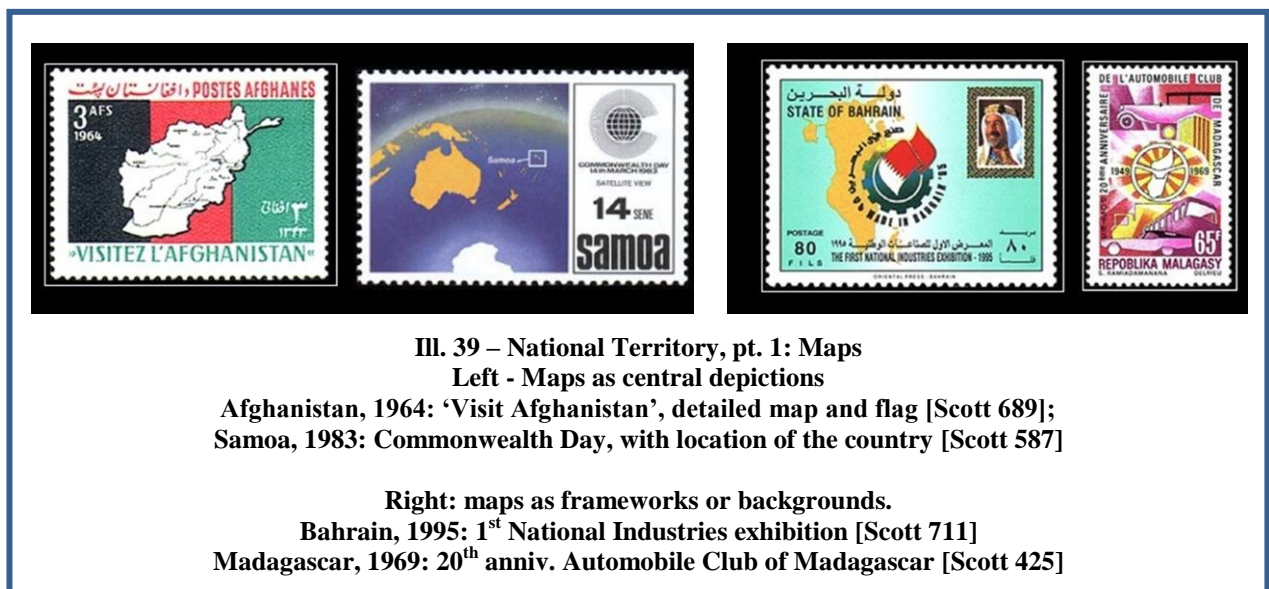
Ill. 39 – National Territory, pt. 1: Maps
Left - Maps as central depictions
Afghanistan, 1964: 'Visit Afghanistan', detailed map and flag [Scott 689];
Samoa, 1983: Commonwealth Day, with location of the country [Scott 587]

Right: maps as frameworks or backgrounds.
Bahrain, 1995: 1st National Industries exhibition [Scott 711]
Madagascar, 1969: 20th anniv. Automobile Club of Madagascar [Scott 425]

In turn, confirming the arguments and findings of the authors mentioned above, on many occasions stamps were found to make territorial claims. Some of them were quite straightforward, such as the stamp from Venezuela (Ill. 40, far left), which presents very clearly the territory claimed from Guyana as a shadow at the right. Another case, less prominent at first sight, is the stamp from Chile that celebrates 75 years of Rotary International (Ill. 40, centre left). The long, white strip of Chilean territory is barely recognizable in the globe. Yet, once spotted, it is quite clear that so-called Chilean Antarctic territory is also marked – this, in spite of Argentinean claims over sections of it (and both Chilean and Argentinean claims being not internationally recognized anyway). The meaning of such territorial depiction in a stamp for a different topic becomes much clearer when we take into account that the stamp was issued in 1980, only two years after Argentina and Chile had briefly gone to war regarding disputed southern territories.

Stamps related to armed conflicts and territories were also found in the sample. One was the stamp from the Rep. of Korea (ROK) issued in November 1950, directly after the beginning of the Korean war. In it, the UN and ROK flags flank a map of the peninsula where the internal borders have been erased (Ill. 40, centre right). A further, Egyptian stamp commemorates the 11th anniversary of the October/Yom Kippur war, but does it by putting national symbols over the Sinai peninsula, as a means to underline sovereignty claims over the region (Ill. 40, far right).

Ill. 40 – National Territory, pt. 2: Territorial claims
Venezuela, 1964: 11th National Population and Housing Census, showing the claimed portion of Guyana [Scott 1248];
Chile, 1980: 75th anniv. Rotary International, showing continental Chile (in white) as well as the claimed territories in the Antarctica [Scott 567]
Republic of Korea, 1950: Stamp with UN symbols, ROK flag and the Korean peninsula without internal borders [Scott, Korea 711]
Egypt (UAR) 1968: 11th anniv. Yom Kippur war and regain of control over Sinai peninsula [Scott 425]

Finally, 'non-map' references to the national territory, or representative parts of it, were quite common. One natural instance of this was for commemorations of particular places, like the Slovak stamp for the 750 years of the city of Banská Bystrica (Ill. 41, first from left). Such apparently innocent references contrast with others, much more politically charged ones, such as the Italian stamp that celebrates the annexation of Venezia Giulia (second from left) and does so by means of an old seal – probably to underline the historical character of the Italian claim over the region.

Ill. 41 – National Territory, pt. 3: other territorial references

Slovakia, 2005: city of Banská Bystrica, 750th anniv. [Scott 472];
Italy, 1921: Annexation of Venezia Giulia to Italy [Scott 130]

Seventh category: foreign relations of the nation

Relations with other states and communities beyond the borders are, of course, one of the most important activities for any modern state. And, as argued before, stamps have an inherently international character, being small "paper ambassadors" (Altman 1991) that present certain aspects of the nation to the world. Therefore, it was expected that messages about other nations, states and/or international organizations would be quite frequent in stamps – a fact that was evident from the last chapter, due to the large number of supranational / cosmopolitan stamps found (see Ch. IV; also Table 2).
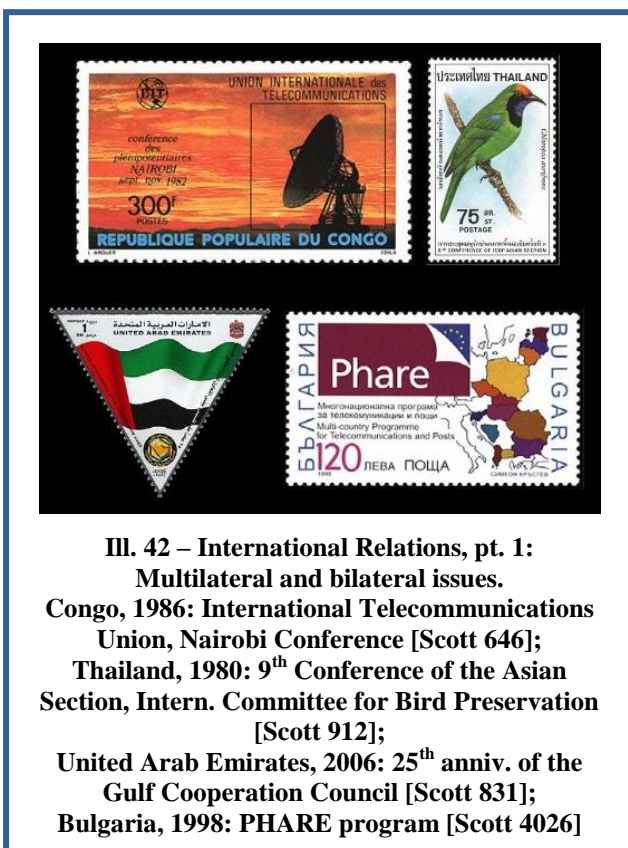
Ill. 42 – International Relations, pt. 1:
Multilateral and bilateral issues.
Congo, 1986: International Telecommunications Union, Nairobi Conference [Scott 646];
Thailand, 1980: 9th Conference of the Asian Section, Intern. Committee for Bird Preservation [Scott 912];
United Arab Emirates, 2006: 25th anniv. of the Gulf Cooperation Council [Scott 831];
Bulgaria, 1998: PHARE program [Scott 4026]

Indeed, a large group of stamps within this category was related to global, multinational, or regional initiatives, which the issuing nation-state was endorsing, promoting or taking part in. The range of topics covered was quite large: global telecommunications, environmental protection, development cooperation, amongst many others (Ill. 42). Certainly, due to both topics and depictions, a number of these stamps were also classified as supranational/cosmopolitan. However, in some cases, the nation-state had a larger relevance in stamp depictions, even relegating supranational messages and depictions to the background (e.g. the stamp from UAE, Ill. 42,

lower left corner)

Another large group in this category were messages concerning bilateral relations. In the same way as above, a variety of specific topics were found in the sample. These included stamps honouring presidential visits (see Ill. 43, far left), as well as bi-national initiatives or enterprises (centre-left). Then, the celebration of peace and friendship treaties were also promoted in stamps, such as the agreement between Ecuador and Peru to end their decades-long border conflict, which took them sporadically to war (centre-right). Hence peace and cooperation seem to be the rule in stamps. However, in some cases they also had some more patriotic, almost militant tone,

such as the stamp from Luxembourg thanking France for her support in liberating the country from the Nazi occupation (Ill. 43, far right).
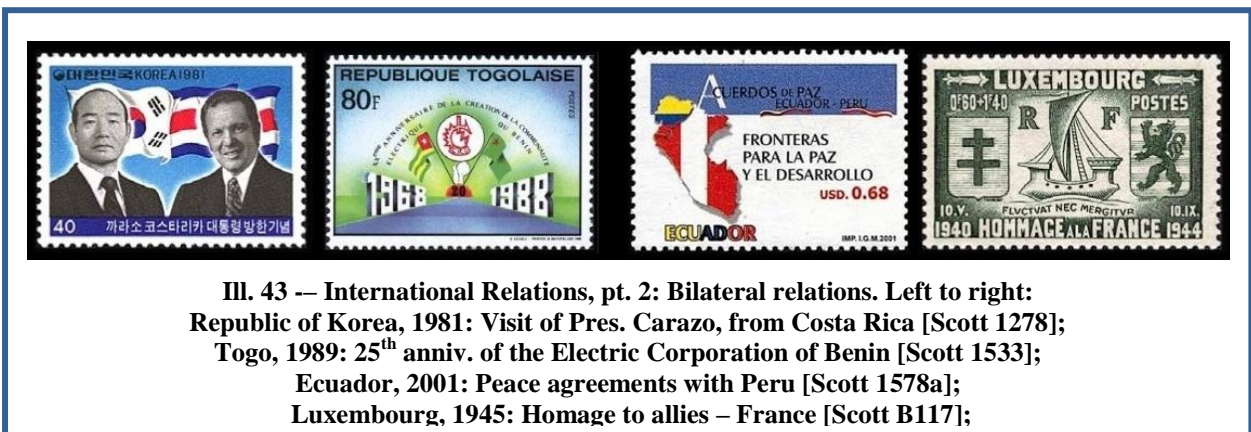
Ill. 43 -– International Relations, pt. 2: Bilateral relations. Left to right:
Republic of Korea, 1981: Visit of Pres. Carazo, from Costa Rica [Scott 1278];
Togo, 1989: 25th anniv. of the Electric Corporation of Benin [Scott 1533];
Ecuador, 2001: Peace agreements with Peru [Scott 1578a];
Luxembourg, 1945: Homage to allies – France [Scott B117];

The abovementioned cases are straightforward, but other stamps offer more subtle and quite interesting messages. For instance, a 1961 Bolivian stamp celebrates Miguel de Cervantes not specifically because of his literary work, but because he has been appointed "Perpetual Mayor of La Paz, Bolivia". This is quite interesting, not only because Bolivia did not exist in Cervantes' time (and he certainly never visited the Americas in his lifetime) but also because this honour was never conferred by the Spanish crowns, and it was symbolically granted by Bolivia only in 1948 and 1962 (EFE 2005). In this sense, depending of the point of view, the stamp message can be interpreted as recognition of a literary *Maestro,* or as an appeal to a broader Hispanic identity.

In contrast to this, some other stamps are extremely forthright, even dramatic in their messages. One example is the stamp from Guatemala (ill. 44, centre-left) that presents a crude photography of a destroyed village, with the text "Earthquake [of] February 4, 1976. Guatemala is wounded, but not dead. Thanks, friends of the world" – perhaps the most unambiguous example of a stamp being a true "paper ambassador" (Altman 1991).
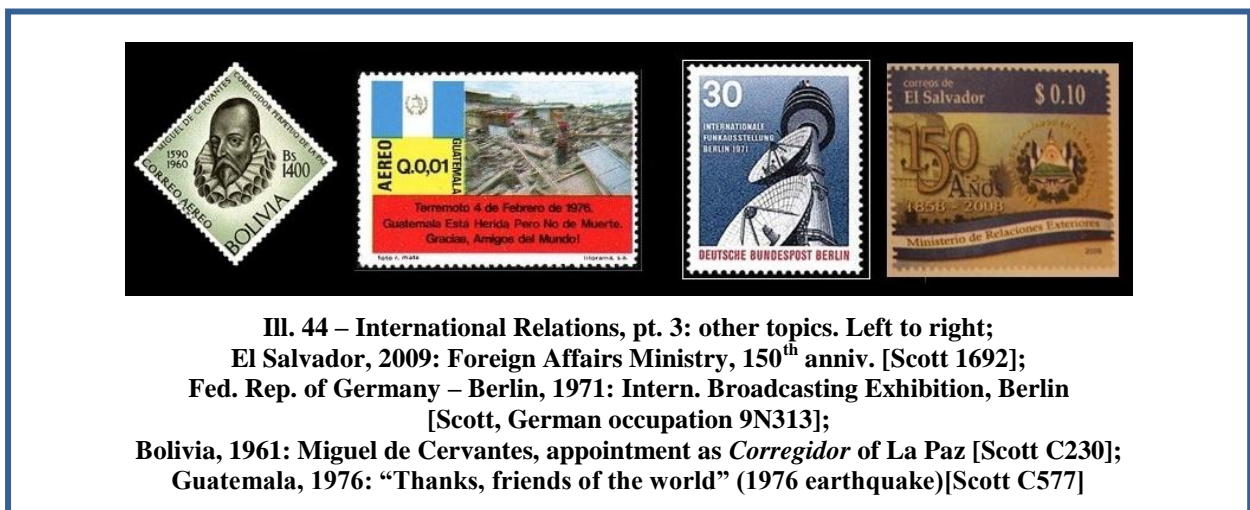
Ill. 44 – International Relations, pt. 3: other topics. Left to right;
El Salvador, 2009: Foreign Affairs Ministry, 150th anniv. [Scott 1692];
Fed. Rep. of Germany – Berlin, 1971: Intern. Broadcasting Exhibition, Berlin
[Scott, German occupation 9N313];
Bolivia, 1961: Miguel de Cervantes, appointment as *Corregidor* of La Paz [Scott C230];
Guatemala, 1976: "Thanks, friends of the world" (1976 earthquake)[Scott C577]

Besides these two main groups, many other international topics have been included in stamps. Quite frequent are those commemorating an international event, which is being sponsored by the nation-state issuing the stamp (see Ill. 44, centre-right) and can also include a large number of topics. In other cases, the governmental institutions in charge of foreign relations are the ones honoured (centre-left). Overall, 15,97% of the stamps in the random sample had messages about the international relations of the issuing nation; as two thirds of these were graded with '1' (see Table 4).

<u>Eight category: political regime</u>
This is one of the most extensive and complex categories, since a "political regime" could include very diverse topics. For the sake of simplicity, I will focus here on messages regarding political leadership in a nation or state, its political hierarchies and governmental institutions, and the notions that are presented as the core ideological values, which sustain the nation's or state's existence.
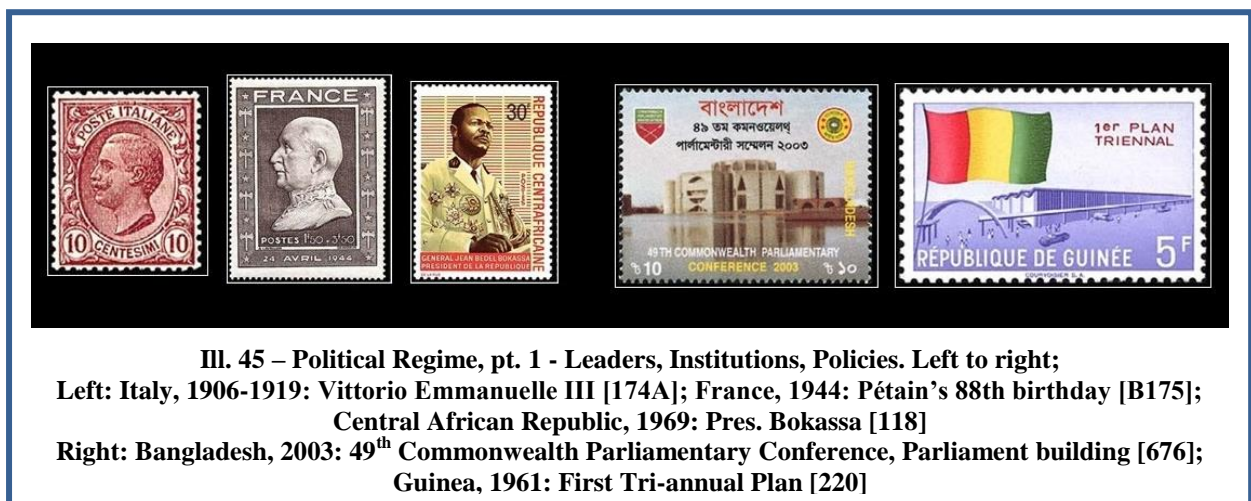
Ill. 45 – Political Regime, pt. 1 - Leaders, Institutions, Policies. Left to right;
Left: Italy, 1906-1919: Vittorio Emmanuelle III [174A]; France, 1944: Pétain's 88th birthday [B175];
Central African Republic, 1969: Pres. Bokassa [118]
Right: Bangladesh, 2003: 49th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Parliament building [676];
Guinea, 1961: First Tri-annual Plan [220]

One of the most frequent topics in such stamps are specific leaders, as Ill. 45 makes evident. This is partially explained by the fact that, at least until the end of the First World War, most ordinary series issued had a portrait of their Sovereign as a single motif – such as Vittorio Emmanuelle III (see Ill. 45, first stamp). However, during and after the Second World War, most totalitarian as well as several authoritarian regimes also presented their own leaders in stamps, such as Petáin in the stamp of Vichy France (second from left to right). Finally, some post-colonial regimes, from all continents, have been very keen to present constantly their own authoritarian leaders, whether alone, like J.B. Bokassa (see Ill. 45, third stamp) or just as a small portrait in all stamps issued, following the English example (see for instance Gambia in Ill. 30; Gabon, Ill. 32; Brunei, Ill. 18)

A second group within this category were messages about the political institutions and policies of the issuing nation-state. These ranged from whole branches to very particular offices. For example, the Bangladeshi stamp (fourth on Ill. 45) presents the Congress building of the country together with a message regarding Bangladesh being the host of the 49th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. In this way, the country was promoting both its own political nature as a parliamentarian democracy, and its involvement in international affairs. One may also highlight, the Guinean stamp promoting the first tri-annual development plan (last stamp, Ill. 45). It is in these cases that we can most clearly see stamps having a political propaganda role on behalf of a particular regime.

Ill. 46 – Political Regime, pt. 2 – Ideals, values, Political Propaganda
Ecuador, 1952: Abolition of slavery [179]; Rhodesia 1965: [200]; Rwanda, 1969 [306]

A third group included messages regarding more abstract ideas or political values, with or without being linked to specific persons or institutions, as well as straightforward propaganda. For instance, the Indonesian stamp (first in Ill. 46) promotes "the rule of law" in the country, but without offering any further details. The Ecuadorian stamp (second in Ill. 46) celebrates through both symbols and text the centenary of emancipation of slaves in Ecuador – which Pres. Urvina, depicted, ordered while in office 1851-1856. In this sense, a link between an ideal (freedom) and a given national hero is explicitly made.

Some stamps present more openly propagandistic motifs. For instance, the stamp from the Dominican Republic (third in Ill. 46) promotes the incoming general elections, by means of an idealized male figure raising a map of the republic, which in turn, is filled by different objects and landscapes. The complex iconography is completed and somehow clarified by the adjacent slogan "the force of the vote": only the citizens can support and raise the republic – a particularly meaningful message after decades of both political instability and extreme repression.

Finally, the stamp from Rwanda (Ill. 46, last stamp) has been included as one of the most interesting and complex found in the random sample, with multiple meanings detectable, and so

classified in several categories. On it, an idealized strong, young man (probably signifying the "Rwandan people", or perhaps only part thereof) waves a national flag while carrying what it seems is a basic hoe, most probably signifying the peasant sector. Yet, that person is also stepping over traditional cultural symbols (a drum, a basket, and a headdress) while the flag's pole is in fact piercing the drum. All these, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the 1959 revolution. It seems quite probable that the traditional artefacts are symbolizing the overthrown monarchy of Kigeli V, while the male figure stands for the liberated masses.

Overall, messages belonging to this category represented 18,33% of those stamps with nationalist messages at least having one of the kind. Yet, it is interesting that most messages in this category received a '1' mark (see Table 4). It seems that nation-states tried to be careful and clear when presenting references to their own political situation: after all, they are well aware of the potentialities (and risks) of stamps as propaganda means.

Ninth category: national economy and technological development

This category comprehends those messages related to the economic activities and technological development of the nation-state. Yet, a condition was set for the analysis regarding the *national* nature of such depictions: they should refer to domestic topics or developments (programmes, resources, industries, technologies etc.) or to foreign ones, but always topics that are applied or referred to the issuing country *and* presented as national – appropriated, in other words. This limitation was set to exclude a large number of stamps depicting cars, planes, ships etc. that did not have a real connection with the issuing state, but were mostly aimed at collectors.

Ill. 47 – National Economy and Technological Development, pt. 1:
Natural resources, productive activities, local industries. Left to right:
Mozambique, 2000: Agricultural Wealth – Coconuts [Scott 764];
Uzbekistan, 1997: local automobile production [Scott 158a-c];
Indonesia, 1999: 50th anniv. Garuda Indonesia [Scott 1825];
Rwanda, 1986: Transport [Scott 1243];
Costa Rica, 1993: National Industrial Chamber, 50th anniv. [Scott 456]

A first group of stamps in this category were devoted to natural resources and local industries/trades. Some were quite specific, such as the stamp from Mozambique (Ill. 47, first stamp) that names coconuts as "Agricultural Wealth" of the nation, or the series from Uzbekistan (second in Ill. 47) displaying diverse automobile models produced by Uz-Daewoo, a joint venture between the Korean manufacturer and an Uzbek public company. Stamps devoted to public or strategic companies were very common indeed, such as those for national airlines (e.g. Garuda Indonesia Airways, third stamp). Some other stamps made references to broader productive/economic activities within the country, such as that from Rwanda regarding "Transport" (fourth stamp). Finally, some made reference to local institutions involved in these economic activities, such as the stamp from Costa Rica celebrating the national industrial chamber of that country (last in Ill. 47).

A second, quite large group of stamps was related to technologies of local development or application (see Ill. 48). Some praised truly local technologies, like the 1993 stamp from Russia (first from right), which is devoted to the *Molniya 3* satellite series –one of the most successful and most commonly used communication satellite systems of both the former USSR and its successor state. The same applies to the Czech stamp (second from right) that presents one of the most successful early models by the *Nesselsdorfer Wagenbau-Fabriks-Gesellschaft A.G.,* one of the first internal combustion carmakers of the world, and a direct predecessor of the modern Tatra company. A further example of this group is the 'postal rocket' from Cuba, mentioned above (see Ill. 32 and accompanying text).
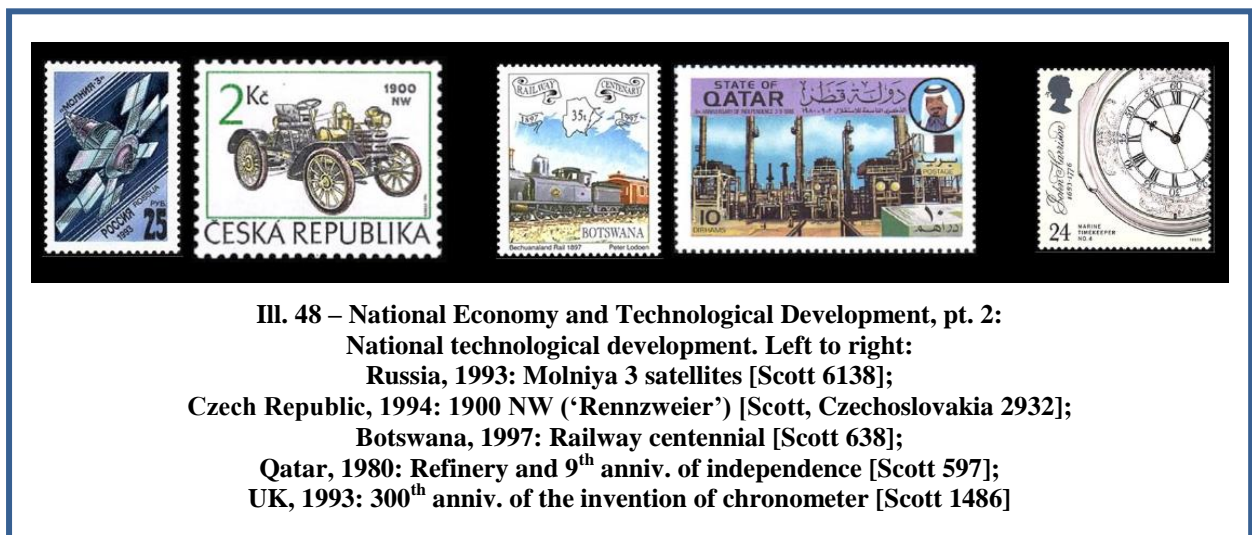
Ill. 48 – National Economy and Technological Development, pt. 2:
National technological development. Left to right:
Russia, 1993: Molniya 3 satellites [Scott 6138];
Czech Republic, 1994: 1900 NW ('Rennzweier') [Scott, Czechoslovakia 2932];
Botswana, 1997: Railway centennial [Scott 638];
Qatar, 1980: Refinery and 9th anniv. of independence [Scott 597];
UK, 1993: 300th anniv. of the invention of chronometer [Scott 1486]

Some stamps presented technologies of foreign origin that have been 'appropriated' so they are presented as national or at least, as contributing to the economic development of the

nation. For instance, the stamp from Botswana (third in Ill. 48) celebrates 100 years of the introduction of railways in the country – even if in reality it was the British crown that introduced the railways to their then-protectorate of Bechuanaland. In a similar way, Qatar (fourth stamp) presents the image of a refinery in a stamp that celebrates the 9th anniversary of independence. Logic indicates that the refinery should be of foreign origin; yet it is 'appropriated' to the point that it becomes a symbol of the independence of the country. A final case in this group is represented by discoveries and developments made by individuals, which are presented as technological advancements of the nation, such as the chronometer in the UK stamp (last in Ill. 48).[63]

A third group in this category was devoted to governmental economic policies, projects or institutions, such as the Toshka Land Reclamation Project in Egypt – an extremely ambitious, expensive and still unfinished development project in the southern part of Egypt, comparable to that of the Aswan dam (see Ill. 49, top). It also included governmental institutions devoted to applied science and technology, such as the Cuban Institute of Research in Sugar Cane Derivatives (*Instituto Cubano de Investigaciones de los Derivados de la Caña de Azúcar*, ICIDCA) commemorated in a stamp (Ill. 49, bottom) by making references to its resulting products: paper, matches, and cattle food. Since they refer to governmental actions or institutions, stamps within this group also quite frequently appeared in the 'political regime' category (see for instance Guinea in Ill. 45) or in that of 'foreign relations' (see Togo, Ill. 43).
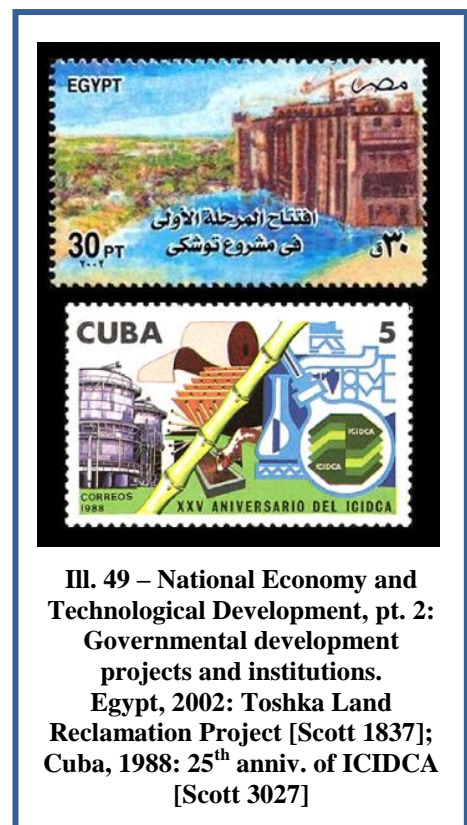
Ill. 49 – National Economy and Technological Development, pt. 2: Governmental development projects and institutions. Egypt, 2002: Toshka Land Reclamation Project [Scott 1837]; Cuba, 1988: 25th anniv. of ICIDCA [Scott 3027]

Overall, messages related to the economy and technological development of the nation were fairly common: 17,24% of the sample, and most of them were graded as '1' (see table 4). Therefore, it is quite clear that the issuing nation-states have been using stamps as vehicles to promote their feats in the areas of science and technology.

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[63] Depending on the particular depictions, these kinds of stamps were counted in this category, in the fourth one (individual accomplishments), or in both.

The last category is perhaps the most evident of all: it includes depictions and messages of the official national symbols of the nation (see the corresponding section in Ch. II). Stamps with depictions or direct references to the national flag, coat of arms, or anthem, as well as other objects considered as official symbols of a given nation (e.g. a Crown) were included in this category.

As expected, national flags are a very frequent topic in stamps. In some cases, such flags are the main motif, such as in the Romanian stamp (Ill. 50, first stamp) commemorating 30 years of the socialist republic. However, in many other cases, flags are used in stamps in combination with other symbols. Quite interestingly, I could detect several instances where the flag seems to be used to inject some 'national component' into otherwise international or neutral topics. An example is the Cuban stamp (Ill. 50, second stamp) that arguably commemorates the 50th anniversary of UN and a world conference to be held in La Havana, yet in fact the most appealing features are the large flag in the background and the Cuban parliament. Something similar happens with the stamp from Nicaragua (third stamp), which is allegedly devoted to the International Year of Women, and yet, the only reference to it is a small legend at the bottom, while practically all of the stamp is covered by a portrait of Blanca E. Arauz (the wife of the revolutionary leader Augusto César Sandino) and a Nicaraguan flag. In both the Cuban and Nicaraguan cases, the flag works to bring the attention of the viewer towards the national realm, despite the fact that the stamp is (allegedly) issued for an international celebration.

In many other occasions the national flag is used as an extra element, to reinforce the national character of the topic depicted, like in the stamp from Ghana (Ill. 50, top left corner). Similar cases have been presented already, e.g. Afghanistan and Bahrain in Ill. 39; Korea and Egypt in Ill. 40; the three first stamps of Ill. 43, and Guinea in Ill. 45, et cetera.

Ill. 50 – National symbols, pt.1: National flags
Romania, 1977: 30th anniv. proclamation of the People's Republic of Romania [Scott 2745];
Cuba, 1977: 50th anniv. of the United Nations / Conference on Commerce and Employment [Scott 3890];
Nicaragua, 1984: International Women's Day – Blanca Arauz and flag [Scott 1336];
Ghana, 1968: Tobacco [Scott 331

National coats of arms have been also used in stamps, even if not as frequently as flags. They were used mostly for ordinary series issued during the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, such those from Latvia and Haiti (Ill. 51, first two stamps), where they were the single motif. Approximately since the second half of the twentieth century, coats of arms have been used mostly as backgrounds or extra elements, as in the case of Iraq (Ill. 51, last stamp).
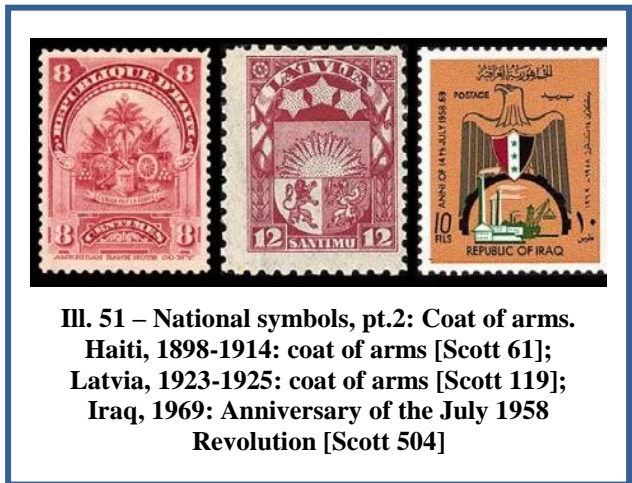
Ill. 51 – National symbols, pt.2: Coat of arms. Haiti, 1898-1914: coat of arms [Scott 61]; Latvia, 1923-1925: coat of arms [Scott 119]; Iraq, 1969: Anniversary of the July 1958 Revolution [Scott 504]

A second group included other types of symbolic references to the nation, as long as they had an official character, or were widely accepted as such. Particularly important were 'embodiments' or 'personifications' of the nation (Leoussi 2004, 150-151). These occur when a human-like figure (or in many cases, a God/Goddess-like one) is used to represent the whole nation, actually 'embodying' it. Some of the most well-known cases of such personifications of

Ill. 52 – Personifications of the nation. Left to right: United Kingdom, 1919-34: 'Britannia rule the waves' [Scott, Great Britain 173]; Switzerland, 1913: Helvetia and Matterhorn [Scott B1]; Philippines, US admin., 1935-44: Juan de la Cruz [Scott, US-Philippines 390]

the nation are Marianne to represent France, Helvetia for Switzerland, or Britannia for the British Empire; others are not as internationally known, yet still accepted as such in the issuing country, such as 'Juan de la Cruz' to represent the Philippine nation. These personifications of the nation have certainly been profusely presented in stamps (see Ill. 52).

Also, I am aware of more picturesque yet recognizable personifications of the nation, which due to their use have achieved a semi-official status, even being used in official propaganda, including postage stamps (like Uncle Sam to signify USA, e.g. US A2530 and A2883 in Scott Publishing 2010). However, these were not found in the random sample. The same happened with other stamps making reference to further official national symbols such as anthems or crowns: they exist, but are less common and so did not appear in the random sample.

Finally, as mentioned in Ch. II, the name of the country is a national symbol in itself; however, a requirement for stamps is to bear the name of the issuing postal authority. Therefore

the name itself was not taken into account in the analysis, unless it was repeated several times in the stamp, evidencing a "semiotic pleonasm" (Scott 1995, 9-10) and this, only when such repetition was made with clearly propagandistic / nationalistic goals.[64]

Together, national symbols and personifications of the nation were found in 19,06% of the sample. In relative terms, those graded with '0,5' were more frequent (see Table 4). This is a consequence of the use, as described above, of such symbols as background or extra elements to imprint a 'nationalist character' upon otherwise international or neutral depictions.

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[64] An interesting case, which is not propagandistic, is represented by those states with more than one official language, or that incorporate minority languages on their stamps. For instance, it is easy to follow via stamps the development of Canadian policies regarding the use of both English and French, and even the details of these policies like the use of the local language and grammar when mentioning a particular region, as when putting the text 'Québec' above 'Quebec' and in turn, 'British Columbia' above 'Colombie-Britannique' on stamps. (Wood 1979). A related case is Belgium and its elaborated linguistic guidelines for stamps: when honouring a given person or institution in stamps, the language identified with that person will be the predominant one, and also the corresponding national denomination will come first: België/Belgique for Flemish-related topics, Belgique/België for the French-related ones. When it is a single stamp and the topic cannot be allocated to a particular community; when it is related to the King or to the federal level; or when is about Brussels, then two similar texts are printed, each on one side. When the series comprise more than one stamp, then the location of the French and Dutch legends change in each subsequent stamp (Wood 1979; 1980, 46). Analogous situations can be found in other cases, such as the use of the neutral name "Helvetia" and English texts for Swiss stamps; or the use of 'Suomi / Finland' which is not because, as we could think, that the stamp provides an English translation, but rather because that is the name of the country itself in the co-official Swedish language (Wood 1980). A similar, more recent case is the trend towards bilingualism in the stamps of New Zealand / Aotearoa. However, when stamps of this kind were found in the random sample, the name repetition was not counted, as it is done with different goals than patriotic or propagandistic ones.

Nationalist messages in stamps: sample analysis outcome

Table 4 - Typology of nationalist messages										
	Hum Comp	CultId	HistDev	IndAcc	NatAtt	NatTerr	ForRel	PolReg	NatEc & TechDev	OffSym
	1) Human composition	2) Cultural Identity	3) Historical Development	4) Individual accomplish-ments	5) Natural Attributes	6) Territory	7) Foreign Relations	8) Political Regime	9) National Economy & Tech. Dev.	10) Off. Symbols and personif. of the nation
Regarding *all* valid stamps (691) — Graded "1"	71	194	170	29	70	45	61	84	73	62
Graded "0,5"	30	54	16	1	35	35	27	17	22	43
"1"+"0.5"	101	248	186	30	105	80	88	101	95	105
Graded "0"	590	443	505	661	586	611	603	590	596	586
Regarding stamps with *Natio-nalist* messages (551) — % of 1's	12,89%	35,21%	30,85%	5,26%	12,70%	8,17%	11,07%	15,25%	13,25%	11,25%
% of 0.5's	5,44%	9,80%	2,90%	0,18%	6,35%	6,35%	4,90%	3,09%	3,99%	7,80%
"1"+"0.5"	18,33%	**45,01%**	**33,76%**	**5,44%**	19,06%	14,52%	15,97%	18,33%	17,24%	19,06%

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Chart 2 - Relative frequencies of nationalist messages in stamps
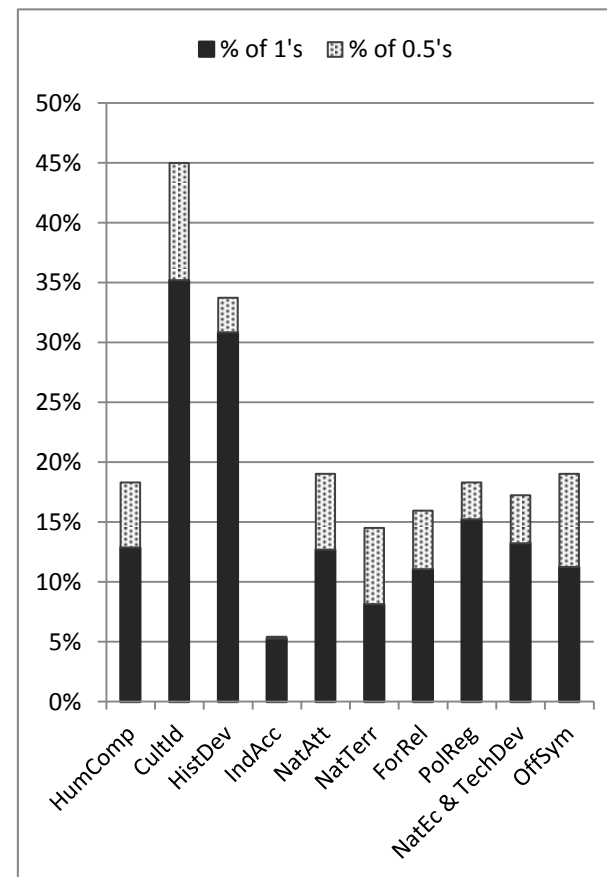
Then... what stamps are saying about their nations?

In Chapter 4, we demonstrated that in fact, stamps have been intensively used to send ideological messages. Then, for the present chapter, we focused on those stamps of the same sample that displayed nationalist messages, and studied them by means of the 10-category typology stated above. By doing so, we were able to find some very clear tendencies, as well as some singularities.

Looking at Table 4 and Chart 2, we can notice that most of the categories were consistently within, or very close to the 15%-20% range. This happened even for some categories that I expected would receive higher scores, such as human composition of the nation – that is, ethnic/racial depictions and stereotypes in stamps – as well as national territory. In this sense, we can detect an overall balance in the messages about the nation in postage stamps, for seven out of the ten categories used.

There were, however, categories that clearly stood out in the analysis. On the one hand, both cultural identity and historical development were well above of the rest with 45,01% and 33,76%, respectively (see Table 4). In this sense, we can detect a clear preference in stamps for presenting topics about the human specificity of the nation, particularly in terms of a shared culture, and about its genesis.

We can argue that the preference in stamps for cultural identity topics has some good reasons. First, culture is an extremely efficient way to promote the internal identification, the constitutive identity *and* the external differentiation of the nation, all at the same time (see Ch. II). In contrast, more technical depictions as those regarding a given economic activity within the country, or the celebration of the visit of a foreign head of state, might not impact the viewer as defining 'us' as a singular nation with a shared identity and a common history – but carefully selected cultural depictions can do so, at least in principle. Furthermore, cultural topics will probably attract attention of broader audiences, both at home and abroad.

The use of cultural references in stamps has lower political risks, both inside and outside the borders of the issuing state, than references to the ethnic/racial attributes of a given nation. That is: no matter how carefully selected they are, the use of stereotypes or models might cause offence at the interior of the issuing country (as they exclude those populations that do not conform with such stereotypes) but also outside , as the Memín Pinguín example made clear (see Ch. III). In contrast, if selected carefully, cultural depictions can be less exclusivist or harmful.

In addition, if we put the country name aside, many foreign audiences would find it difficult to detect fundamental differences between, let's say, the depictions of a 'typical' Mexican, a Guatemalan, and a Salvadorian; or among Laotians and Vietnamese – not to mention many Europeans. Perhaps for this reason, 'pure' ethnic/racial depictions or stereotypes are not very common in stamps; they are generally accompanied by other elements like cultural objects (traditional dresses, festivals, etc.), territorial references, or official national symbols, which can reinforce the differentiation of the nation as a single group.

A further noteworthy category, but this time due to its low share, was <u>individual accomplishments</u>: only 5.44% of the stamps in the random sample had a depiction of this kind (see Table 4). Certainly, the methodological limitation I set to avoid the overlapping of this category with that of cultural identity is partly responsible for such a low share, as it left a limited number of cases within this category: mostly inventors and scientists, adventurers, and athletes. And yet, precisely these types of representations are extremely relevant for my case: they offer a clear case of 'appropriation' into a national imaginary.

Let me explain. It might well be true that the work of most artists has been shaped by their national communities, their cultural features, traditions, etc. Therefore, such communities can somehow rightfully claim some 'participation' in the artist's development, and perceive the resulting works of arts as 'theirs' in some way. The artists themselves might acknowledge such national influence in their works, and even be pleased of contribute to the cultural development of their communities.

Nevertheless, this connection might not be as evident for an inventor, a scientist, an adventurer or an athlete: they might well be driven by different motivations than any national attachment.[65] Even so, the official imaginary will appropriate their achievements, discoveries and feats for the whole nation; they are, and will always be, 'ours' – regardless of what the person really had in mind when embarking upon them. When seeing things in this way, even such a low incidence as 5,44% is quite revealing of the efforts of a given regime to create common identifications for its target, national population. As the stamp in Ill. 35 makes clear, it is not just Ms. Zuluaga who won, due to her individual merits. Not at all: the whole of Colombia triumphed. Everyone, including men.

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[65] For instance, despite the fact that many athletes take part in international competitions only if sent by, and representing, a given country, it is true that in many cases what really drive them to participate is not their national allegiance but simply the goal of being 'the best' or 'the first' in their respective disciplines. Their goals are primarily individualistic, not necessarily attached to a given national community.

As stated, two marks were set to grade each category. A '1' was given when the message was very clear in the stamp, and '0.5' when it was secondary or implicit. In this case, the relationship between '1' and '0.5' also offered some interesting data. As it was expected, '1' was higher in all categories, and generally by a significant margin. However, for two particular categories, the difference between the these marks was significantly lower; namely national territory and official national symbols and personifications of the nation.

There is an explanation for this. As said above, most depictions of the 'national territory' were maps. Then, flags and coat of arms made for the greater part of the 'national symbols' category. In this sense, the findings indicate that not only both national maps and national symbols are represented in stamps (which was certainly expected) but that in relative terms these objects, and these two precisely, are the ones most often used as background and/or accompanying elements in stamps. They seem to have the key role of imprinting a national meaning in stamps that are otherwise dedicated to different maters. This finding seems to empirically sustain M. Billig's (1995) claim regarding flags, maps and similar objects being used pervasively in public life, to constantly remind persons about the existence of a given nation. It also backs B. Anderson's (Anderson 2006 [1983]) well-known affirmation of the map as one of the most important means to help the imagining of a national community.

All things considered, the analysis of a random sample, made by means of the typologies developed, leads to very convincing results. Given the fact that all ten analytical categories received marks, we can now demonstrate that, besides their purely administrative and postal roles, postage stamps have been intensively used to promote *a national imaginary* – namely, a particular vision of the history, features, composition and development of the nation, which supports its internal identification, constitutive identity and external differentiation of it as a single group. In this way, both hypothesis 1 and sub-hypothesis h1a (see Ch. I) have been confirmed, in terms of the concept, functions and components of a national imaginary proposed in Ch. II.

Yet, this is not enough. Even if the research has verified that stamps have been used to promote a given national imaginary using stamps, it has not yet proven that this is the *deliberate* product of a political process. To prove that, we must study particular cases and look for the political goals, actors and processes involved in the creation of postage stamps and most importantly, in their meanings and depictions. This is what the next two chapters are devoted to.

CHAPTER VI: THE QUEEN OR THE NATION?

THE POSTAGE STAMPS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1950–1970

In this chapter, I will focus on the changes in topics and iconography of the postage stamp of the United Kingdom.[66] I will give a brief historical and organizational background, particularly regarding the institutions, traditions and rules involved in postage stamp topics and iconography in the UK. Then, I will turn my attention to the period from 1950 to 1970, analysing and trying to explain the profound changes detectable in stamp images in this period, tracing the main actors, institutions and political/governmental processes involved.

A word about Britons and their identities

Certainly, the British is one of the most complex, and best-studied, cases of the development of a common identity and a state. And yet, it is still problematic to call the UK a "nation-state", as it is composed by (at least) four very distinctive territorial and cultural communities: Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. In the literature prior to the Second World War, and often still today, there is a tendency to consider England as the 'national core' of Britain and of any 'British nationality'. In fact, some authors on nationalism had pointed to England as one of the earliest examples of the development of a shared 'national' consciousness (e.g. Greenfeld 1992; Hastings 1997). This might be partly true, but only from a *longue-durée* point of view and by making a link between medieval communal-religious affiliations with modern nationalist identities.

On the other hand, the fact that the main political institutions of the UK are located in London and these invest the city, and England by extension, with a special political and symbolical meaning. The Monarchy had a key role in promoting a shared identity across the British Islands, and later all across the Empire and Commonwealth – regardless how much 'invented' and ritualistic such institution could be, and how limited its actual political role is (Cannadine 1983; Nairn 1989, 1990).

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[66] The focus of this study is the United Kingdom as such: namely, the political entity constituted by the four countries of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It does <u>not</u> include other Crown dependencies within or near the British Islands (e.g. Isle of Man, Guernsey, Jersey) as they are not subjected to the authority of Westminster Parliament or any mainland institutions besides the Crown itself. The same applies to the Irish Free State. Finally, the UK does not include any overseas territories (dominions, colonies, protectorates) of the British Empire as they had diverse degrees of autonomy vis-à-vis the UK, and so many had their own postal authorities and stamps. In some cases, such stamps presented depictions and meanings completely different from those from the UK.

However, the processes of devolution from London to the regions, particularly after the mid-60s and 70s, had put England's political predominance into question (see for instance Keating 1996, 2009; Morgan 1981; Haseler 1996). Nevertheless, it is not clear that devolution has created ethno-cultural divisions within and among the UK constituent communities, or dismantled an overarching British identity (Paterson 2002). Certainly, there are very diverse identities within the UK, based on evident cultural, linguistic and historical differences (e.g. Harvie 1977, 1989; Morgan 1981). However, not all of these identities have developed into full nationalisms, or did so only recently. In fact, it can be argued that, historically, local identities have contributed more to the cause of *unionism* than of separatism, particularly in moments of widespread crisis (Keating 2009; Paterson 2002).

Two of the strongest unifying factors for any community are religious identity and a common enemy. In this way, the development of a common British identity has been explained in terms of both Protestantism and the threat posed by France in the 18th and 19th centuries (Colley 2003). The presence of a common foe or, at least, of those 'not-like-us' abroad, is also the basis of the English/British exceptionalism and the complex relations with continental Europe – a long-standing issue that after the Second World War got renewed attention given the European integration processes (Dewey 2009; Haseler 1996; Smith 2006; Wellings 2012).

In turn, there is still a debate about the impacts that both the construction of the British Empire, and its later demise, had on inter-communal relations in the Islands themselves. It can be argued that the Empire was essentially an overseas extension of English predominance. However, there are arguments as well for seeing the imperial expansion as a shared enterprise, which other Briton communities, Scots in particular, were quite happy to join (Condor and Abell 2006; also Kumar 2006; cf. Hechter 1975).

All of the above mentioned factors: the alleged traditional Anglo-centrism of the Kingdom, the ambiguous but very significant role of the Monarchy, the gradual empowerment of the constituent units vis-à-vis the metropolis, as well as the construction and demise of the Empire and the relationship with Europe, are key factors in the nation-building processes endured by the UK in the post-war era, as well as in the shaping of an elusive British national identity, and therefore constitute the battleground where diverse elites will compete for power.

I should be able, if my hypothesis 2 and its sub-hypotheses are true, to detect through stamps an official vision on these topics; to establish links in the changes of such vision, to

transformations within the ruling political elites; and to detect competing elites and actors that have tried to influence the official national imaginary of the stamps of the country.

A word about sources and limits

To my disappointment, interviews with postal experts for the UK case were impossible to obtain. However, this was not a major problem, thanks to the British Postal Museum and Archives (BPMA) of London, which holds plenty of primary sources like parliamentary records, questions, studies and requests regarding both stamp design and stamp policies, as well as many other useful sources. There, I was directed to the so-called *Stamp Stories:* brief internal documents prepared by BPMA members, summarizing the creative and organizational procedures followed in the design and issuing of several UK stamp series. I am very grateful to BPMA staff for granting me access to these documents. In turn, for the study of stamp images, the Scott's Catalogue (Scott Publishing 2010) was complemented with the Stanley Gibbons Great Britain Concise Stamp Catalogue (2005).[67]

I must make it clear that here I deal with national imaginaries in stamps from the United Kingdom, and <u>not</u> from the British Empire. This is due to several reasons, including methodological ones (e.g. to allow comparative analysis between two nation-states, Mexico and the UK) but also because it would be a gross overstatement to claim the existence of a coherent, Empire-wide policy on stamps and stamp depictions. Truly, during the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, most zones of the British Empire used the same basic design, the Sovereign's portrait, for stamps of the ordinary series.[68] Yet right after the beginning of the 20th century (but well before the start of decolonisation processes), many territories of the Empire began to issue their own stamps, making reference to local themes: such a humble colony as Santa Helena was issuing its own, unique postage stamps already in 1903, not to speak of Canada or New Zealand.[69] In fact, in some cases the Sovereign was not even included.[70]

It is true that, for special occasions of imperial relevance such as coronations, some 'common series' were issued. But the first of such series was not issued until 1935, for George V's Silver Jubilee (Jeffery 2006, 61) and these were not really 'imperial', as many particular postal authorities chose to design and issue their own stamps for such occasions – including,

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[67] As not all stamp images are available in Scott's catalogue (2010), both catalogue numbers will be offered for the stamps included in this chapter.

[68] In any case, this was the standard practice for all empires and monarchies of the time.

[69] See the corresponding entries in (Scott Publishing 2010). By the 30's, it was common that almost each territory of the British Empire was issuing its own stamps.

[70] This happened in certain dominions (New Zealand) and also in a number of protectorates (from Zanzibar to Brunei to the Solomon Islands), which represented the local ruler alone.

quite significantly, those of the UK itself. If there was an imperial policy on stamps and their symbols, it was more a laissez-fare than an autocratic one, and it became increasingly liberal as time advanced (cf. Jeffery 2006), in sharp contrast with other empires or colonial powers (see Cusack 2005; also Bauwens 2012; Newman 1989) In administrative terms and with few exceptions, the postal authorities of the United Kingdom did not have power over stamp designs made elsewhere in the Empire. In fact, during the research, it became clear that those authorities had very little interest in developments abroad, and were devoted to creating stamps standing for the UK only.

Historical and organizational background

The General Post Office [GPO] was established in the mid-17th century and, as described in Ch. III, it was subjected to a profound reform, creating the modern postal system in 1840. However, unlike similar institutions elsewhere, the GPO became far more than just a technical, bureaucratic office dealing with mail services. All the contrary: through the 19th and 20th centuries, the GPO became a remarkably large and powerful governmental agency that controlled all types of public communications involving individual senders or receivers. Hence, besides postal services, the GPO also controlled first telegraphs and later telephones (see Daunton 1985; Griffiths 1997, 678; Perry 1992, 1980; Campbell-Smith 2011). Even wireless broadcasts were controlled by the GPO for a while: the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) got its licence from it in January 1923 (Briggs 1985, 36-37).

Thus, the GPO was a truly strategic institution for the UK in matters of both internal and external politics, nearly monopolizing communications not only inside the UK, but also those sent abroad. In 1935, the GPO had 231,877 employees, making it the largest business employer in Britain (Griffiths 1997, 678; see also Campbell-Smith 2011, 707). By 1964 it had grown to ca. 390,000 (Benn 1987, 162). Accordingly, it had one of the most influential unions within the UK (see Clinton 1984; Perry 1992).

The strategic importance of the GPO made its head, the Postmaster General [PMG] a very visible figure. However, such public pre-eminence did not correspond to actual authority. In fact, the PMG was close to an honorary post, limited to transmit or ratify decisions that were made either within the ranks of GPO bureaucracy, or in external, superior instances. In this vein, most day-to-day administrative decisions were taken by officers such as the Assistant Postmaster General, the Secretary of the Post Office, the Director General of Posts, and other ranks within the Postal Service Department [PSD]. In turn, the strategic decisions were very frequently

influenced by external bodies such as the Treasury or the Parliament itself (see Daunton 1985, 271-334; BPMA [2012]-a, [2012]-c). In sum, the PMG was quite detached from the internal life of the organization; it was "much more like being an ambassador than a manager", as a former PMG described it (see Positively Postal [2010]).[71] This situation was replicated in stamp design processes, as we will see next.

Stability at home, chaos elsewhere: The Sovereign in stamps

As stated above (see Ch. III and footnote 18) stamps from the UK are the only ones allowed by the UPU to present a portrait of the sovereign instead of the country name. This privilege, granted due the UK being the creator of postage stamps, has been called the "grandfather clause" (see Wood 1979; also Altman 1991, 6-7; Jeffery 2006, 49). It became a real trademark for stamps of the UK, but those only; other parts of the Empire still had to indicate their names.[72]

The use of the Sovereign's portrait on stamps from the UK demanded respect for the royal image, and it was not uncommon that a cause for rejection or criticism of a given stamp was the poor treatment given to the King's or Queen's figure.[73] Furthermore, UK stamps have traditionally presented the Sovereign looking to the left, in order for her/him to "look" towards the centre of the envelope and not outside it, once the stamp was glued.[74] Beside these matters of protocol, further rules had more important political connotations:

11. Stamps from the UK should not depict any other identifiable persons besides the Sovereign or, in truly exceptional cases like royal marriages, other members of the innermost circles of the Royal family (see Bates 1993a). All other human figures should

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[71] From March 1950 to September 1970, there were nine PMGs. The most important for our case were Herbrand Sackville, 9th Earl de la Warr (Nov 1951 – Apr 1955) Reginald Bevins (October 1959 – October 1964) Anthony Wedgewood Benn (October 1964 – July 1966) and Edward Short (July 1966 – April 1968). (BPMA [2012]-b) The post of Postmaster General ceased to exist in 1969, when GPO was transformed into a public corporation, with a Chairman and CEO at the head of it (Daunton 1985)

[72] Territories of the British Empire beyond the UK were *not* subjected to the GPO's authority (see footnote 66 in this chapter). Most such territories, namely Crown dependencies, dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates… were recognized as postal authorities per se, therefore issuing their own stamps. In some cases, the depictions and meanings in stamps were completely different, even directly opposed to those from the UK; a very famous case is the first ordinary series issued in 1922-1923 by the Irish Free State, which presented a map of the whole island without recognizing the borders with Northern Ireland, as well as the coat of arms of all the four provinces, as a means of claiming the territorial integrity of Ireland (see Scott Publishing 2010, Ireland 65-76; also Morris 2005).

[73] This particular point (the deference for the Sovereign) did applied to stamps issued by territories within the British Empire. For instance, a certain Fred Elliott of the Queensland Post and Telegraphic Department prepared essays for a semi-postal stamp, which would raise funds for the Boer war. One of his designs portrayed the Queen at the centre, with a troopship and a horseman flanking her. However, this design disqualified the essay, because "the close proximity of the horse's rear end and Victoria's nose […] made this suggestion quite unsuitable […]"(Quoted in Jeffery 2006, 54).

[74] The first stamp from UK presenting the Sovereign looking to the left was issued in 1966 [Scott 477p, Stanley Gibbons 271] allegedly due to design considerations (Bates 1993b)

be stereotypes, for instance anonymous persons acting in some role (soldiers, workers, doctors…) or plain idealizations, like Britannia.

12. Commemorative series had to be devoted either to "Royal and postal anniversaries" or to *current* national or international events of an "outstanding" nature (Muir 2007, 56). In other words, the commemoration of almost all kinds of national and/or historical events were banned.

A first consequence of these rules was that, up to the 1950's, the overwhelming majority of British stamps were of the ordinary type, therefore varying only in colour or minor details. Very few commemoratives were issued, even for celebrations that would comply with rule no. 2 above, were generally not granted the privilege of a stamp. In fact, the first commemorative stamp from UK was introduced until 1924, for the British Empire Exhibition of that year, and despite the reported discontent of King George V's about it (Jeffery 2006; see Scott Publishing 2010, Great Britain 185; also BPMA 2005a). By that year, almost every other postal authority of the world produced commemoratives, and in some cases had done so for decades. Only ten commemorative series were issued by the UK during the 40's and 50's (Gentleman 1974, 434), while many suggestions were rejected, including those made by parliamentarians for events as important as the birth of the heir to the throne (see Parliament of the United Kingdom 1948). In turn, stamps commemorating national heroes faced a double restriction: both rules above forbade them. Finally, the few commemoratives issued after 1924 were of very simple design, because "pictorialism" was found distasteful by both authorities and designers (see the debates in Rose 1980).
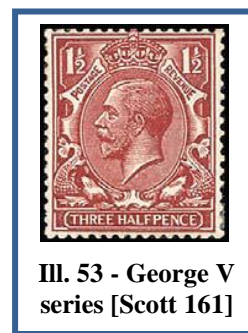
Ill. 53 - George V series [Scott 161]

With such sternness, stamps from the UK until the 50's were famous worldwide for their simplicity (see Ill. 53).[75] As an (unintended?) consequence, they were relatively immune to political or ideological influences. Most followed the "Penny Black" pattern: an endless repetition of royal heads, treated with reverence and sobriety. This regularity was a revelation in itself; as a young Eric Hobsbawm noted, stamp collecting in the 1920's "was a good introduction to the political history of Europe since 1914", since "it dramatized the contrast between the unchanging continuity of George V's head on British stamps and the chaos of overprints, new

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[75] In contrast, other parts of the Empire had their own policies regarding format, iconography, and even language(s) used. Many issued commemoratives not only for mainland and imperial, but also for local events (Jeffery 2006), included several motifs, and even introduced variations to reflect local circumstances, as Canada did in the 1930s by incorporating captions in French (Wood 1979).

names and new currencies elsewhere" (Hobsbawm 2003, 9). Indeed, for more than 50 years (1840-1901) no other sovereign than the Queen Victoria was found in stamps both from the UK and the rest of the Empire. Her figure symbolizes six decades of stability: a fact that became a source of national pride (see Golden 2009, 105-106). Yet it was not only the chronological stability that mattered, but also the all-embracing identity and allegiance implied in the sovereign's portrait:

> Britain and its monarchy belonged inseparably together, whatever other changes were taking place. The advent of the postage stamp and its worldwide circulation emphasized the point. This arrogant country, unlike others, did not trouble to identify itself by name. In the age of Gladstone and Disraeli it was deemed sufficient for the queen's head to appear (Robbins 1998, 162; see also Jones 2001).

Yet, there were moments when British stamps included some other symbols and meanings, which are politically significant. During World War II, for instance, stamp depictions became increasingly rich. Ordinary stamps issued from 1937 to 1939 presented, besides the inescapable royal head of George VI and a Crown, the four flower emblems of Britain – rose, thistle, shamrock and daffodil for England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, respectively (see Ill. 54, left). In contrast, the subsequent 1939-

Ill. 54 – George VI stamps
[Scott 241, 250]

1942 stamps were larger and more elaborated, one even including the royal coat of arms (see Ill. 54, right): a graphic richness that was unheard of, but that can be explained by the intention to lift the patriotic spirits of the population during the Second World War. It is not a coincidence that such large, ornate design was discontinued right after the war, and the simpler ones were used for the rest of George VI's reign.

Stamp design processes

One of the PMG's attributions, at least theoretically, was to take decisions regarding postage stamps, particularly regarding the selection of both general topics and individual designs. Yet in practice, this role was restricted by a series of internal arrangements, filters, and bureaucratic

practices, making the Postal Services Department (PSD) the most important internal actor regarding stamp design and issuing processes.

External actors were also deeply involved in stamp design and topic selection. The PMG was counselled in this regard by the so-called Advisory Panel, which was a body of high-profile experts in arts.[76] Yet, during the first years of the period studied here (1950-1970), the Panel's influence diminished rapidly and it was disbanded in 1956 (Rose 1980, 49-52). In its place, a second organization became of key importance: the Stamp Advisory Committee [SAC]. SAC was created in the mid-forties,[77] as a section of the very influential Council of Industrial Design [CoID] (P. Jones 2004; Rose 1980; Muir 2007). In turn, CoID was established after the Second World War to be "a centre of information and advice both for industry and government department in matters of industrial art and design" (Muir 2007, 63).

SAC members were art experts, industrial designers, and philatelic personalities.[78] In theory, they should provide the GPO with the point of view of the design industry regarding motifs and designs in stamps – an advisory role, as its very name indicated.[79] However, during the 1950s and particularly in the early 1960s, SAC became far more than that; in fact, it was the central actor in the whole process. Its judgments were determinant, not only for assessing stamp iconography or style, but also for choosing topics, selecting designers, formulating the criteria they should follow, and approving the products. The SAC also enjoyed veto and censorship powers in both topics or designs, including those presented or suggested by the PMG himself or other high-ranking officers. In the specific area of stamp design, the SAC acted more as an autonomous unit responsible for stamp design than a purely advisory one, being in fact an intermediate step between the GPO and other institutions, including Buckingham Palace. Therefore SAC acted not just as an advisory body, but as a true stamp design authority (P. Jones 2004; Muir 2007; Positively Postal [2010]).

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[76] The Panel included the Garter King of Arms (the highest heraldic authority in the UK) as well as the Director of the National Gallery and a representation from the Royal Fine Art Commission of Scotland (Rose 1980, 50).

[77] Strangely enough, there are discrepancies regarding the precise date of the SAC's creation. Jones sets it at 1946, but Muir in 1945 and Rose in 1947 (cf. P. Jones 2004, 166; Muir 2007, 63; Rose 1980, 43, 51) Yet, by the beginning of the period studied in this chapter, the influence of the SAC in stamp design was already evident.

[78] In 1962 the SAC was composed by Sir Kenneth Clark, widely recognized art historian and critic; Cecilia Lady Sempill, art patron; James Fitton, artist; Sir John Wilson, keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection; Milner Gray and Abram Games, industrial and graphic designers; and Prof. Richard Guyatt, from the Royal College of Art (Muir 2007, 63; see also Rose 1980, 49-56 for more details).

[79] In official terms, "to assist the Postmaster General in selecting designs of British postage stamps which might be recommended to the Queen […] As its name indicates its role will be an advisory one" (Memorandum of relations between the COID and the Post Office, quoted in Muir 2007, 63).

A final, and very important external actor was the Palace itself. After the GPO and SAC reached an agreement on a set of philatelic essays, royal acquiescence should be granted. This sub-process would involve a number of organizations such as the Royal Mint Advisory Committee, in charge of coins, seals, royal decorations... or key individuals within Buckingham Palace. Finally, the essays had to be examined and approved by the King or Queen in person, and returned to the GPO for modifications. This was repeated until an agreement on the final designs was reached Only then would the official announcement about a new stamp series be made (Daunton 1985; Dobson 2005; Gentleman 1974; Muir 2007; Rose 1980). The technical part of the design and printing process was left to private companies, while the GPO and SAC supervised the quality of the products.

In this vein, the stamp design process was complex, hierarchical, and quite secretive.[80] As stated above, the GPO was a large bureaucratic organization where the power of its nominal head (the PMG) was seriously limited by the structure and ranks of the institution itself. Then, up to mid-1960s, external influence on stamp design was quite limited. Most suggestions for stamp topics/depictions were generally rejected if they did not originate in the SAC or the GPO, including those from political actors such as Members of Parliament (MPs).

In turn, stamp designers were prominent artists, well-known engravers, and/or very recognized art scholars. However, in terms of the stamp design process, they were nothing but "suppliers" that should follow strict instructions, according to topics and criteria decided by the SAC and/or the GPO alone. In the words of David Gentleman, one of the most noted artists of the post-war UK and a well-recognized stamp designer:

> [before 1964] It used to be the normal practice to invite half a dozen people to submit competing designs; and the whole thing became a kind of steeplechase […] conducted under the Olympian gaze of the GPO and an extremely distinguished but very remote Council of Industrial Design Committee […]. One never discussed anything with the Post Office officials, let alone the committee; instructions were passed on (Gentleman 1974, 435).

In this sense, stamp design, but particularly the selection of topics, was a matter of elite decisions within centralized institutions, in a very top-down approach. The products of this

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[80] In this I diverge from Dobson, which calls it an "open, but qualified" system (Dobson 2005, 65).

process were still subjected to final sanction by none other than the King/Queen, who could naturally demand changes or even put a veto on the issue of any stamp, at any time.

It is important to note that royal approval was not a simple formality. The Palace has been a very active and demanding actor regarding the selection of stamp iconography – principally, of course, for those series that present the Sovereign's portrait as the unique motif. For instance, right from the beginning of her reign, Queen Elizabeth II was very attentive to this point: a number of portraits, drawings, engravings and essays came back and forth until a portrait of the Queen with enough aesthetic quality was found to be put on the stamp series issued after her father's death in 1952 (Allen 1994) as well as for the new portrait introduced in 1966, based on an engraving by A. Machin, still in use (see Muir 2007). But beside matters of taste and royal self-appreciation, the Palace also vetoed cases when the proposed topic, or a specific stamp design, was considered as not suitable for reasons of internal and/or external politics. I will analyse some of these cases next. In line with the rest of the thesis, the focus of the analysis will not exclusively centre upon stamp depictions. I will focus instead on the political and governmental processes involved in the selection and creation of such depictions, and how such processes have responded to ideological debates regarding the nature of the UK as a nation-state, and the official national imaginary that should be presented in stamps.

Who rules? Stamps and political hierarchies

Insistence upon the characteristics of the political regime is one of the key elements of any national imaginary. Therefore, it is not surprising that messages referring to political institutions, symbols of power, and/or particular national leaders are not uncommon in stamps; in fact, as demonstrated above (see Table 2 and the corresponding categories in Ch. V), messages in the 'political regime' category are not only quite common, but also straightforward. The UK is one of the clearest examples of it. Due to the exception granted to British stamps (see above, 129 and footnote 18) the Sovereign's head is both the nation's identifier (in a purely indexical sense) and the equivalent of a national symbol, which accounts for the nation's uniqueness, signals its common identity, and states both its sovereignty and the existence of a political body overseeing it (see "national symbols" in Ch. II)

Yet, as Jeffery (2006, 50) notes, after the Second World War, the references to royal authority began to disappear from UK stamps: crowns, royal ciphers, coats of arms, the Sovereign Orb, spades and shields started to disappear. Even Britannia, as an incarnation of the

nation, vanished from stamps while more mundane motifs like landscapes or bridges slowly came into sight. These changes can be linked to internal political debates about the foundations, ideology and symbols of the political regime, as we shall see next.

The Coronation series (1953)

The first relevant stamp of the 1950-1970 period was issued for the Coronation of Elizabeth II.[81] Preparations for this issue started just after the death of King George VI (on the 6th of February 1952). This series was truly special, as not only a new design, but also a new royal *portrait* was required. The SAC would have a major role in this process, right from formulating the invitation to artists (5 May 1952) to the final selection of products (21 January 1953).

For this series, the SAC and the GPO together decided to provide the artists with a series of photographs of the Queen, made by Dorothy Wilding some days after the death of George VI (Muir 2007). However, one artist (E. Dulac) asked permission to use a full-face portrait as he found Wilding's portrait unsuitable for stamp design.[82] Quite surprisingly, this privilege was granted. All artists were granted freedom to propose and design the remaining, decorative elements within the stamp iconography. As a result, the essays submitted evidenced sharp departures from the detached, cold, almost iconic side engravings used since the Penny Black (Allen 1994).

Nevertheless, the process followed was quite complex and time-consuming. These involved not only the SAC, but also several GPO instances and the then-PMG, the Earl De La Warr (see footnote 71). Together they studied the artists' designs, asked for changes and adjustments, made a selection and then submitted it to the Buckingham Palace for input. After receiving the Queen's comments, the process was repeated (Allen 1994).

Some external actors, particularly MPs, showed interest in both the Coronation series as well as the ordinary one, which would substitute George VI with the Queen's portrait. However, such involvement was mostly limited to technical questions, e.g. regarding face values and expected dates of issuing.[83] Yet, at least one member of the House of Lords requested that MPs would be allowed to see the designs in advance, even before their official sanction by GPO and

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[81] Technically, the commemorative stamp issued in 1951 for the Festival of Britain (still under the rule of George VI) would come first. This is a very interesting case, as the Festival allowed for a large display of nationalism. However, I chose to take it out of the study for the sake of coherency, because this series was issued very shortly before George VI's death, while all the rest of the 1950-1970 period were issued during Elizabeth II's reign.

[82] See (Muir 2007) p.15-17. Yet, Dulac used Wilding's portrait for other stamps of the permanent series [see Scott 306-308, Stanley Gibbons 159-160] so it seems his reservations were only about the suitability of this portrait for the commemorative series (e.g. when combined with other iconographic elements).

[83] A number of these parliamentarian questions are kept in the British Postal Museum & Archive [e.g. Folio 54/54].

the Palace. The answer given by the PMG Earl de la Warr was clear: "I regret that the procedure suggested [by the Hon. MP] would not be appropriate. In the matter of designs for new stamps, after consultation with the Council of Industrial Design, I tender advice to Her Majesty the Queen with whom final choice rests" (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1952).

From 76 essays sent by 28 persons, only four stamps were approved and produced. Three of them were based on Wilding's ¾ portrait. The fourth and final one was a Dulac's full-face portrait of the Queen in royal regalia (see Ill. 55). This was only the second time that a stamp from the UK presented the sovereign directly facing the postal user.[84]

Ill. 55 – The 1953 Coronation issue [Scott 313-316]
Left to right: designs by E. Fuller, M. Goaman, E.Dulac, and M. Farrar-Bell.
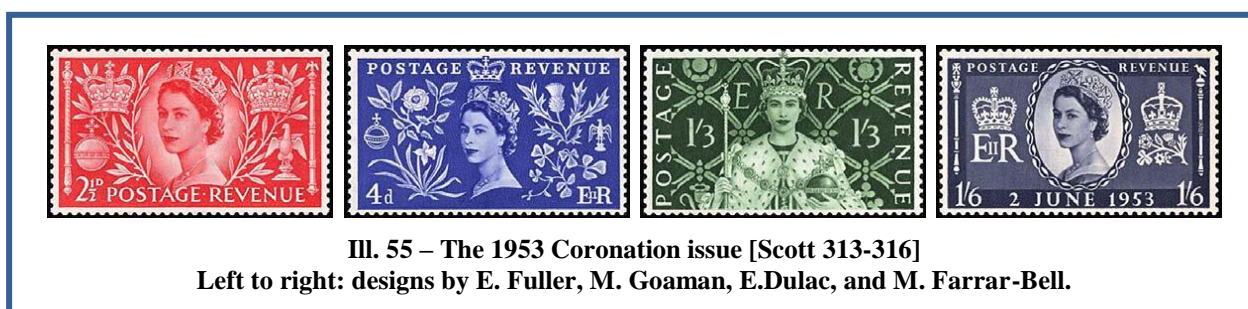
It is clear that the main object of these stamps was to announce to the world the arrival of a new Sovereign on the throne of the United Kingdom. But then, it is remarkable that this goal was not made explicit in the stamps, e.g. by means of a "Coronation" text; and that the actual coronation date (02 June 1953) was shown in only one of the four stamps – precisely in the one with the lowest circulation, due to its high face value.[85]

As expected, symbols of royal power are very evident in all the stamps in the series: up to two crowns in each, as well as royal sceptres and orbs.[86] Yet, references to the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom are quite restrained. The symbols of each (rose, thistle, shamrock and daffodil)[87] are only evident in the 4d stamp as four independent, full-grown plants (see Ill. 55, second stamp) which prompted a mordant critic to say that "Her Majesty looks out of a formidable jungle" (quoted in Allen 1994, 13) Yet the 'jungle' is reduced to a single branch in the 1s6d stamp from which the four flowers are blossoming (see fourth stamp); and they become

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[84] The other being in 1937, a stamp for the coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth [see Scott A100]. However, it seems that the Queen herself was not really happy with this Dulac stamp, but "cheered herself with the reflection that, at 1s3d, its sales would be less than the lower values". (Allen 1994, 13)

[85] In fact, 5,987,200 stamps with 1s6d value were issued, in contrast to the 415,034,000 ones of 2½d (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1963)

[86] The use of these objects as symbols of power and for coronations taking place in Westminster dates back, at least, to 1066. See Robbins (1998, 43)

[87] An internal debate occurred regarding the use of daffodil to signify Wales, instead of a leek. At the end, the daffodil was preferred for technical reasons and because it would "look odd for Wales to be represented by a vegetable while the other three […] were represented by flowers or a flower leaf" (Allen 1994, 9)

a difficult-to-spot part of the background in the 1s 3d stamp, one near each corner (see third stamp). Significantly enough, the designer of this particular stamp (E. Dulac) did not include all the four flowers in the first versions of this design, but only a repetition of the Tudor rose – the one at the top left corner – which is the symbol of England. It was an explicit demand by SAC and GPO to modify such design to incorporate the remaining three flowers (Allen 1994; cf. Rose 1980, 6).

Finally, these territorial symbols are completely absent in Fuller's 2½d stamp (see Ill. 55, first stamp). I could not find any demand on the artist to incorporate these symbols. Therefore, it seems the rule was that, either all the four flowers were in the stamp, or none at all. This makes a lot of political sense – and the demand made to Dulac (see paragraph above) evidences that GPO and SAC members were well aware of this.

There was a further dimension involved in the Coronation stamps: international politics. Right at the time when these stamps were being printed, "the Foreign Office had urged that overprints be available in the [Persian] Gulf because of the trend towards oil nationalisation in the area – *it was important to fly the flag where British interests were at risk*" (Allen 1994, 19. My italics). Indeed, a large number of these stamps were sent to the zone. For instance: 10'134,700 stamps of the 1s, 3d value (third on Ill. 55 above) were printed to be used in the UK. Whereas, overprinted stamps for use in the posts of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East totalled 1,440,000: almost 15% of those for Britain (Allen 1994, 18-20). It would be completely unreasonable to print so many stamps for such sparsely populated areas (61% of these stamps were never sold, in fact)[88] unless this action had other goals than just postal service per se. This was indeed the case, as the Foreign Office request made it clear: postage stamps were just another means for "flagging the flag" or more precisely, "flagging the Queen" (see Billig 1995) as a national symbol (see Ch. II) therefore asserting sovereignty and power.

The use of stamps for diplomatic / geopolitical purposes is not uncommon, of course. Yet it was highly unusual for stamps of the UK, especially in times of peace. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, postage stamps issued by the GPO were meant to be used in, and stand for, the UK only; their depictions tended to be quite immune from political issues beyond the immediate European vicinity. Only in a very few cases were such stamps also distributed for use in territories abroad – which was the case, incidentally, for the posts in the Middle East and

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[88] This comparing to just 20.9% in UK for that 1s, 3d value. Figures for the other values in the series are even more scandalous: the unsold percentage of 4 pence stamps (second on Ill. 55) was 75.3% (!) on the Gulf, while only 15.1% in the Islands (See Allen 1994).

Persian Gulf.[89] Surely, what was in jeopardy in the Persian Gulf during the early 1950s was nothing less than the oil supply to the UK, after the Mosaddegh regime first nationalized the fields and then completely cut the sales. In some way, the 'flagging' of the Queen in the zone anticipated the British-American intervention to overthrow Mosaddegh, which occurred just two months later. In this sense, to 'flag the Queen' could be seen either as the reaction of an old Empire that still refuses to lose its place in the world,[90] or the manoeuvre of a nation-state in pursuing particular strategic and geopolitical interests. Probably the answer is a combination of both. Yet, if the Queen was given such role of signifying the nation (and/or the Empire) abroad, the same role would soon be under attack at home.

The "off with her head!" movement

As said above, there was a clear policy for UK stamps to present the Sovereign, and the Sovereign only. In truly exceptional cases, such privilege was extended to other members of the Royal family. At the same time, a number of propositions for including more persons in stamps were presented to postal authorities, they always made clear that such a change was not in the plans:

> [MP Sorensen, Leyton]: To ask the Assistant Postmaster General [Mr. L. D. Gammans] if he will consider issuing stamps portraying other eminent human beings in British history in addition to those now portrayed and thus further circulate evidence of the British democratic way of life […].
>
> Mr. L. D. Gammans: No, Sir. (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1953b)

Several other requests of the type were made, and were answered in the same way.[91] This would change in 1964, when the Labour Party achieved a narrow victory against the Conservatives, leading to Harold Wilson being appointed as Prime Minister. A young, well-known member of the Party, Anthony "Tony" Benn (born 1925) was appointed as PMG.[92] Mr. Benn would attempt what was, without any doubt, the most radical change in stamp design in the

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[89] Other cases were the so-called *British Offices Abroad* (like those in Morocco, in operation until the late 1950s), as well as zones under direct military control and/or trusteeship.

[90] It should be taken into account that, even if British India, Burma, Egypt and other territories had become fully independent by 1953, the Empire still kept a very large colonial territory, including most of Africa.

[91] See for instance (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1953a).

[92] Joseph Slater (1904-1977), another distinguished albeit much older Labour Party member, was appointed as Assistant Postmaster General. He would serve under Mr Benn and his successors, being the last person to hold such position.

UK history: one with deep symbolical and political implications that actually extended well beyond purely stylistic and postal matters, leading to heated public and political debates regarding how the United Kingdom should be represented abroad, what the symbols of its sovereignty as a nation-state should be, and the relationship of the Kingdom with its four constituent countries.

Elite change and change in stamp policies

Tony Benn was the representative of the most leftist or, to be precise, most pro-republican sectors within the Labour party. At the age of 25, he was elected to the House of Commons in 1950, representing Bristol South-East. He gained nationwide public attention in 1961 when he renounced the peerage inherited from his father (William Wedgwood Benn, 1877–1960, first Viscount Stansgate).

As a peer, Benn became officially ineligible for the House of Commons. But he was already an MP, so his seat was declared vacant and a by-election was called. Instead of accepting it, Benn publicly renounced his titles (even if this was not possible under common law) and again presented himself as Labour candidate for the same district, in the by-election theoretically being held to choose his successor. He won the election in 1961, receiving almost 70% of the votes. He was nevertheless disqualified as ineligible, so the Conservative runner-up was invested (Benn 1987, 1994).

Tony Benn subsequently initiated a long campaign against both this decision and the peerage system in general. It would eventually lead to the passing of the 1963 Peerage Act, which introduced a way, through a peculiar procedure of royal appointments, for a peer to lose his/her titles, becoming a commoner again and thus eligible for the corresponding House. Not surprisingly, Benn was the first person to use this mechanism. Then he stood in the 1963 by-election in Bristol SE, winning once again, and so returning to the House of Commons. All this made him a very popular figure in the Labour party and particularly amongst the proponents of a Republican system (for a personal account see Benn 1987, 1994).

Once he was appointed PMG in 1964, Tony Benn introduced a new managerial style in the GPO. For instance, he established personal contacts with the Union of Post Office Workers: a truly unprecedented step, as no PMG had ever visited the Union offices before (Positively Postal [2010]). He also introduced management reforms and new products, such as the National Giro, a post-office based banking system (Benn 1987; Campbell-Smith 2011; Wolstencroft 1988). However, Benn's reformist impulse was the most visible in the specific field of postage stamps.

In concrete terms, he tried to (a) introduce new ideas for stamp design and topic selection; (b) to include more actors in the decision-making processes; and (c) regain some functions overtaken by other bodies in previous years, SAC in particular.

Regarding the first point, on 25th of November 1964 the PMG Benn announced new guidelines for British stamps, which from then on should be used to

> […] celebrate events of national or international importance, to commemorate anniversaries and occasions, to reflect Britain's unique contribution to the arts and world affairs, to extend public patronage of the arts by promoting philately and to raise revenue (Benn, quoted in Muir 2007, 56; see also Dobson 2005; Griffiths 1993a; Rose 1980)

These guidelines indicated a radical departure from UK stamp practices. Firstly, they implied that commemorative series could now be issued for occasions other than postal and Royal anniversaries. Secondly, these guidelines also opened the door for external inputs in stamp design, for example when deciding which "British contributions" to arts and world affairs should be celebrated. In this sense, they allowed for different messages than just royal-related ones.

However, Tony Benn proved to be even more innovative, and pushed through an agenda with explicit political implications. He proposed to replace the Sovereign's head with a proper country identification ('United Kingdom' or its abbreviation 'UK') at least in the commemorative stamp series; or as a second option, to use other symbols of the monarchical institution, such as a crown, instead of the portrait of a specific person. This attempt created turmoil not only within GPO and SAC, but also in the political institutions and public spheres of the UK as a whole (Benn 1987; Campbell-Smith 2011; Dobson 2005, 69-71; P. Jones 2004; Muir 2007; Rose 1980; Wolstencroft 1988).

Few political actors would back PMG Benn in this regard. Yet, he did receive the support of David Gentleman, one of the most recognized artists of the UK at the time, designer of some of the most successful post-war stamps in the country (Bates 1993a; Gentleman 1974; Griffiths 1993a; Rose 1980). Arguably, Gentleman favoured the exclusion of the Queen in commemorative stamps only, and solely for aesthetic reasons; according to him, the existing portrait of the Queen was adequate for stamps devoid of any other subject, like those of the ordinary series; yet the same portrait posed great difficulties when it was to be set in combination with other depictions − as it was bound to happen in commemorative and special series

(Gentleman 1974, 434). Even in cases when such a combination was successful, the result was still a split between "the head [of the Queen] and the rest" (Gentleman, quoted in Muir 2007, 59).

Tony Benn probably had further motivations than the purely aesthetic ones when trying to remove the Sovereign from stamps. He should have been well aware that, by proposing a new national identification for UK stamps, he was changing their symbolic references to authority from the personal ruler, to the nation-state as a whole; or at least, presenting the monarchy as an institution (e.g. by means of a crown or a Royal Coat of Arms) and not as a single person.

Rather predictably, PMG Benn's efforts faced staunch opposition from political actors and government bodies including, but not limited to the Conservative Party and the House of Lords. What is more, Benn did not have the support of its own party on this regard. The Labour Party has never been truly Republican – not even its Scottish brand. In fact, the party has been historically supportive of the Monarchy, and the relations between Labour governments and the Buckingham Palace have been generally good. What is more, the relation between PM Harold Wilson had and the Queen Elizabeth II was exceptionally good, to the point that he was nicknamed in the press as "the working man's Melbourne", in reference to the Queen Victoria's PM (Morgan 2003).

Opposition came as well from important sectors in the press and, quite naturally, from Buckingham Palace. Public talk of Tony Benn trying to "behead the Queen" was common. A strong opposition to all graphic and topical innovations in stamps also came from the postal bodies themselves; members of both GPO ranks and SAC accused Benn of using the governmental institutions to advance a personal political/ideological agenda (see Benn 1987; Muir 2007, 55-106; P. Jones 2004; Wolstencroft 1988).

The Gentleman album

In order to defend his new approach to stamps, and to offer a concrete example of how they would look like if the reforms were implemented, PMG Benn asked David Gentleman to prepare a number of designs, giving him very few indications, and asking for artistic innovation. Therefore, the so-called "Gentleman album" was prepared during 1964 and 1965. Officially it was not a series of essays, but just sketches and ideas of possible future developments on UK stamp design (Gentleman 1974; Griffiths 1997; P. Jones 2004; Muir 2007). The album included a number of designs and topics, from new ordinary series based on a darkened silhouette of the

Queen, to general topics like birds, trees, landscapes and architecture, as well as novelties like aeroplanes and bridges.

However, the album included some topics of profound political relevance. For instance, it presented a 18 stamp-long series of "rulers of United Kingdom" from James I to Elizabeth II... but also including Cromwell (Gentleman 1974; Muir 2007, 82-85). Some of the stamps showed the Queen's darkened silhouette, which in fact would later be adopted for some non-ordinary series. Other examples just had a coat of arms, or other sorts of royal symbols, but not royal portraits. Some others just left an empty space where the Sovereign, or any other national identification, should be. (Muir 2007, 55-106; Rose 1980; BPMA 2012b)

In order to avoid opposition, the first examples of stamp models in the Gentleman album were presented by PMG Benn directly to the Queen, in a visit to the Buckingham Palace. These examples had not been presented to SAC before. In Benn's view, the Queen appeared open to new ideas in stamp topics and designs, even celebrating the discussion about the rules on what could be commemorated. Also, always according to him, the Queen even considered it acceptable to substitute her portrait for another symbol such as a crown or a coat of arms, or the text "United Kingdom" (Benn 1987; P. Jones 2004; Muir 2007, 55-106).

However, PMG Benn's attempt to introduce such radical changes in postage stamps did not proceed much further. His bold move of presenting the designs directly to the Queen gravely infuriated both the ranks at GPO as well as SAC members. The crisis would eventually lead to the resignation of the Chairman of SAC, the art critic Sir Kenneth Clark, in 1964 (Muir 2007, 74; Rose 1980, 61-62).[93]

More importantly, Buckingham Palace made it very clear that the openness of the Queen to discuss philatelic designs did not imply her acceptance of being displaced as the symbol of the nation. The Palace (through the Queen's personal secretary) on at least two occasions rejected any substitution of the Queen's head, even insinuating a veto if such attempts were to continue (Muir 2007, 74-78). As Tony Benn himself recalls, by that moment the Palace regarded him as a "complete revolutionary" who had to be restrained (Benn 1987, 344). One particular episode is very indicative of the political tensions caused: Prime Minister Harold Wilson had an appointment with the Queen in early November 1965. The main point of it was to discuss the policy they should follow regarding Ian Smith's rebel regime of Rhodesia (which at the time was

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[93] Most probably, this was expected by Benn as, according to him, Clark once told him of postage stamps being little more than "heraldic devices": a vision that did not match at all the ideas of the new PMG, either in the pictorial or the political sense (Benn 1987, 203).Sir Clark later confirmed this by saying that "A stamp should have the character of a crest of badge with some symbolic meaning" and nothing else (Quoted in Rose 1980, 62)

about to declare independence from the UK). Yet PM Wilson later told Benn that they had "spent ten minutes on Rhodesia, and an hour and five minutes on stamps" (Benn 1987, 344; see also Dobson 2005, 71).

By that moment, a purely symbolic issue had developed into a very contentious matter, becoming a matter of public debate and creating a major political problem for both the Labour party and Harold Wilson's (first) government, which enjoyed a very narrow majority of only four seats. Therefore both the PM and the party demanded that Tony Benn drop further attempts on the matter.[94]

However, this was not really a defeat for PMG Benn and his agenda. In the end, the definitive Gentleman album was presented to the press as part of a "Stamp Design Seminar" held on 23rd June 1966. The goal of this seminar was to "lift the subject of stamp design of the secrecy that had traditionally clothed it" (quoted in Rose 1980, 66) and therefore, to attract the interest of the public and consolidate the path for future external influences in postage stamps iconography and topics. The Gentleman album was the subject of intense scrutiny, becoming the main point of reference for future developments. In fact, some designs presented therein would later be issued as actual postage stamps. We will study some of them in the next pages.

Furthermore, even after her refusal of substituting the Sovereign in stamps, the Queen still accepted the possibility for a substitution of the present, ¾ portrait for a profile or silhouette, at least for commemorative series. She also agreed to a different portrait for future ordinary series (see Muir 2007, 78-81). Therefore, PMG Benn commissioned two experts: Gentleman would create the new profile/silhouette for commemorative series, and the very recognized designer, engraver and sculptor Arnold Machin would take care of the new portrait for ordinary series. The products presented by both became some of the most successful designs in stamp history, reaching the status of true icons, and they are still in use in contemporary UK stamps as well as in many parts of the Commonwealth (see Ill. 56).

Ill. 56 – The Queen, still there.
Left: Machin's engraved portrait, in use for ordinary series since 1967 [Scott MH22].
Right: Gentleman's dark silhouette (upper right corner) used in most commemorative and special series since May 1966 [Scott 1192]

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[94] PM Harold Wilson would call a new General Election in 1966, winning this time a comfortable majority (almost 100 seats). Yet the opening of the new parliament was only in late April, and Tony Benn left the office of PMG shortly afterwards (4th of July) after being appointed Minister of Technology.

The debates regarding the use or substitution of the sovereign's figure in stamps from the UK could be judged as exaggerated, or even perceived as a matter of pedantic traditionalism – a factor that cannot be excluded, of course. Yet, the permanence of the sovereign's head on stamps had quite more important reasons. The portrait has been, and still is, a very convenient piece of political iconography, and the authorities involved in stamp design were quite aware of the fact. A report written by the designer Andrew Restall, commissioned by PMG Benn, but submitted only his departure from GPO,[95] discussed the matter and reached the conclusion that, if the new country identifier could not be a name (e.g. United Kingdom, UK Postage etc.) then the "inevitable conclusion" was that "the [royal] head is the only way of satisfying the needs of all", as the Scots had a different version of each symbol of power available: a different Royal Coat of Arms, a different Royal Cipher, even a different Crown (A. Restall, quoted in Rose 1980, 63). In this sense, the use of monarchical identification to signify the modern UK is not only a matter of tradition, but also of the political limitations of the current state. As Tom Nairn argues, "both the genesis of the contemporary [British] monarchy and its apparently unstoppable popularity are quite clearly phenomena of *national* rather than merely social significance. They are elements in a drama of unresolved national identity." (Nairn 1989, 76).

That is: in a political entity formed by four quite different constituent parts with distinctive ethno-cultural communities, the best way to maintain unity is through an identifiable institution of little real power but high public visibility (see Cannadine 1983) which could claim to be both above minority and/or regional interests, and beyond mundane political and governmental issues – therefore safeguarding the core interests and true identity of the nation as a whole. In this way, the Sovereign becomes not the (nominal) Head of State, but rather a symbol and incarnation of a single British community that, arguably, exists in spite of any ethno-cultural divisions it may have (Nairn 2003 [1977], 1990).

When analysed in this manner, we can better explain the political upheaval caused by Mr. Benn's attempts, and the final defeat of his agenda for new national identifications in postage stamps. However, 'defeat' might be too strong a word. We can actually find a path towards the modification of the monarchical figure after the Gentleman album. Clearly, Machin's design for ordinary stamps (Ill. 56 above) is of a truly 'majestic' nature: the detail of the royal diadem, as well as the extraordinary artistic quality of the piece as a whole, help to present Elizabeth II as a true Queen. However, Gentleman's dark silhouette design for commemorative and special

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[95] This, due to his appointment as head of the Ministry of Technology (a creation of the Wilson government) on 4th of July, 1966.

stamps are far less royal: Elizabeth, with no crown or diadem but just a hint of a tiara, is far closer to an incarnation of the nation (a kind of modern Britannia) that to an actual person. In this sense, at least regarding commemorative and special series, the path towards demystification of the monarchy (Jeffery 2006, 50) seems to continue. The royal icon subsists, but with a character that is much more related to a national symbol, printed for identification purposes both within and beyond the borders, than to a picture with an explicit monarchical or imperial meaning.

Who are we (not)?

The predilection for royal themes in UK stamps issued during the first half of the 20th century, certainly reduced the number of topics that could be analysed here. That is: it is difficult to find any messages in UK stamps from 1910-1950 that could be analysed and classified by means of the typology developed in Ch. V – besides, of course, category 8 (political regime) and category 10 (national symbols and personifications of the nation).

Yet in the 1960s, Benn's reforms allowed for UK stamps to present more topics promoting the internal identification, the constitutive identity and the external differentiation of the UK, beyond a simple portrait with a crown. A full range of national characteristics, particularities, cultural markers, heroes, etc. could now be used to denote the UK, define a common identity, and claim its collective uniqueness as a nation.

The selection of such depictions and topics could, and would, become a matter of ideological and political confrontation, and the debates, actors and processes involved in topic selection and stamp depictions can tell us a lot about the evolution of the official imaginary in the post-war years. How should Britons define and recognize themselves, beyond simple subjects of a royal house? What should be the representative aspects of the collective past and of the present identity of the nation? Which features should be underlined as 'uniquely British', that is, as evidence of the existence of a national community that is different from the rest of the world?

The following cases, focused on specific series issued during the early 1960s, will help us to understand the role of elites in shaping an official national imaginary, as presented in stamps. The cases were listed according to the topics involved, so they do not necessarily follow a strict chronological order; the only differentiation is made between those issued before the elite change in 1964 (that is, before Mr. Benn was appointed PMG) and those issued in 1964-66.

Not Europa! The CEPT series (1961)

In 1961, UK hosted the second meeting of the European Postal and Telecommunications Conference (CEPT). An agreement established during the first conference specified that a common commemorative stamp series would be created for each meeting. All member states would issue stamps with the same basic design, only changing the face value, country name and currency of that particular country. The task of creating such a design was left to the host of the respective meeting, but it was implied that the spirit of such a common design should be more European than nationally-centred.

The fact that this would be a common CEPT issue, forced GPO to follow a procedure quite different from the 'closed' one, so typical of GPO and SAC. An international call for designs had to be made and the work by a Dutch artist, Theo Kurpershoek, was declared the winner. It depicted a dove made by a group of 19 smaller doves flying together, one for each CEPT member country [96] (Griffiths 1994). As agreed, such design was adopted and issued by the rest of CEPT countries without further modification except, of course, the face value, currency symbol, and country name.

However, after some deliberations, the UK government refused to use the common design as presented, because the stamps issued should include the Queen's portrait, inserted along with the CEPT references and the common design, while not being diminished by them (Griffiths 1994). This had happened already in 1960, for the first CEPT meeting [see Ill. 57, first column] and Kurpershoek's design had to be adapted in a roughly similar way. The corresponding modifications were made by Michael Goaman, under GPO supervision,[97] and the final essays (as three individual stamps had to be issued) passed all the internal GPO instances, and were also approved by the Foreign Office.

Anticipating no further problems, the CEPT stamps series were ordered into production. However, at that precise moment, the Queen objected strongly to the inclusion of the word "EUROPA" in the stamps. This word had been the slogan of the previous common series since 1958 and in fact, the British CEPT stamps had used that word just the year before (1960, see Ill. 57, left column). Yet, in 1961, the Queen considered otherwise:

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[96] Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK.
[97] It seems that, regarding this particular series, the SAC had no formal role (Griffiths 1994). This is probably due to the exceptional nature of the series.

In spite of the fact that the Foreign Office have agreed to the inclusion of Europa, she [the Queen] considers that in the present state of public discussion about the Common Market, [the word 'Europa'] might well be misunderstood by the ordinary user in this country [the UK] and by people in the Commonwealth overseas who found it on their letters." (Letter from Sir Michael Adeane, Queen's Private Secretary, to PMG Bevins, 4th July 1961. Quoted in Griffiths 1994, s.n.).

Therefore, the production had to be stopped, and the three designs were hastily reworked to erase the word (see Griffiths 1994). The definitive stamps were issued on September 18th, 1961. The result speaks for itself. The stamps issued for the previous, 1960 CEPT reunion already differed from those of all the other member countries [see Ill. 57, left column]. Yet for the 1961 London meeting, they were profoundly different: not only had the problematic word "Europa" disappeared, but the central motif of it was the Queen, not the CEPT logo or even Kurpershoek's dove [Ill. 57, right column]. There is a certain irony in the fact that such stamps were, arguably, part of a common European series, and that they were celebrating a meeting (in London) of an institution regarded as an important step in efforts towards European integration.

Ill. 57 – Examples of CEPT series.
Left column, top-bottom: 1960 common and UK stamps as issued. Notice the word "Europa" in both [Scott Belgium 553, Great Britain 377].

Right column, top-bottom: 1961 common and UK designs as issued. The word "Europa" was originally included on the latter, but suppressed after the Palace veto [Scott Belgium 572, Great Britain 377].

Beyond questions of formalities and protocol, the royal intervention reflects a concern for both internal and external politics. On the one hand, a negative reaction by British citizens was feared, after several years of internal debates regarding the role of England in Europe, especially

vis-à-vis the European Economic Community (EEC), the formation of the competing European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and particularly, the recent rejection of UK's application to EEC by Charles de Gaulle (see Dewey 2009; also Robbins 1998, 307-316). Certainly, a postage stamp with the word "Europa" beside the Queen would not only allude, but ostensibly endorse, a too-close linkage between the Kingdom and the continent.

Yet, on the other hand, the UK could not just withdraw its intention to issue a stamp for the occasion, especially since the meeting was being held on its own soil. A move like that would certainly not be appreciated by the rest of the European member states, precisely at a moment when the Macmillan government was attempting a reapproachment with Europe, after several years of cold, even strained relations, and the international condemnation received after the 1956 Suez Crisis.

Probably in order to avoid further dilemmas of the kind, the UK did not participate again in any CEPT common issue until 1969 (for the 10th anniversary of the organization - see Pendlebury 1993b) and then abstained again each year until 1973, when the series was abandoned in all of Europe.[98]

In this sense, we can confirm that stamps are a matter of politics and symbols of state authority, and that their messages are important for both internal and external audiences. However, there is a further, subtler message in the 1961 CEPT stamps. As mentioned, these were issued before Mr. Benn's reform of the stamp design guidelines. Therefore their meanings and depictions are scarce. However, there is still a message that, not by coincidence, was clearly and forcefully imposed via a top-down decision: that, whatever the UK is as a nation, it is definitively different from 'Europa'.

'This was the noblest Englishmen of all': the Shakespeare series (1964)

In 1964, the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth was commemorated in the UK with a large festival, organized by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Trust director, Mr. Levi Fox, made a request in September 1961 to the then-PMG Bevins for a stamp to be issued on this occasion (Pendlebury 1995). As usual, the request was turned down. The answer to Mr. Fox was prepared by the PSD, and quoted the traditional reasons for rejection: that a such stamp would violate the rules regarding commemorative stamps and the prohibition of depicting any person besides the Sovereign.

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[98] Some member countries kept designing and issuing their own CEPT stamps afterwards.

However, the external pressures to issue this stamp were not only intense, but came also from both local and high-ranking politicians, such as the Mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon (Stanley Charles Rosser) and the MP representing the area (John Profumo), as well as from public figures including the Chairman of the Royal Society of St. George, Sir Ralph Rayner. Even more importantly, both Mayor Rosser and Sir Rayner had strong influence in the Post Office: the former was the President of the Post Office Engineers Union at the time, and the latter was a member of the Post Office Advisory Committee (Pendlebury 1995).

The pressure was enough to force GPO ranks to engage in a serious discussion on the subject. Arguably, even the Director General (Sir Ronald German) was somehow sympathetic to the idea. One solution devised was that these stamps would be issued not to celebrate the poet himself, but only the festival –considering it as a "current event of national importance". Yet, there was a further obstacle of political nature:

> A stamp for Shakespeare could be controversial as the Post Office had, for a number of years, receiving representation for a commemorative stamp for the bicentenary of [the Scottish poet] Robert Burns' birth. These requests had been repeatedly rejected so an announcement of a Shakespeare stamp would cause an outcry in some circles (Pendlebury 1995).

Such outcry indeed happened, as we will see below. Nevertheless, after extensive discussions within the GPO and the SAC, the Shakespeare stamps were approved in 1963. The instructions provided to the artists explicitly allowed the inclusion of Shakespeare's head, but with the restriction that it should be a "linear stylized head no larger than the Queen's head" and that the latter should remain "an independent inset" and "one of the dominant features" of the stamp ('Instructions to Artists', quoted in Pendlebury 1995, 3).

Ill. 58 – Shakespeare stamps.
Left: one of the four Gentleman designs [Scott 402].
Right: The stamp designed by the Ironside brothers,
featuring Hamlet and the skull [Scott 406]

Several artists sent essays for consideration. After selection by SAC and GPO, the options were reduced to two sets. Each set consisted of five individual essays depicting various episodes and characters of Shakespeare's works. One such set was authored by David Gentleman; the others by the brothers Richard and Christopher Ironside (see Ill. 58).

The set proposed by Gentleman were the clear SAC favourites; eventually, four of the five designs would be issued.[99] Only one design of the Ironside brothers' set would be issued, featuring Hamlet in the classic episode of the contemplation of Yorick's skull. This would become the highest value of the whole series, contrasting sharply with the rest (those designed by Gentleman) due to its different style and printing technique (see Ill. 58)]. We will focus now on this particular Ironside stamp, as its analysis will tell us a lot about the messages that the UK authorities wanted to present about their nation.

To be British enough… or not?: Ethnic representations in stamps

As explained above, the Ironside brothers presented a full set of essays for consideration. However, only two essays were considered as potential winners. One was the scene with Hamlet contemplating the skull (see Ill. 58, right); the second presented Othello. Common sense would dictate that that the decision of opting for one of these two essays would be taken by the SAC and the GPO according to purely artistic considerations. Yet it seems that was not the case:

> A minute for the PMG [Bevins] from the Deputy Director General, W A Wolverson, indicated that, for the line engraved stamp, the Committee [SAC] preferred the Othello design; however, it was suggested the Hamlet design be recommended as first choice to the Palace. The letter to the Palace put the matter as delicately as possible, but the inescapable conclusion is that there was a fear the portrayal of a black character might be regarded as controversial by 'some extremists' (Pendlebury 1995, 10).

In other words: in 1964, the UK was not ready to represent a "non-white" person on a postage stamp – even if he was just a fictional character, and in any case created by one of the most recognized Englishmen in history. This is certainly related to the socio-political environment, as in the late 1950s and 1960s, Britain was set for increasing local opposition to immigration and even racially-based riots (Robbins 1998, 326-327)

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[99] Some touchy PM's would later criticize one of these designs (see Ill. 58, right) for putting the Shakespearian character 'Bottom' right at the nose of the Queen (quoted in Dobson 2005, 69).

It is true that, in 1965, a stamp allegedly presented non-white persons ('Trinidad Carnival Dancers', see Ill. 59, first stamp) yet the figures were drawn in such a way that the ethnic/racial features were very difficult to discern. Furthermore, there was no clarification of such character in the stamp itself (e.g. a text stating the topic). Finally, this particular series was made for the 1st Commonwealth Arts Festival, so these characters could still be presented as not belonging to the UK itself but to the overseas territories: a piece that could in fact represent a very good example of pictorial orientalism (see Newman 1989; Said 1978), and one of the very few cases in which the British Empire (more precisely, the Commonwealth) is alluded to in a UK stamp. The first evidently "black" character in a UK stamp arrived in 1969, but only as one of the Three Kings for a Christmas issue [Scott 607, Stanley Gibbons 342].

That same year the first depiction of a real non-white person appeared, in a stamp issued for Gandhi's Centenary Year (Ill. 59, second stamp) in 1969. However, this is a very particular case. By 1968 there were several requests to the GPO for a stamp celebrating the Gandhi Centenary, including several by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Yet within the GPO and the SAC there was a strong opposition towards representing foreigners on any UK stamp. The then-PMG, John Stonehouse, agreed to such a policy and all appeals were therefore rejected. Only when PMG Stonehouse received a request from Lord Mountbatten of Burma, such stamp was approved and issued.

The reasons for such a decision were much more a matter of deference and personal influence than due to any ideological reasoning by UK postal authorities. Both the SAC and the GPO, as well as PMG Stonehouse, maintained their disapproval of the idea but, at the same time, acknowledged that they would just be unable to deny a request coming from a person with such a high profile as Lord Mountbatten (Pendlebury 1994). Not only was he the last Viceroy of India, but he had also been First Sea Lord (that is, head of the Royal Navy), Chief of the Defence Staff of the UK and the most important factor, he was the uncle of the Duke of Edinburgh and a cousin of Elizabeth II.

Lord Mountbatten's motivations to ask for such a stamp are also clear. The year before, he had been appointed Chairman of the UK Gandhi Centenary Committee. Since most of the 25 countries that would participate in the Centenary festivities would also issue a stamp for the occasion, he considered that 'it would be most unfortunate if we [the UK] lagged behind the tributes paid by other countries in the philatelic world' (quoted in Pendlebury 1994, 1). This was thus both a matter of personal motivation and of international prestige.

After the GPO and the SAC gave a very reluctant approval for the stamp, a closed call for essays was made, and the winning design was that of Mr. Biman Mullick – incidentally a British-based Indian designer and illustrator. Mr. Mullick's design presented Gandhi over an Indian flag [see ill. 74, centre], which generated some debate at the GPO regarding the appropriateness of presenting a foreign flag in a UK stamp. However, this objection was rapidly surmounted, the design was swiftly approved by all instances involved (including the Palace) and the stamp was issued in August 1969 (Pendlebury 1994).

The Gandhi Centennial stamp was not only "the first to commemorate an overseas leader" but also "the first to be designed by a overseas artist" (Pendlebury 1994, 5). It represented therefore a turn in UK stamp policies. However, it should be noted that the stamp was issued only due to the UK participating an international event; and that the stamp itself is not 'appropriating' Gandhi for the UK, as he is clearly linked to India by means of the flag, with no mention of Britain. Finally, given the circumstances of its creation, such a stamp is not so much evidence of a change in the political attitudes of British society, but rather a case of external actors trying to influence stamp topics, according to their own considerations and goals.

A stamp from the UK that clearly presented a 'non-white' as a member of the British nation or at least, as part of the contemporary British society, had to wait until ten years later. In 1979, a series devoted to the Metropolitan police included one stamp depicting children, one of them a boy of clear African ancestry, who, together with a blonde girl, is talking to a local policeman [Ill. 59, right].

Ill. 59 – Evolution of ethnic / racial representations in UK stamps. Left to right:
1965, first (apparently) "black" characters in a UK stamp [Scott 428];
1969, first non-white real person [Scott 607];
1979, first non-white presented as part of the UK society [Scott 875]).
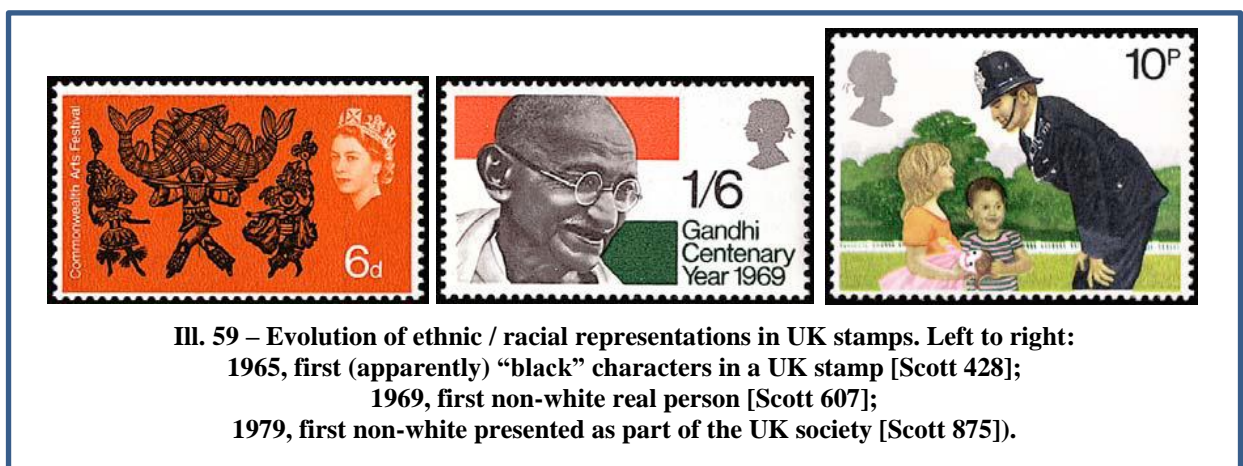
It took quite a long time for UK stamps to present their own society as a multiracial one, or even to acknowledge the influence of overseas populations in UK public life and culture. I

have no proof that such long-standing exclusion of non-white populations was a general and explicit policy regarding stamp design, even if the reasons offered for choosing Hamlet over Othello would strongly suggest it. However, that was a single case and so far, I have not detected further ones that could confirm such exclusion a systematic and planned. We can nevertheless evaluate how UK postage stamps presented their *own*, white, non-English native populations in stamps. This will be the subject of the next section.

Britannia beyond London: local demands and politics in stamps

Up to the mid-50's, the GPO as an institution, as well as the different PMGs, were quite emphatic in rejecting any suggestions of issuing stamps devoted to a specific constituent territorial unit within the Islands. This was despite intense pressure exercised by diverse actors (particularly, but not limited to Scottish figures) that denounced the overwhelming English and/or London references in UK stamps.

Of course, this is related to the much larger topic of British national identity, or rather, the interrelation of at least four different identities and histories, namely English, Scottish, and Welsh (see for instance Robbins 1998), as well as that of Ireland (North and South) and further, even more peculiar cases such as the Manx or Channel Islanders. This is a very complex topic, extensively studied in the literature on nationalism (see the introduction to this chapter).

However, even if we accept the arguments regarding the existence of an English 'nation', 'ethnic group', or 'proto-nation', this still does not suffice to explain the development of the United Kingdom as a unified polity. The idea that 'Englishness' is at the core of the modern British identity, will certainly not explain the fact that all the other local identities and cultures not only survived, but actually experienced a revival since the 19th century at least, and particularly in the late 20th century (cf. Keating 1996, 2009; Morgan 1981; Nairn 2003 [1977]). Then, it is clear that the imperial experience had a prominent role in shaping the British identity as a sort of 'chosen people' with a civilizing mission and, after the loss of both empire and world leadership, it is facing difficulties in defining its own identity (see for instance Kumar 2003). In fact, many of the attitudes towards the rest of Europe can be traced to such historical and identity problems (see Wellings 2012; also Dewey 2009).

This is a debate with many other aspects than just the philatelic ones. However, for the purposes of my research, the key point is: even such a apparently minor matter such as stamp depictions offered opportunities to local elites and social actors to advance their minority and/or territorial demands and interests, expressed not just in terms of equality on the state-wide level

(for instance, demanding similar treatment for the four constituent parts of the Kingdom regarding stamp topics and depictions) but also, and even more importantly, in terms of the cultural and historical recognition of the outer areas versus the metropolis, and particularly of Scotland vis-à-vis England.

The Parliament was a prominent place for such debates. For example, already in 1951, Mr. Hector Huges (MP, Aberdeen North)[100] asked the Assistant PMG, Mr. L. D. Gammans, "if he will consider the issue of special and individual designs in postage stamps for Scotland". He only received a forthright "No, Sir" for an answer. Upon Mr. Huges' insistence, Assistant PMG Gammans answered in the following way:

> There has been no previous request for this except from the hon. and learned Gentleman, and there are very great difficulties in the way. May I point out to him that already on the existing stamps Scotland has pride of place by the thistle in the top right hand corner? (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1951c)

This is a half-truth, as not all stamps of this period bear the four herbal symbols of the constituent parts of the UK. In any case, it was clear that before and even during the early 1950s, there was no space for local issues, identities and demands in the British stamps, beyond a herb in the corner.

The policy of avoiding any mention to the constituent parts of the UK and its cultural and historical specificities would be maintained until the mid-1950s, despite the insistence on the topic by Mr. Huges and other MPs from Scotland, as well as some from Wales.[101] The first series with clear territorial implications was the 1955 'Castles' series, which featured four: Caernarfon, Carrickfergus, Edinburgh and Windsor, corresponding to Wales, North Ireland, Scotland, and England respectively [see Scott 309-312, Stanley Gibbons 166-169]. The intention of representing all the corners of the Islands equally is clear, and this was formalized later by becoming part of the 'instructions for artists' issued when commissioning stamp series that had territorial implications (see Bates 1993c; Pendlebury 1993a; Goodey 2011).[102] A similar

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[100] When not quoted in the archival sources, the biographic data of MPs has been obtained from the TheyWorkForYou.com online database (MySociety - UK Citizens Online Democracy 2012)

[101] Mr. Huges would repeat such request several times. See for instance (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1951a). Other requests are included in BPMA, *Parliamentarian Questions Concerning Postage Stamps Commemorative Issues and Others, 1948-1963,* Folio 54/54.

[102] A further example is a series for the 20th International Geographical Congress, held in London in July 1964. The four stamps presented London apartment buildings, Belfast shipyards, the Beddgelert Forest Park in Snowdonia (Wales) and the Dounreay nuclear reactor (Scotland), respectively [Scott 410-413; Stanley Gibbons 211-214]. The

reasoning was applied to the four herbal symbols in stamps: either the four countries are represented, or none at all. That would change in the early sixties.

Appeasing Scots: the Forth Road Bridge series (1964)

In February 1964 (that is, when the Shakespeare series was in the production stage), PMG Bevins received an informal letter from Lord Provost of Edinburgh (Rt. Hon. Duncan Weatherstone). He was asking for the issuing of a commemorative stamp, celebrating the imminent completion and opening of the monumental Forth Road Bridge in Scotland. This request had evident shortcomings. First, it would meant to pay tribute to a feature linked to Scotland, not pertaining to the UK as a whole. Up to that moment, this suggestions had not been welcomed at all by either the SAC or the GPO. Furthermore, very obvious practical considerations came into view: the bridge was very near to completion, its opening was approaching very quickly, and so the time to issue a stamp for it too short. Finally, the request for this stamp was made well after the yearly programme of stamps had been decided and announced in the Parliament.

There were more than enough reasons, both political and practical, which would allow for the rejection of the suggestion of a Forth Bridge stamp at once. Yet, and most surprisingly, the request for it was immediately accepted by GPO. In fact, just a week later (in early March), the GPO was already looking for information regarding the projected date of opening of the Bridge , in order to ensure that the stamp would be issued the same day. Six artists were invited and their designs presented, discussed and approved with remarkable speed (Griffiths 1993b).

The reasons for such expedited acceptance, so contrary to GPO tradition, were clearly not related to philately. Instead, this became one of the most clearly politically-induced decisions regarding stamp issuance in the period studied. It was the Deputy DG of posts (Mr. Wolwerson) who put the case forward, through a letter to the Assistant PMG (Mr. Mawby). The formal justification was that the completion of the bridge was in itself "an outstanding current event of national importance" and therefore, was entitled to a stamp. However, the letter contents quite clearly reveal the true motivations:

> The bridge's completion as a significant Scottish event was emphasised by
> [Mr. Wolwerson] in view of some accusations, both in Parliament and the press,

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same pattern was repeated in the British Landscapes series of 1966 [Scott 454-457; Stanley Gibbons 248-251]; British Rural Architecture or 1970 [Scott 608-611; Stanley Gibbons 343-346] etc. An interesting exception is the 1978 'British Architecture' series that did not present an Northern Ireland example [Scott 831-834; Stanley Gibbons 533-536]

that the Post Office neglected Scotland when deciding on the subject matter for stamps. This had arisen over the decision to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, having not marked the Robert Burns anniversary a few years previously. A Forth Road Bridge would, it was felt, go some way to reconciling the imbalance, and more importantly, conciliating aggrieved Scots. (Griffiths 1993b, 1-2)

We should note that these stamps would constitute a *real* precedent, allowing other modern engineering projects to be presented in stamps. At any other moment, such an innovative character would play strongly against the possibility of such stamps being issued. Yet this did not count this time, and the two stamps of the Forth Bridge series were a philatelic success [see Ill. 60; also Scott 418-419, Stanley Gibbons 219-220]. However, it did little to appease the demands for the recognition via stamps of the quintessential Scottish poet, Robert Burns.

Ill. 60 – Appeasing the Scots: A 1964 Forth Road Bridge stamp

Liberty is in Every Blow: the Robert Burns series (1966)

The demands made by public and political actors for a stamp honouring Burns increased steeply in the late fifties, as the 200th anniversary of the poet's birth (in 1959) was approaching. For instance, at least 30 parliamentary questions on this subject were made to the PMG and/or GPO representatives between October 1955 and February 1964.[103] Some local artists were even creating their own Burns "stamps", and using them in protest letters (see Lynch 2012). By 1958, the external pressure about the matter was so intense, that Prime Minister Macmillan (Cons.) had to call a meeting for this specific issue, attended by a delegation of MPs and representatives of the Burns Federation (Bates 1993d).

Burns 200th anniversary passed, and the public pressure receded, even if never gave away completely. The announcement of the Shakespeare series in April 1964 (still during PMG Bevins' term of office) revitalized such demands, together with claims of unequal treatment (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1951b). In this sense, the GPO's tactic of presenting the Shakespeare series not as honouring the poet itself, but only the Festival, was a complete failure, as it was the "appeasement" attempted with the Forth Bridge stamps described above.

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[103] Transcripts of these questions can be found in BPMA, *Parliamentarian Questions Concerning Postage Stamps Commemorative Issues and Others, 1948-1963,* Folio 54/54.

The appointment of Mr. Benn as PMG in 1964 presented a new occasion for the Burns stamp cause. The discussions regarding a stamp series to honour Sir Winston Churchill (which will be studied next) provided an adequate environment to discuss the representation of figures of historical relevance for the nation's history, as confirmed by the new guidelines for stamp depictions (see "Elite change and change in stamp policies" above). Several requests by citizens, groups and political figures were made to PMG Benn. Without fully committing himself, he answered that all policies regarding stamps were in a process of revision, but once completed, a stamp for the Scottish poet would be considered. Ultimately, when presenting the 1966 philatelic programme to the House of Commons, Tony Benn mentioned "at least one stamp" commemorating Burns to be issued early that year (Bates 1993d).

The SAC decided to invite only Scottish designers for the Burns stamp. Eight of them were shortlisted.[104] The 'instructions to artists', clearly dictated by Benn with no consultation with the SAC, encouraged the artists to consider 'non-traditional ideas', granting them 'absolute freedom' in terms of design and also giving them the option of including a different country identifier than the Queen's head. The instructions also allowed the inclusion of Burns' portrait (Bates 1993d; Muir 2007, 75-77).

During the first meeting called to review the essays, SAC members reacted in unfavourable ways to the designs submitted. Clearly without much enthusiasm, they selected two essays: those presented by Jock Kinner as their first option, then those by Huntly as second option (Bates 1993d; see also Muir 2007, 75-76). Kinner's designs had 'UK postage' instead of the Queen's face, so the SAC stated that this would be their first choice, but only after the royal portrait was restored.

The suppression of the royal head in some designs would become, once again, a matter of contention between PMG Benn and the SAC. Mr. Benn apparently accepted the suggestion of restoring the Queen's face, but in the meantime, he kept brushing over the matter: in a most unusual move, he commissioned a third design (by A. B. Imrie, one of those *not* selected by SAC) to be produced as well. Imrie's design featured a royal cypher instead of Elizabeth's face.

A second SAC meeting to review the modifications to their two selected designs was called in October 1965. It was announced during this meeting that Sir Kenneth Clark had quit after three decades in the role of Chairman of the Committee. Allegedly, his retirement was due

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[104] This represents evidence of a more careful approach than in the case of the Forth Bridge issue, as in that case only one out of the eight designers invited to the competition was Scottish, Gordon F. Huntly (Griffiths 1993b, 2) and in the end, David Gentleman was the winner – he was based in Edinburgh at the time, though he was born in London.

to old age, yet it is clear it was motivated by his disagreement with Benn's changes in stamp design policies (Rose 1980, 59-62; Muir 2007, 72-75) (see "The Gentleman Album" above and footnote 93). During this second meeting, the committee's preferences were inverted, so the designs by Huntly became their first preference, and Kinner's the second,[105] and so they were submitted to the Palace for approval. In a surreptitious manner, PMG Benn enclosed the third, A.B. Imrie design depicting a royal cypher instead of the royal portrait (Bates 1993d). Not surprisingly, the Palace answered by approving only those designs with the Queen, and confirmed Hunty's as the preferred ones.

The final Burns series included two stamps, both featuring a prominent portrait of the poet – far larger than the Queen. One of the stamps had the Scottish flag as background (see Ill. 61) while the other presented references to the poet's life and environment. Not surprisingly, the Burns stamps were both popular and controversial. The political significance of the poet could not be ignored – and this was only reinforced by presenting the Scottish flag on a stamp from the UK. Burns himself was another contentious matter,

Ill. 61 – The poet and the Scottish flag

especially among the most conservative circles, since "because of his private life there were some who thought he should never have appeared on the same stamp with the Queen" (Benn, interviewed by S. Rose, in Rose 1980, 68). In contrast, it seems that there were fewer debates on the stamps issued for Burns' bicentennial birth anniversary (in 1996) despite the presence of one that included the line '*Scots, wha hae wi Wallace bled*' and a depiction of Wallace [Scott 1641, Stanley Gibbons 1228]. The personal reasons for Benn to accept, and even promote, the issue of the Burns stamp series in 1966 are not certain. However, it seems very likely that the long-standing tradition of support of Labour in Scotland, was a determinant influence in the decision (Keating 1996, 2009; Keating and Bleiman 1979)

Both the 1964 Forth Road Bridge and the 1966 Robert Burns stamps series were extremely significant from a political point of view. By presenting topics, places and connoted persons of a specific constituent territory of the United Kingdom, they symbolically elevated the regions to the same level as the metropolis, and also extended the ethno-cultural representations

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[105] Apparently, this decision was based on design considerations only. Kinner's designs featured the Burns signature on a white background. It was felt that, after the inclusion of the Queen's head, the signature was too small and misplaced, so it would be obliterated or indistinguishable after it was marked with by a postal cancellation.

of the nation: the postal users would now have a visual confirmation that the UK was not limited to a Queen, Shakespeare and the Englishmen. In this regard, the topics and depictions in stamps from the UK became just another battlefield for the recognition of the multicultural nature of Britain.[106]

The intrusion of the Commoners: Churchill's stamp (1965)

As explained earlier, before 1964, the restrictive rules regarding commemorative stamps and the secrecy that characterized the stamp design process, blocked the inclusion or commemoration of any other persons or historical events in UK stamps. However, this does not mean that prior to 1964 there were no demands for commemorative stamps devoted to non-royal persons or topics. The Robert Burns stamps, discussed above, were just one case among several.[107] But when was the first non-royal figure included in a stamp from Britain, and why?

After the Second World War, a number of requests were made for a stamp in honour of Sir Winston Churchill, on behalf of very diverse social and political circles, including several MPs. All of these requests had been rejected by the GPO and the SAC, rather predictably. Yet such petitions did not recede, and actually increased as Churchill's 90th birthday approached (November 30th, 1964). Even so, by the 29th of April of that year, the GPO was still replying that to issue a stamp for Churchill would imply introducing "a completely new policy regarding stamps", something that they were not inclined to do.[108]

The petitions for a 'Churchill stamp' increased after the October 1964 general elections, and the Labour government responded to them in a much more favourable manner. However, there was no immediate chance to put the idea into practice as, allegedly, PMG Benn was still revising the whole policy regarding stamp design, so no new series could be launched in the meantime (Bates 1993a). Churchill died on January 24th, 1965.

The next day, Benn sent direct orders to DPS to produce the stamps commemorating him and, on the 27th, he publicly announced that two stamps would be issued, even before consulting

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[106] See Dobson (Dobson 2005, 68-69) at this respect. It is important to note that there were further instances of this battle in stamps regarding "who are the real English/British peoples". A very significant one, which cannot be treated in detail here, was regarding the 900th anniversary (in 1966) of the battle of Hastings. Starting in 1962, a number of requests were made to the Post Office for a commemorative stamp series for that. Again, such request came from by MPs, connoted persons, and social groups, but all were declined until PMG arrived. When the stamp issue was announced, Sir John Eden (Cons.) wrote to object 'very strongly' against it, as in his opinion, GPO was commemorating 'an English defeat' (quoted in Bates 1993b).

[107] A number of these parliamentarian questions are kept in the British Postal Museum & Archive [e.g. Folio 54/54]

[108] From the internal documents and correspondence on this case, it seems that the then-PMG (Reginald Bevins) showed some sympathy toward the idea, and undertook discussions about it within the GPO's ranks – where both the Director General and the DPS were against it. However, the matter was definitively put to rest after consultations with the Prime Minister (Alec Douglas-Home, Conservative) who rejected the idea (Bates 1993e).

with the Queen on the matter (Bates 1993a). David Gentleman, Abram Games, and the Harrison & Sons Co. were contacted immediately to design the stamp. Two unusual facts marked this event, as, on the one hand, Mr. Games was part of the SAC at that moment and, on the other hand, the designers were given no instructions regarding the designs expected.

The SAC met on 16 Feb. 1965 to revise the essays sent by the artists, selecting two as first preferences, and two as second preferences. Perhaps not surprisingly, these preferred options included one stamp designed by the abovementioned Mr. Games. In the meeting there was an intense debate as well, as some of the compositions (particularly those by Gentleman, based upon the famous Karsh photograph of Sir Winston) gave the impression of the Queen

Ill. 62 – Churchill's divided stamp: a national hero… but a commoner, after all.

'peeping-over-the-shoulder' of Churchill (Gentleman 1974, 434). Furthermore, SAC demanded the inclusion of a white vertical line in the designs, right between Churchill and the Queen's respective heads (see Ill. 62). This was objected to not only by PMG Benn, but also by the artist (Gentleman) and even the printers, as the line created both aesthetic and printing problems (Bates 1993a; but see Gentleman 1974, 434). Despite these objections, such a white line was maintained, because the SAC demanded a "symbolic barrier" separating Queen from commoner or, as Gentleman put it, as a "sort of cordon sanitaire" between the two (Gentleman 1974, 434; see also Muir 2007).

PMG Benn then took the most unusual step of showing the essays to an external person, namely Lady Churchill (Bates 1993a; Muir 2007). She expressed her preference for the Gentleman essays. Then, instead of returning these essays for further discussions with the SAC, Benn sent them directly the Palace, together with a letter explaining and supporting Lady Churchill's preferences. The Queen approved these same ones the next day, and so they were issued, overriding SAC preferences.

Again, beyond matters of design and of trivial office quarrels, we can see both political considerations and controversies involved in the choosing of stamp designs. In the first instance, the refusal to celebrate Churchill in a stamp while he was still alive was framed in terms of respect for tradition but, more precisely, it was caused by a resistance to present any other person than the Sovereign on a stamp.

So far, UK stamps had presented the nation and its political regime by means of their embodiment in an individual, to the point that not even a country name was needed. Yet, such identification of the nation with a royal portrait could be challenged, at least in a symbolic form, at the very moment that other members of the national community would be included. To open the space in stamps for non-royal persons, even those as noted as Churchill, would imply some equality status, or at least a direct relationship between the commoner and the Sovereign him- or herself.

However, if that privilege could not be granted during Churchill's lifetime, it was difficult to deny it once he had died, especially given the official treatment he received during the occasion. He had been, without doubt, the most popular and revered politician from the United Kingdom of the 20th century, as well as a war hero who, in the view of most Britons, had saved the country from a complete defeat at the hands of the Axis. Accordingly, he was granted the honour of a state funeral: the first for a commoner since 1852. Around 320,000 persons paid their respects in Westminster during three days and the service at St. Paul's was attended by 110 foreign representatives as well as the Queen in person, a very rare occurrence (The Churchill Centre and Museum 2013).

If by a royal-sanctioned decision Churchill had been elevated upon his death to the level of a statesman, it was difficult to deny him the same treatment in a postage stamp. Therefore, the combination of strong internal pressures from social and political actors, a change in the political regime, and the royal sanction, allowed Churchill to be the first commoner depicted in UK stamps, besides the rather particular case of Shakespeare (P. Jones 2004; Bates 1993a). Even so, the honour was still qualified by the introduction of a symbolic barrier on the stamp separating the commoner from the royal figure. There was no doubt that for the SAC, Sir Winston Churchill was a great Briton – yet a commoner above all.

So far, we have focused on individual figures presented in UK stamps. Yet individuals, whether political leaders or cultural icons, are not always enough to represent a common past, and particularly those events that have left deep, long-lasting imprints upon the national community. Therefore, even if Churchill was a hero, the Second World War cannot be signified by him alone. In this sense, it was just matter of time for collective feats (in other words: *national* ones) to find their way into UK stamps.

The Battle of Britain (1965)

During the early sixties, and particularly in 1964, there were numerous demands for a commemorative stamp series celebrating the 25th anniversary (1965) of the Battle of Britain. Among the proponents were veterans' organizations, but also members of the armed forces, and high-ranking politicians. Yet the GPO repeatedly rejected these demands (Griffiths 1993a; Griffiths 1997).

The GPO's rejections were carefully presented as based on both practical and normative arguments: despite its undeniable historical and collective significance, the Battle of Britain simply did not (as yet) comply with the rules for commemorative stamps – which were supposed to be issued only for "important current events of national or international interest" or "Royal and postal anniversaries," because "the history of our country is so rich in outstanding events and persons that if we were to abandon this policy we would be faced with the invidious task of discriminating between important anniversaries of various types or of greatly increasing the number of special issues" (D. H. Beaumont, Postal Services Department, answering one of such requests; quoted in Griffiths 1993a).

However, just as in the case of Churchill, the external pressure upon the PMG and the GPO regarding this topic did not stop. As a matter of fact, more and more political actors of increasing hierarchical status started to get involved. At least two parliamentarian questions were made in the early to mid-1964 to the (then) PMG Bevins, and delegations from over 20 MPs paid visits to the GPO to further press on this issue. Yet all of them faced the same negative answer (Griffiths 1993a).

However, on 26 August 1964, the Minister of Defence for the Royal Air Force (MP Hugh Fraser) wrote to PMG Bevins with the same demand. The political status of the applicant made it impossible to deny the request without offering a clear explanation. The reasons outlined by the GPO in its answer to Mr. Fraser were that, first, the inclusion of a single commemoration "of a new type" would force the GPO to accept all future suggestions for new commemoratives; and second, that "commemorating the Battle of Britain risked giving offence to the Germans at precisely the time that the UK was trying to forge links with the European Community" – this, right on the eve of a May 1965 visit by the Queen to West Germany (Griffiths 1993a). Allegedly, the GPO had made consultations about it with the Foreign Office, which had answered very emphatically regarding the last point.

Yet, after the new Labour government took office, PMG Benn immediately agreed to the idea of celebrating the Battle of Britain. The occasion fit perfectly in his plans for reforming both stamp rules regarding commemorations, and stamp iconography. Two designers were invited for this task: Andrew Restall and David Gentleman – the latter then also including his wife, Rosalind Dease.

The initial designs were considered too controversial by GPO staff. Both Restall and Gentleman choose to present aircraft in battle as the main topic, and some of these were easily recognizable as German bombers (Griffiths 1993a). These early essays evolved, but most of them still featured planes as the central topics, a fact that kept worrying SAC and arguably, the Foreign Office as well.

These early designs included six stamps depicting aircraft, designed by Gentleman (who at the same time was working on his 'album') plus two more made by Restall, which focused on the battle as seen from the ground. Overall, the series was a perfect synthesis of both Benn's and Gentleman's ideas: a se-tenant[109] of six stamps of the same face value but with different designs, and only one (at the upper right-hand corner of the set) would have the portrait of the Queen on it. The rest featured the legend "UK postage" (BPMA 2012b; Griffiths 1993a; Gentleman 1974).

This series was not only innovative in terms of presentation and design, but also politically provocative due to both the depictions presented and the removal of the Queen's portrait. In fact, it has been pointed out that this particular set was the one that "really annoyed" the Palace, which condemned the whole proposal of substituting the Sovereign's head with other symbols (Benn 1987, 344-45; Positively Postal [2010]). Given the strong opposition that PMG Benn faced from the SAC and the GPO itself, as well as several social and political actors (not to mention the Buckingham Palace) he had to retreat in his project. Therefore, the final Battle of Britain series would have, as customary, the royal portrait on each stamp (see BPMA 2012a).

Yet, in other aspects, many of Benn's and Gentleman's ideas were kept within the series: from the printing format (se-tenants for Gentleman's stamps) to the topic itself and the way of representing it, for instance with "recognizable aircraft" with realistic insignias. Restall's designs showed significant changes. However, in the case of Gentleman's, only one design was substituted altogether.[110] The new design showed a downed, fractured, sinking German bomber

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[109] In philately, a "se-tenant" is a set of stamps, printed together in a single block, but where each individual stamp has a different design and/or value. This in contrast to the normal sets where each individual stamp repeats the same design and value as the rest of the block.
[110] The original design presented a downed Spitfire, and his parachuted pilot being rescued by a boat. It was conceived to honour those branches of the armed forces that assisted the war in the air – much like the Restall

with a prominent swastika on its broken tail, and RAF planes flying above (see Ill. 63, centre-right). This particular stamp was the centre of a public debate regarding the appropriateness of presenting the Nazi symbol and raised some protests amongst some army veterans, MPs, and Jewish organizations (Griffiths 1993a; also Campbell-Smith 2011, 451; Dobson 2005, 71-73; Muir 2007, 74).

Ill. 63 – Battle of Britain stamps as issued
[(Hoyo)]
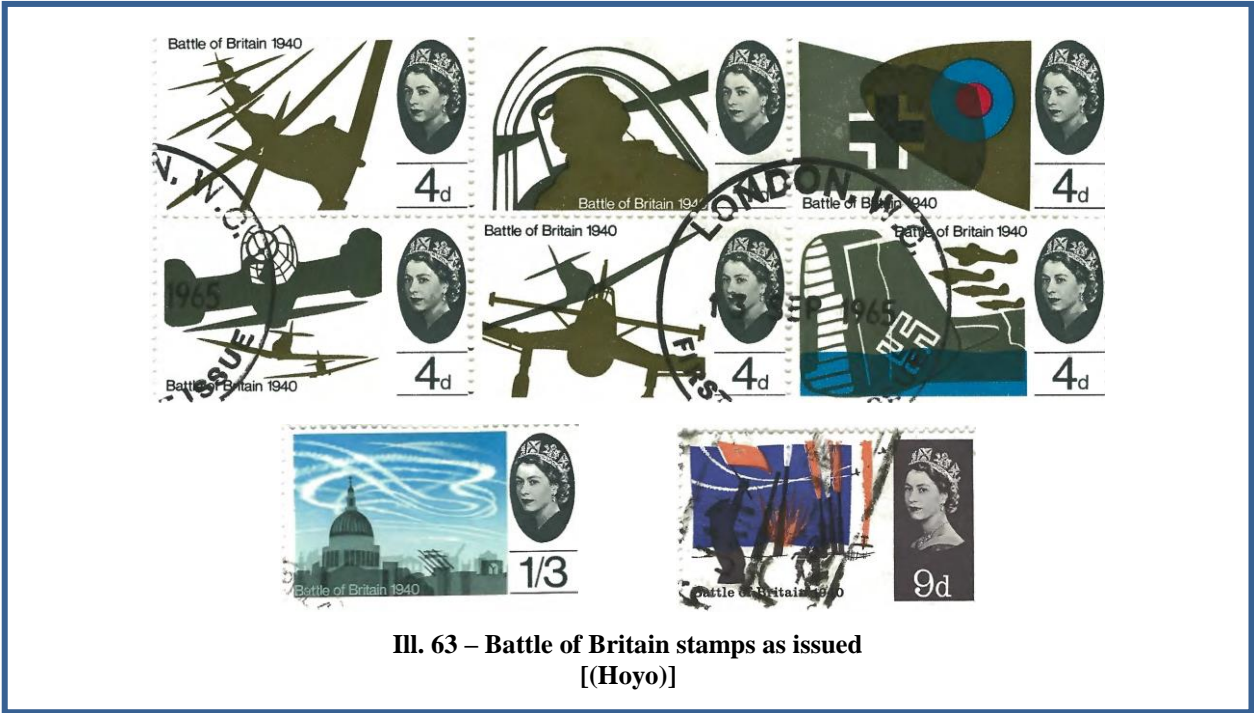
These stamps were certainly pioneers in British postal history: the first examples to celebrate an event of truly collective (national) nature, and the first ones to refer to Germany. The balance between both messages was certainly delicate, as an excess of British pride could offend German sensibilities at a moment when UK was trying to build bridges with the continent. Yet on the other hand, it was difficult to ignore the fact that the Battle of Britain was fought against the Luftwaffe; and a too simplistic design could also create resentment among local audiences, particularly veterans' organizations and the Armed forces themselves.

The solution adopted by the GPO was very simple and effective: to present the event as schematic and general as possible. In the stamps, the two enemies are easily recognizable by the colour contrast (green vs. grey), by symbols only in some cases, and the different aircraft

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design did by focusing on anti-air batteries and their personnel [see Ill. 63, lower right]. This design was another cause of debate within the SAC, as some members of it were in favour of celebrating the Air Force only because, if such sea rescue teams were honoured, then several other army/navy branches and services would also be entitled to the same treatment, and both SAC and GPO would be forced to discriminate among them.

outlines. Yet, there are almost no representations of individuals, except as silhouettes in only two stamps: it seems like if the Battle of Britain was waged by machines, not by humans. The only identifiable person, of course, is the Queen herself.

In the end, despite the protests of some sectors within Britain, these stamps were issued on September 13th, 1965, and quickly became very popular amongst both collectors and the public (Griffiths 1993a). They also did not cause any objection by the German government (see for instance Gentleman 1974, 438).

Conclusions: elite changes and imaginaries in stamps

The centrality of the Sovereign was a true hallmark of UK stamps. But to imprint His/Her face on stamps was not just an homage to a political leader (whose real power was in fact reduced); instead, it was a true national symbol. The face was there not only to represent the state that issued the stamp, *but also to stand for it*, embodying the whole community and territory of the nation in a single individual. In stamps, UK was first Queen Victoria, then Edward VII, George V, Edward VII (briefly), George VI, Elizabeth I… and not much else. The royal portrait was such an overarching symbol for the UK that, for many years, the inclusion of almost any other topic on stamps was considered unnecessary, or even improper.

Correspondingly, the governmental agencies in charge of stamp design operated under a very closed system. Some institutions (the GPO, the SAC, and Buckingham Palace itself) concentrated all design and executive decisions, not only regarding matters of style but also of politics, as the Coronation issue, and particularly the 1961 CEPT conference, demonstrated. Any interference by external social or political actors, even from the Parliament itself, was immediately rejected. Of course, designers themselves were just suppliers without any voice of their own.

In this sense, the changes in stamp policies and design during the sixties had repercussions not only in matters of style, but also regarding the depictions and messages about the nation in UK stamps. Both the 1964 Shakespeare stamps (honouring a cultural icon) and the Forth Road Bridge issued the same year, presented evidence of change. However, the real attack on the top-down, closed scheme regarding stamp topic selection and design, came after a change in the ruling elite (the Labour government of Harold Wilson) and particularly, the appointment in October 1964 as PMG of someone with such a republican agenda as Tony Benn.

Therefore, the series issued in 1965 and 1966, such as those for Churchill, Burns, and the Battle of Britain, as well as many others, became not just philatelic novelties but also scenarios

for heated debate between political actors, governmental institutions, and social sectors. What kinds of messages should be presented in stamps? If a royal portrait is not enough to signify the whole of the UK, then which symbols and faces of the national community should be presented on stamps? Or, to put it in terms of this research: What official national imaginary should be presented in UK stamps? What messages, besides those related to the royal authority, should be promoted as vehicles for the internal identification, constitutive identity, and external differentiation of UK as a nation-state?

The answer to such a question implied different areas of debate regarding political symbolism and meanings in stamps. The first one was the most basic, and yet the most important one: the identification of the nation *per se*. What exactly should be used to both 'denote' and 'stand for' the United Kingdom? Should it be the portrait of the King or Queen, therefore embodying the whole nation in a single, identifiable person? Or should a royal symbol be used instead, like a coat of arms or a crown, therefore linking the nation to a dynasty or to a monarchical system in general? Or could a formal country name be adopted for stamps, a given abbreviation, or even just a collective signifier like a flag, that could make reference to the national community as a whole, and not just to a specific social strata (e.g. royalty) within it?

In this case, the winner was clear: the UK would be (and still is) represented by the sovereign, and not only because of the strong political and cultural traditions that interfered with reformist attempts such as Benn's, but also because of the particular features of the UK's political history: if a given name cannot be used (for whatever reason), and even the Crown or the Coat of Arms are subjected to controversy regarding which sectors or populations within the Islands they represent, then a face (or silhouette) is the only symbol of authority that can be accepted as standing for everyone – except, of course, anti-monarchists. In this sense, the efforts of a small part of the ruling elite were blocked no only by it adversaries, but even by its own party and government: most members of the Labour party were well aware of the importance of the Monarchy as a symbol of political unity in the Islands.

A second area of debate regarding stamp depictions in the new UK stamp series, was about the specific persons that should be presented and honoured in stamps as collective heroes. In some sense, the obsessive caution, and even fear, shown by the postal authorities prior to Tony Benn was justified: once a single person other than the Sovereign was admitted onto a stamp, then every other prominent member of the nation could potentially follow, and so the postal authorities would have to make choices between those entitled to this honour, and those who not so entitled. This decision is inherently political, and it is also shaped by considerations

regarding who should represent and/or 'belong' to the nation, and who should not – certainly Shakespeare, even the Danish Prince Hamlet, but not Othello, for instance.

A third area of debate was about what topics and events of the collective past should be remembered. Before the sixties, this was not a preoccupation for the postal authorities in the UK since only current events could be celebrated, or those anniversaries related to the postal service itself (a quite apolitical theme) or to the royalty, a topic on which few persons would dare to disagree. In this sense, the stamps issued for the Battle of Britain were certainly pioneers in British postal history as the first ones to celebrate a topic different from these. However, it was not just "something", but an extraordinary event of a truly *collective (national) nature.* No doubt, many inhabitants of the Islands would celebrate a Jubilee or Coronation with genuine joy, and this celebration (and its corresponding stamps) would make them feel 'connected' as Britons. Yet, the events of the Second World War, and the Battle of Britain in particular, are collective experiences of a different kind, appealing to a community in terms of a shared identity, common historical development, and common suffering.

To sum up: during the sixties, the representation of the UK in stamps changed from the almost exclusive representation of a particular Sovereign (therefore rendering all the rest nothing but subjects) to the representation of a national community. Such a change was made possible by a combination of factors.

The first was a change in the political elite. The arrival of the Labour party to power allowed for a revision of long-standing policies on collective identity, history, and symbols. Second, and related, was the arrival of a PMG with a strong ideological background, eager to introduce reforms to his organization, and to regain the control on some areas, including stamp design, which until then were dominated by very conservative bodies like the SAC.

Third, there were continuing external pressures by both political actors and social sectors for a more open "view" of messages in stamps. These were presented by those sectors that, for instance, considered that the most prominent figures (whether as old as Shakespeare or as recent as Churchill) should be also recognized in stamps regardless of their social/hierarchical status; or those groups that reclaimed the commemoration of not just royal, but truly collective (that is, *national*) feats like the Battle of Britain; or finally, those that wanted to expand the representation of the nation and its members beyond faces, to include places, things, and cultural expressions.

The complex political processes involved in the selection of both stamp topics and individual designs, support my claim that stamps have been used to promote a specific nation-building doctrine pursued by the ruling political elites, that such messages will change according to the hierarchical, organizational or ideological transformations of such elites, and that external actors (elites in opposition, local/regional representatives, social and pressure groups…) will try to influence the messages in stamps, in order introduce topics, events and persons into the official national imaginary as promoted via stamps. In this sense, both my hypotheses H1 and H2 and the corresponding sub-hypotheses (see Ch. I) have been confirmed.

CHAPTER VII: REAL MEXICANS ON THE POST:

NATIONAL IMAGINARIES IN THE STAMPS OF MEXICO

In this chapter, I will present a study of the postage stamps issued by Mexico as a means for the promotion of an official national imaginary.[111] The chapter is divided into two parts. The first is a brief background on the development of the postal system in Mexico, and of postage stamps in particular. The second part will deal with how messages and depictions in postage stamps have promoted an official imaginary regarding 'Mexico' and 'the Mexicans', particularly after the Mexican Revolution (1910). This will test my hypotheses h1a and H2 (see Ch. I). As this is a very long time span, I will focus on stamps issued for official festivities of the Mexican independence, in multiples of 25, starting with the 1910 Centennial (the first commemorative issue concerning the topic) and then followed by those held in 1935 (125th anniversary) 1960 (150th) and 1984 (175th), ending with the 2010 Bicentennial.

For each case, I will first describe the organizational transformations of the Mexican postal authority. I will do so in order to determine the degree of involvement of the postal authority in spreading nationalist imaginaries; for instance, whether it had an implicit goal, an institutional agenda, or even an explicit mandate to present "Mexico and the Mexicans" in some way; or limits or criteria with which the Mexican postal authority had to comply, and who defined such limits. Second, I will analyse the commemorative stamps issued for the aforementioned Independence anniversaries. As stated above, I chose these periods because of their commemorations; however, they are also convenient because each represents a very contrasting political regime. Third, I will also study the ordinary series that were circulating at the same periods in order to study how those same national imaginaries were represented in the "normal" postage stamps, the ones more likely to be used (and seen) by the citizens for everyday postage services, and during an extended period of time. In this way, for each period studied, I will focus my attention on:

13. How independence was celebrated in stamps: which slogans, historical narratives, political meanings and symbols were used on them, and which ideologies were represented, therefore looking at messages that would fall into the "historical

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[111] Some arguments and findings in this chapter were presented in Hoyo (2012) and (2014).

development", "political regime" and "national symbols" categories of the typology presented in Ch. 5.

14. How "the Mexicans" and "the Mexican nation" were depicted in the most common and most commonly used types of stamps (e.g. ordinary series): particularly, which ethnic affiliations can be identified on such depictions, and what cultural manifestations are represented.

The postage stamps issued to mark the 2010 Mexican Bicentennial will be an object of particular attention. This is because, on the one hand, the relevance of the event (as with any bicentennial) gave the stamps a unique political importance; and, on the other hand, because the availability of sources, including interviews with the persons involved in the design and issuing of Bicentennial stamps, enabled me to engage in a much more detailed study. Finally, I will also briefly mention of other cases, which during the research were found as being very relevant to test my hypotheses. For example, the government of Pres. José López Portillo (1976-1982) was especially fond of using nationalist/populist discourses and symbolism to justify political decisions.

A word about Mexicans

The studies on Mexican nationalism have been dominated by anthropology, history, and sociology. Many of them focus in the events and political developments of the early 19th century: for instance, the creation of local identities during colonial times and/or the autonomist or (proto)nationalist movements of (e.g. Brading 1983, 1991; Lafaye 1987; Villoro 1977).[112] In turn, the literature about Mexican nationalism after the 1910 Revolution is quite extensive and covers several aspects. Yet three of them stand out: the ethnic composition of the nation, its cultural identity, and the official nationalist doctrines and policies.

The relation between Mexican nationalism and indigenous populations has been one of the most common topics in the literature, especially among anthropologists and historians (see for instance Bonfil Batalla 1987; Florescano 1997). These have underlined how indigenous peoples had played an essential role in the official nationalist discourse and official mythology, while in reality, they are living at the margins the modern Mexican nation, in socio-political,

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[112] Following the work of Miroslav Hroch (Hroch 1985, 1993) I have briefly studied elsewhere some characteristics of the early patriotic movements in the 19th century New Spain / Mexico (see Hoyo 2010b) as well as the different versions implied regarding the nature of the 'Mexican nation'.

cultural and economic terms. A closely related literature is that about *indigenismo*: the set of official policies implemented after the Revolution, aiming at the 'development' and 'integration' of those indigenous communities into modern Mexico – in fact, at their disappearance as separate communities, through miscegenation and acculturation (Brading 1989; Bonfil Batalla 1987, 161-186; Dawson 2004; Gutiérrez 1999).

Such ethno-cultural mixing of populations (*mestizaje*) is at the core of post-revolutionary nationalism. The *mestizo*, as the modern descendant of both Spaniard and Indigenous communities, is identified not only as an historical result, or as the 'typical' Mexican of today, but as an ethno-cultural *goal* for the post-revolutionary state. That is: in the discourse, the indigenous past is asserted as the historical basis of the Mexican nation (and sometimes presented in almost mythical terms); nevertheless, *mestizaje* is seen as the current nature as well as the desirable future for Mexico (e.g. Bartra 1987; Basave 2002; Tenorio-Trillo 1996b, 2009a; Lomnitz-Adler 1995, 1999; Miller 2004; Miller 1999).

The official sanction of *mestizaje* as the ethnic basis of the modern Mexican nation, implied the search for its corresponding 'true' cultural and artistic expressions. This topic has attracted wide scholarly attention; well-known cases are the works of the painters of the 'muralista' movement (e.g. D. Rivera, J. C. Orozco, D. A. Siqueiros), of intense nationalist and ideological nature, as well as the promotion of the *charro* culture through both music and cinema. Yet in fact, the search for – or invention of – a common Mexican cultural identity had repercussions on almost every artistic genre (see e.g. Béjar and Rosales 2008; Noriega Elio 1986; UNAM 1986; Vaughan and Lewis 2006; also Alonso 2004).

The abovementioned ethnic and cultural policies have been a central part of the *Nacionalismo Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalism) doctrine – which otherwise is a rather ill-defined concept. It alludes to a set of strategies and policies followed by the post-revolutionary regimes, aiming on the one hand to 'modernize' and to provide an unifying identity for the Mexican nation, while on the other hand, creating institutions for the new State and consolidating the power of the ruling party (Bartra 1989, 199; 1987; Tenorio-Trillo 1995; Turner 1971). Some authors see the 1934-1940 regime of Pres. Lázaro Cárdenas, with its left-wing policies and discourses, as the apex of Revolutionary Nationalism (e.g. Meyer 2010; see also Segovia 1968).

Despite the vagueness of the concept, some core ideological elements of revolutionary nationalism, such as its emphasis on *mestizaje*, were incorporated into both public education and cultural policies during the whole period of the PRI-led regime (Rabiela 1987; Segovia 1977;

Vázquez 1975; Florescano 2002). It must be said that in general terms, these policies were very successful in creating an overarching, shared national identity – or, to use my terms, an official national imaginary.

The radical change in the ruling political elites of Mexico during the 80s, when the older generation was replaced with a younger elite of neo-liberal tendencies, implied a profound revision of the Revolutionary Nationalism doctrine (Bartra 1989; Klesner 2006; Mabire 1999, 1994; Vizcaíno 2002, 2004; O'Toole 2010). Particularly relevant was the change in the relations between Mexico and the United States, which would eventually lead to the North American Free Trade Agreement (Aguayo 1998; Meyer 2006; Meyer and Vázquez 1994; see also Tenorio-Trillo 2009b).

Finally, since at least the 2000s a series of works influenced by multiculturalism theories have analysed the modern Mexican society (see for instance De La Peña 2006; Stavenhagen 2000). Yet, it is true that when compared with anthropological, historical, or sociological studies, those based in political science (whether qualitative or quantitative ones) or political sociology are rather few (Gutiérrez 1999; Mabire 1999, 1994; Morris 1999; Vizcaíno 2002; 2004, among others).

A word about sources

The two main sources for the study of Mexican case were, on the one hand, internal documents (operational handbooks, memos and instructions, reports…) provided by the postal authorities, or found in the Library of the main Postal Administration of Mexico ('Postal Palace'). Further very valuable and detailed information was obtained there through interviews and electronic communications with public officers and designers in charge of stamp design. Such information was especially helpful for the latest policies and stamp issues, such as those of the Bicentennial. Regarding stamps *per se*, and to keep methodological coherence, the main source for stamp images and philatelic information in this chapter was, once more, Scott's Catalogue (2010), but complemented with the specialized catalogues for Mexico by Fernandez Terán (1997) and Esteva (1984), as well as the WNS online stamp catalogue (World Association for the Development of Philately and Universal Postal Union 2011b).

The contested origins of the Mexican postal service

Depending on the point of view, and the nationalist narrative used, the Mexican Postal System has been seen as a relatively new development, or one having a very long history. For instance, it has been very common, both in academic literature (i.e. Carrera Stampa 1970; Gojman de Backal 2000), and in the official discourse (i.e. Correos de México 2010b, 2010a; SCOP [1952]), to claim that the first 'Mexican' postal systems existed well before the Spanish conquest, namely, the foot messenger system (*Paynani*) of the Aztec empire.

Despite being devoted to military, administrative and diplomatic issues only, the *Paynani* system indeed had many of the characteristics of modern couriers. It was fully institutionalized, covering the whole territory of the Empire by means of a dense network of roads, and using fixed posts and relays that worked around the clock; furthermore, its members were fully professionalized and enjoyed official protection. Taking into account the fact that the native populations knew neither horses nor wheels, the *Paynani* system was remarkably efficient: for example, messages sent from the Atlantic were able to travel 380 km (and climb 2,200 m) to reach the Aztec capital of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in just 24 hours (Carrera Stampa 1970, 13-17; Alcázar 1920).

To name the *Paynani* as the first 'Mexican' courier/mail system has, of course, ideological connotations. Such a discourse is related to a perspective (both academic and political) that traces the origins of modern Mexico to its pre-Hispanic civilizations. In contrast, another narrative dealing with the development of the Mexican mail system is couched in much more modern terms, particularly by associating it with the Hispanic conquest of the Aztec empire (1521), and the ensuing establishment of the Viceroyalty of New Spain.[113] This contesting vision has not been very popular in the academic world (and even less in the political discourse), yet I found it in some recent official documents. According to this view, 1579 is the real foundational moment for the Mexican post, when Mr. Martin de Olivares was appointed to the post equivalent

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[113] The first Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, was appointed in 1535. The Viceroyalty of New Spain included the territories of what nowadays is Mexico, plus (at least *de jure*) large territories up to the north and south, as well as some administrative sub-divisions, named *Capitanías Generales* (General Captaincies) spread around Central America, the Caribbean and even across the Atlantic (the Philippines). In geographical terms, the continental Viceroyalty was a roughly rhomboid shape with tips in the southern coast of Alaska (North), Costa Rica (South), U.S. California (West), and Florida (East) Certainly, such a vast territory was extremely difficult to control in the 18th century. Several zones of it belonged to Viceroyalty only in theory, as they were either uncharted, dominated by still unconquered indigenous populations, almost unpopulated, or known only through isolated expeditions – as it was the case of the foundation of the city of Valdez in Alaska (1790). Finally, other zones such as the *Capitanías Generales* were much more populated and yet, they were so remote and/or inaccessible due natural causes (jungles, deserts, oceans) that in the facts they functioned as independent units.
Some years after the independence, the First Mexican Empire was 'reduced' to include, in contemporary terms and at least *de jure*, Mexico as well as the US. West Coast, Texas, Louisiana, and some portions in between those states: still a very large territory even in the time of empires.

to Postmaster General of the colony.[114] The next year, a formal courier system was established, by means of individual concessions granted by the colonial authorities. Before that, and always following this vision, there were no "real" mail systems, and even the idea of mail did not exist. Instead (and this is a rather curious argument) there were merely "messengers" that did not transmit "messages" (?) but simply had "a ceremonial and religious role" in "proclaiming" news about war and diplomacy – as if the act of proclaiming news would not, in fact, transmit a message (see for instance SEPOMEX 2006, 7; Correos de México 2009, 6).

In this sense, the narrative about the origins of the postal system already demonstrates some ideological interpretations and debates regarding the historical and ethno-cultural origins of the modern 'Mexican nation'. Yet for our research, it is enough to notice that the *Paynani* system disappeared with the Hispanic conquest, and that the colonial authorities only established a messenger system more than half a century later. Then, by 1765, post activities became a Crown monopoly (*Renta de Correos*), which served both official and private customers. Such control over communications was not restricted to the local level; in fact, the Crown also exerted a tight control over maritime communications between the Spanish metropolis and its colonies, as well as those with other states (see for instance Carrera Stampa 1970; Alcázar 1920, 113-118; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987; Gojman de Backal 2000).

Post-independence mails

Mexico achieved its independence from Spain on September 27th 1821. The *Renta de Correos* was initially incorporated into the Department of Internal and External Affairs, at the Ministry of State. Then, in 1824, the mail services were taken up by the Ministry of Finances (*Ministerio de Hacienda*) by means of the creation of the *Administración General de Correos* (General Administration of Posts, GAP) (Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 109-110; Carrera Stampa 1970, 41-43; Gojman de Backal 2000). In the following years, this organization would experience a number of organizational and denominational changes, caused in many cases by the very unstable political environment of 19th century Mexico (see Escalante Gonzalbo 1992, 1998).

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[114] This title is a proxy, of course. The original was *Correo Mayor de Hostas y Postas de Nueva España*", which is of difficult translation but that in very rough terms, means "Main Courier Officer for Messages and Quarters of the New Spain" (SEPOMEX 2006). In any case, such date is not correct, as Mr. de Olivares' appointment was made in 1580 (see Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 43).

During most of the period mentioned, the postal services were considered not as a public service, but rather a revenue source for the Mexican government, and a vehicle for official communications. Such a treatment impacted negatively on the efficiency or modernization of the service, and did little to promote its use beyond the highest social strata and the larger cities of the Republic (see Carrera Stampa 1970, 41-50). In fact, the total number of postal workers in 1854 was just 585 for the whole country (Carrera Stampa 1970, 43; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 291).

It was only in 1856 that President Comonfort decreed the first integral reform of the Mexican post services, introducing a system based upon Mr. Rowland Hill's model. Therefore, fixed postal rates were set, according to distances and weights; the pre-payment of services was introduced,[115] and the first postage stamps of Mexico were issued (Carrera Stampa 1970, 207-210; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 117-119).

The need for such reform was defended, not only in terms of the administrative needs of the service, but also according to ideological considerations. This was clearly summarized by the then-Postmaster General (PMG), the noted liberal politician Mr. Valentín Gómez Farías, who claimed that the postal system should not be merely a "rent", but rather an "agent of civilization" and a means for "social prosperity" that should be available everywhere and to everyone in the country, even if that implied high expenses on behalf of the state (Gomez Farías, quoted on Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 118-119).

It seems this was not merely an impassionate discourse. The profiles of the PMGs themselves reveal the real concerns about the need for an efficient postal system that could link all the national territory and its citizens: as an example, by 1856, Mr. Gómez Farías had already served as Vice President of the Republic once, as interim President on five occasions, and had a very long congressional career.[116] His successor as PMG (in 1857) was another high-profile personality: the poet, journalist, historian and congressman Guillermo Prieto (see Cárdenas de la Peña 1987).

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[115] The first decree (21 Feb. 1856) set compulsory pre-payment only for the items of highest value, leaving it optional for low-value items. Yet this did not work well in practice so the second decree (15 Dec. 1856) ordered the pre-payment of all posts. (Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 118; Carrera Stampa 1970, 208-209)

[116] The following year, Mr. Gómez Farías would be elected as Speaker of the Congress that presented the new, 1857 Constitution.

The first Mexican stamps: "Hidalgos"

The first Mexican postage stamps were designed and printed in a dedicated section in the GAP. They presented a portrait of the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1785-1811) in five different values and colors, still showing the old-style spelling of the country as *Méjico* (see Ill. 64) (Carrera Stampa 1970; Esteva 1984, 10; Fernández Terán en Martínez Rodríguez et al. 2000, 157). Hidalgo was a rather natural option, since the official discourse in Mexico has traditionally regarded him as the *Padre de la Patria* (literally 'Fatherland's Father', in the sense of 'Father of the Nation').

Ill. 64 – First Mexican postage stamp [Scott 1]

Hidalgo was a priest of a small town of Dolores, north of Mexico City, and an ethnic *criollo* –that is, an individual of Spanish ethnic ancestry born in the colonies. Within the highly stratified socio-political structure of the Spanish colonies (the *casta* system) the *peninsulares* (Spaniards from the mainland) were at the peak of the hierarchy, while *criollos* occupied a middle position between them and the rest of the population, including *indios* (indigenous peoples) as well as a number of castes such as *mestizos* (persons of mixed Spanish-Indigenous ancestry) *mulatos* (mixed Spanish and African) and many others. Most *criollos* only had access to secondary or provincial posts in the administration (both public and private), the army, and the church. Because of this, *criollos* also had a long history of claims for, on the one hand, more administrative autonomy vis-à-vis the metropolitan authorities in Spain and, on the other hand, increased influence and recognition within the social and political ranks of the colony itself (see for instance Florescano 1997; Florescano and Menegus 2000; Knight 2002; Villoro 1977, 2000).

As *criollo* claims were subjected to persecution by the colonial authorities, many groups operated clandestinely, being known as "conspiracies" *(conspiraciones).* They became particularly active in the colonies after the 1807-1808 occupation of mainland Spain by the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the subsequent, forced abdication of both Charles IV and Ferdinand VII in favour of Napoleon's brother Joseph, who became Joseph the 1st of Spain (June 1808) (Guedea 2000; Lynch 1989). The resistance to the new regime led to the Peninsular war (1808-1814) in mainland Spain. In the colonies, many groups refused to recognize the authority of Joseph the 1st, therefore causing a legitimacy crisis for the colonial authorities that, as Viceroyalties, were still representing the Spanish Crown. This offered an excellent opportunity for *criollos* to advance their own claims.

Hidalgo was the head of one of these *conspiraciones,* based in the city of Querétaro, north of Mexico City. There are still debates about the goals of Hidalgo's group: for example, whether they were planning a general uprising against the authorities in Mexico City, or just a *coup d' etat*. Also a matter of debate is whether the real goal of the group was independence, or not; whether Hidalgo was the authentic leader of the group, etc. (see for instance the essays compiled in Terán and Páez 2004). However, the fact is that after the *conspiración* was betrayed by one of its members (José Mariano Galván, incidentally a postal employee) Hidalgo made a call, from the atrium of his own parish, for popular insurrection against the central authorities on the morning of September 16th, 1810 – an episode known as the *Grito de Dolores* (Cry of Dolores). In the official narrative, this is the foundational moment of modern Mexico, and it is celebrated every year by the President in office.

The Hidalgo-lead revolt grew at a spectacular pace, and became a very successful military campaign that repeatedly defeated the royalist armies. Hidalgo was practically at the gates of Mexico City, when he suddenly ordered the withdrawal of the army, without giving any clear reason. After that, his movement entered into a rapid decomposition. Hidalgo and most of the leaders of the *conspiración* were finally captured in March 1811, and executed shortly after. Hidalgo's movement was therefore a rather brief episode.

As a matter of fact, the independence of Mexico would take ten more years to be accomplished, and only thanks to the alliance of two very contrasting, almost completely opposite leaders. The first was Vicente Guerrero, commander of the only remaining insurgent force at the time, based in the southern mountains of the colony, which had a much more structured ideology, organization and a clear goal for independence than the early Hidalgo movement as well as a much more pronounced *mestizo* and *casta* representation among its leadership – starting with Guerrero himself.[117] The second was Agustín de Iturbide, a *criollo* from Mexico City and high-rank officer of the royalist army, who had actually been put in charge of locating and destroying Guerrero's militia by the Viceroy himself. After unsuccessfully chasing him, he struck a deal with Guerrero.

Both leaders agreed to unite their armies[118] and pursue the goal of achieving full independence: after all, Iturbide was also a *criollo* seeking more power for his group vis-à-vis the Spanish-born authorities. The unified army entered Mexico City on the 27th of September,

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[117] In turn, Guerrero's militia was the offspring of an earlier insurgent movement, commanded by the priest José María Morelos y Pavón (a *mestizo*) who was the first to call for a Constitutive Congress and to set independence as the clear goal.

[118] The event is known as the *Abrazo de Acatempan* (Acatempan embrace) for the place it was held.

1821. Nine months later, Iturbide would become the first head of state of Mexico (the then Mexican Empire) as Agustín the 1st.

Therefore, more than a "father of the nation", it would be far more accurate to name Hidalgo as the person who founded, coordinated and launched a movement that would eventually lead to the independence of Mexico, this by groups and leaders with quite different ideologies and political objectives than him. In this sense, the parenthood of the nation could be better allocated to those who actually accomplished independence in 1821. However, this interpretation is certainly not favoured in the official history of Mexico, so Hidalgo is still regarded simply as the main figure in the independence of the country – even if it is not very clear that he ever wanted it.

Not surprisingly, Hidalgo is prominent in Mexican stamps. He was the only person (the only motif, in fact) in the stamps issued by the Mexican Republic for almost a quarter of a century (1856 to 1879), to the point that the stamps from this time are collectively known as "Hidalgos" by philatelists (see Ill. 65, left). In turn, the competing but short-lived Second Mexican Empire (1864-1867), which was established after a French-led invasion with Maximilian I of Hapsburg as Emperor, issued its own postage stamps as well (Carrera Stampa 1970, 213-220; Fernández Terán 1997, 7-15; Gojman de Backal 2000, 79-88). These presented depictions that were typical of the stamps of almost any 19th century monarchical state: either a coat of arms, or a portrait of the sovereign (see Ill. 65, right).

Interestingly enough, the first time that the national symbol of Mexico (an eagle standing on a cactus, eating a serpent) was presented on a stamp, it was on one issued by the Habsburg Empire, not by the Republic. Such stamps were also the first to present the name of the country as "México", with an "x" instead of the "j" used in the stamps of the Republic. In this sense, the Imperial stamps can be interpreted as a part of an effort to legitimize the regime, presenting it as based in deep historical roots (even pre-Hispanic ones), in contrast to the constant references to the *criollo* character of Hidalgo, that, so far, had been presented in all Republican stamps.[119] Eventually, the Second Mexican Empire would be defeated by the Republican forces; the Emperor Maximilian was captured in Queretaro, put on trial, and executed by a firing squad in June 1867.[120]

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[119] See (Hoyo 2014).

[120] The Second Mexican Empire was initially supported by most of the anti-liberal, conservative and/or Catholic sectors of the Mexican society, including the Catholic hierarchy. The combined imperial forces included a large French contingent, some foreign battalions including Austro-Hungarians and Belgians, as well as a large Mexican army. However, the guerilla-like warfare adopted by the Republican forces commanded by President Benito Juárez

**Ill. 65 – Left: More Hidalgo stamps [Scott 14, 106].
Right: Mexican Empire stamp [Scott 27]**

Certainly, the continuous political instability, internal revolts and international wars that characterized 19th century Mexico posed great difficulties for the precarious national mail system, and the design and issue of new postage stamps was affected by shortages of both funds and materials (Carrera Stampa 1970, 221-233). Hence, stamp series production was quite limited. In 1863, mail services became dependent upon the Ministry of State and Foreign Affairs (Carrera Stampa 1970, 44-45), therefore increasing State control over written communications.[121] However, a real development of the mail system in Mexico would only start years later.

The Porfiriato: introducing 'Mexico' and 'the Mexicans' to the world

In 1876, Gen. Porfirio Díaz was elected President, marking the beginning of a long period known as the *Porfiriato*. During this period (1876-1911) Díaz would be re-elected time and again, with just a four-year interruption.[122] In the official post-revolutionary discourse, the *Porfiriato* has been consistently presented as a personal dictatorship, sustained by an alliance between the army, local and foreign capitalists, and an elite of ideologues/politicians nicknamed as *científicos* (scientists), due to their allegiance to the liberal-bourgeoisie ideas of the time in both the economic and social realms.

However, a simple combination of army, capital fluxes and *laissez-fare* ideas cannot explain the long duration of the *Porfiriato* (almost 35 years), and even less so, the remarkable support it enjoyed for most of such period: after all, Díaz was re-elected on six occasions.

claimed a heavy toll. Furthermore, Maximilian's liberal policies quickly alienated most of his local supporters, particularly the Catholic Church. Then, the end of the War of Secession in the US forced Napoleon III to withdraw his forces, therefore leaving Maximilian alone, who refused to leave Mexico.

[121] This can be seen as an indicator of the increasing awareness by political elites, about the strategic importance of mail and courier services in linking the different parts of such a vast country. It can also indicate the desire to control the circulation of news and ideas through such system.

[122] In 1880-84, Mr. Manuel González was elected President. However, he was a very close friend and political ally of Díaz, so his administration is still considered as an integral part of the *Porfiriato*.

Instead, the *Porfiriato* should be seen as a highly complex regime that, unquestionably, favoured the concentration of power in a small elite closely controlled by Díaz; that combined authoritarianism with tolerance of, and even a limited promotion of, republican institutions and democratic practices at both federal and local levels; and that in its discourse, combined liberalism with a very clear nationalistic approach regarding both internal policies and international relations.

A further characteristic of the *Porfiriato,* which is recognized even by its post-revolutionary critics, was the vigorous and sustained impulse given to the economic development, modernization and industrialization of Mexico. This was achieved by means of large public works, the promotion of private investment in commercial, agricultural and industrial ventures, and tight social control. Such developmental emphasis also reached the communications and transport infrastructure; in fact, both were regarded as some of the most strategic areas of this agenda.

Díaz and the consolidation of the posts

The modernization of the Mexican post had a special importance in the development agenda during the *Porfiriato*. The geographical expansion of the mail system, its technological modernization and its administrative reorganization were regarded as big priorities, which were undertaken from the very beginning of the Díaz regime: for instance, the number of post offices grow from 866 in 1876, to almost three thousand in 1908 (Carrera Stampa 1970, 49,58; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 175; see also Martínez Rodríguez et al. 2000, 41).

Apart from the territorial expansion of the system, the most important decisions were probably taken regarding the postal organization itself. As early as January 1st 1879, Mexico became a member of the UPU, thereby adopting the international standards and norms regarding postal services. Then, the structure, administration and procedures of the postal system were greatly enhanced in 1884 by the introduction of the first Postal Code (*Código Postal*), which was followed by a second one in 1895.[123] (Carrera Stampa 1970, 51-53; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 161-163).

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[123] It should be clear that "Postal Code" is not just a synonym for the ZIP code – namely, the string of alphanumeric characters used to designate certain geographical zones. The early Postal Codes were <u>real</u> codes: that is, lengthy works (sometimes encompassing several volumes) where all the norms, specifications, procedures, requisites, structures, etc. of the whole postal organization, its products and its services, were set out in detail. Then, such 'codes' were distributed to all postal offices, as a means for the standardization of the whole system. The delimitation of postal zones, and their code-naming, was a part of the Postal Code, but certainly not the most important one.

In 1891, the postal service was transferred to the new Ministry of Communications and Public Works [SCOP] [124] (Correos de México 2009; Carrera Stampa 1970). In July 1901 the General Directorate of Posts (*Dirección General de Correos*, DGC) was created as a division within SCOP (see Carrera Stampa 1970, 53-59 for details; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987). DGC included a special sub-division dedicated to postage stamps: the Stocks and Postage Stamps Section [*Sección de Almacén y Timbres Postales*, SATP].[125] Up to that moment, stamp design and printing activities had been secondary activities, distributed amongst different branches of the postal administration.

The new SATP undertook all activities regarding stamps, as well as their distribution to local post offices. Yet, it did not directly print stamps; instead, it was in charge of (in modern terms) outsourcing them, sometimes to specialized foreign companies like Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co. Ltd. of London (Carrera Stampa 1970, 56-57; Esteva 1984). Later, the Ministry of Finances, which was also in charge of designing banknotes, would assume responsibility for printing stamps (see for instance SCOP 1953, 41).[126]

Ill. 66 – The Postal Palace in stamps.
Left: exterior in a 1915 stamp [Scott 665].
Right: Interior in a 2007 stamp [WNS 024.07]

The transformations of the postal system promoted during the *Porfiriato* gave the service a more technical and specialized character than ever before. They also enabled its territorial and organizational expansion, its technological development, and its public visibility. In fact, the final criterion (public visibility) was an explicit objective in the reform of the postal system: society should be made aware of the mail and its significance. In 1907 Díaz personally inaugurated the new DGC offices: the so-called Postal Palace *(Palacio Postal),* which even today is regarded as one of the most magnificent buildings in Mexico City (see Martínez Rodríguez et al. 2000; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 195-200; also Correos de México 2010c). Such

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[124] SCOP is the predecessor of the contemporary Ministry of Communications and Transports (*Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes,* SCT).

[125] SATP was preceded by a similar section, the Editors' and Postage Stamps Section (*Sección de Editores y de Timbres Postales*), but the difference is not as important.

[126] The outsourcing of stamps to such companies is not new at all. In fact, it was the rule for almost all nations during most of the 19th and early 20th century, as the processes could be quite elaborate and specialized. Even today, it is very common that the stamps of many countries are legitimately printed in London. However, this does not mean that they are *designed* there. I have been informed of some cases were the same printing company also designed the stamps, so the contracting country had a very limited role. However, it seems that this applies almost exclusively to stamps made for the philatelic market ("collectors-only" stamps) and not to the ones under study.

an outstanding construction, and the extraordinary efforts made for it,[127] are the best indicators of the great importance that the Díaz' regime gave to the development of a modern postal system.

The stamps of the *Porfiriato*: first glimpses at the nation

The organizational and political changes before and during Díaz' regime had evident effects on the iconography and messages of Mexican postage stamps. As mentioned, Hidalgo was the only

Ill. 67 – "Juárez" stamp [Scott 128]

motif presented since 1865 in the stamps of the Republic. It was only in 1879 that a new depiction, that of former Pres. Juárez, appeared on Mexican stamps (see Ill. 67). This ordinary series lasted three years, being issued with 11 face values (see Scott Publishing 2010).

Quite interestingly, these 'Juárez' series were initially issued for *international* services only*,* while the old 'Hidalgo' stamps were kept for internal services (Carrera Stampa 1970, 227; Pulver 1992). The alleged reason for introducing this series in 1879 was the accession of Mexico to UPU in that same year, which, on the one hand, implied the harmonization with international standard rates (so new values had to be issued) and, on the other hand, a wholly new design in such stamps would facilitate postal handling, by allowing an easier differentiation between internal and international mail (Pulver 1992, 24-25).

However, there is no clear reason why a new *person* should be introduced on these new international stamps. After all, a new 'Hidalgo' design, or even a modification on the colour or size of the existing issues, would suffice for that. Instead, it seems that a new motif was devised for the audiences beyond Mexico; and it is quite significant that the person chosen for that was none other than Mr. Juárez, the Republican president who led the resistance against the French-led invasion of 1862, defeated the Second Mexican Empire in 1867, ordered the execution of Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg, *and* was a "pure" indigenous Mexican –a fact that the stamp makes quite evident.[128] It seems that the *Juárez* stamps were, indeed, designed to work as "paper ambassadors" (Altman 1991).

The *Porfiriato* was a period marked by active nationalist discourses and policies. Particularly, it represented an effort to integrate the indigenous past into a new official national

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[127] The Italian architect Amado Boari was hired both for this project and that of the adjacent Palace of Arts. The total cost of the Postal Palace was 2,921,009.94 Mexican pesos – an astronomical figure for the time, which included, for instance, the ironwork for the interiors being made in *Fondería Pignone* of Florence, Italy (See Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 195-200; Martínez Rodríguez et al. 2000, 56-65; also Correos de México 2010c).

[128] This, in stark contrast with later stamps, where Juárez gradually lost his ethnic features, to the point of looking almost Caucasian.

imaginary. One example of the latter was the highly-publicised 1887 unveiling of a monument to Cuauhtémoc (the last *Tlatoani* or head of the Aztec empire) in *Paseo de la Reforma*, one of the most symbolic avenues of Mexico City (see Earle 2005, 2007; Zárate Toscano 2003). Another, even clearer example was provided by the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition: the Mexican pavilion was an "Aztec Palace" that presented indigenous gods and pre-Hispanic pieces of art, mixed with reference to a prosperous, liberal, western-like country (see Tenorio-Trillo 1996b).

Therefore, it should not be surprising that the same kind of messages quickly found their way onto postage stamps. A very interesting 1895 piece, presenting the aforementioned Cuauhtémoc monument on top of an Aztec-like construction, became the first stamp to make an unequivocal reference to the *pre-Hispanic* world (see Ill. 68, right). What is more, such a stamp was part of a series issued officially dedicated to "mail transport in Mexico". The other four stamps had depictions precisely about this area, for instance: 1) a foot

**Ill. 68 –*Mail transport* series, selected stamps.
Left to right:
Foot messenger [Scott 244];
mounted courier [249];
Cuauhtémoc, first indigenous in a stamp [247].**

messenger, 2) a mounted courier with a mule carrying mail sacks, 3) a mail coach and 4) a train and a ship. The logical connection of Cuauhtémoc with these is not clear, unless we think in terms of making a political statement with them or, at least, to present one monument or symbol that "should be remembered" along with symbols of modernity, such as the steam train.

Besides the two mentioned above, further ordinary series issued during the *Porfiriato* included two of the "minimalist" kind (issued 1882-1883 and 1886-95). The old Hidalgo designs were kept until 1881, and a single new series was devoted to him in 1884-85. Finally, a further 1899-1903 ordinary series presented the coat of arms of the Republic, together with some landmarks including the Cathedral in Mexico City and the *Popocatépetl* volcano.

The Centennial stamps

The 1910 Centennial celebrations in Mexico were splendid, attracting large crowds and including a number of public activities. They were seen as a unique opportunity for President Díaz' regime to reinforce the populations' loyalty, promote national pride, and show the results of its modernisation efforts, both to internal as well as international audiences (see Tenorio-Trillo 1996a). Postage stamps were a very important part of the festivities. This is clear, not only from the aesthetic and technical quality of the stamps, but also from the fact that they were the first commemorative stamps (of any kind) issued by Mexico.

The so-called "Independence issue" comprised eleven individual stamps, each with different designs and values –a very large number for the time (see Ill. 69). Perhaps in a display of Latin gallantry, the first two stamps of the series were devoted to female heroes: (1) Josefa Ortíz de Domínguez and (2) Leona Vicario. They are frequently quoted in the official history as performing key roles as liaison between the members of the *Conspiración*, by providing information material support. The following six stamps in the series presented male figures: (3) Ignacio López Rayón, leader and ideologue; (4) Juan Aldama, army officer; (5) the inescapable Miguel Hidalgo; (6) Ignacio Allende, an army officer and second-in-command after Hidalgo; (7) the nowadays far-less known Epigmenio González, a civilian supporter of the rebellion; and (8) Mariano Abasolo, another army officer (see Ill. 69, upper row).

The final three stamps of the series, larger in size and with the highest denominations, depicted key moments from Hidalgo's movement: the *Grito de Dolores* (the initial call for rebellion against the colonial authorities, made by Hidalgo on September 16th, 1810), the *Monte de Las Cruces* battle, and the takeover of the *Alhóndiga de Granaditas,* a large storehouse in the city of Guanajuato (see Ill. 69, lower row).

Ill. 69 – The Centennial series
Top, left to right: *Criollo* Heroes. Bottom, left to right: episodes of the Hidalgo movement army
[Source: (Filatelia de México 2012)]

At first sight, this is a rather prototypical commemorative stamp series of the time. Yet, these stamps were not just presenting the heroes and key moments of the history of the (then) 100 year-old Mexico. In fact, the 1910 Centennial issue was in fact presenting only its first phase: the one starting with the Querétaro's *conspiración*, leading to the call to arms by Hidalgo, and then to the formation of his army. Chronologically, the series ends at the *Monte de las Cruces* battle (the peak of Hidalgo's military campaign), but does not present his downfall. However, what is more interesting is that it makes no allusion to the other insurgent groups that would lead the rebellion after Hidalgo's execution and finally achieve Mexican Independence in 1821.

In this way, all the heroes depicted on the stamps are *criollos*. Both indigenous and *casta* members of the movement are notoriously absent. Of course, we can argue that they can be detected (imagined?) on the stamps showing group scenes –mostly by means of their attires (see Ill. 69, lower row).[129] However, non-*criollo* Independence leaders such as José María Morelos or Vicente Guerrero, were not commemorated in the 1910 series. Both were *mestizos,* having probably some African ancestry as well (see CNOC-2010 2010a, 2010b) and both were at least as important as Hidalgo for Mexican Independence, if not more so. Yet, Morelos was absent from Mexican stamps until 1915, while Guerrero was absent until 1921 (see Fernández Terán 1997; Scott Publishing 2010).

In this sense, the Centennial stamps promoted a narrative of the Mexican Independence as linked to the *criollo* group of Queretaro and to Hidalgo's army. This is definitively a different narrative that that looking at the Independence as an uninterrupted, multi-class process starting with Hidalgo, continuing with Morelos and ending with Guerrero – an interpretation which is still at the core of the contemporary official national imaginary of Mexico (Vázquez 1975).

Posting the nation in *Don Porfirio* times*:* some conclusions

Some trends are identifiable when analysing stamps issued during the *Porfiriato,* as are some contradictions. A first trend concerns the more inclusive presentation of the Mexican nation, in ethno-cultural terms: indigenous peoples are represented for first time, and even honoured through the reference to emperor Cuauhtémoc. This is in line with the discourse of *Porfirismo* regarding indigenous populations and national identity (Earle 2005, 2007). Furthermore, and also for first time, "normal" Mexicans are presented in the 'mail transport' series. Even if the low

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[129] Also, the $5 stamp depicts a well-known episode where the popular hero "*Pípila",* allegedly a member of the *castas*, risks his life to burn the door of a building in the city of Guanajuato, allowing Hidalgo's army to end its siege (see (see Ill. 69, last stamp).

detail of the stamps do not allow us to determine their ethnic background, their attires clearly indicate that they are "common" Mexicans engaged in work-related activities.

A second trend is the "*des-humanization"* of depictions in stamps of the ordinary series. Even if the *Porfiriato* started by adding Juarez to Hidalgo , it then quickly turned to minimalist designs, one of which circulated for quite a long time (nine years). Then, the mentioned mail transport series presented anonymous figures, and the accent was put not on the person him- or herself, but on the activities they were carrying out –with the notable exception of Cuauhtémoc. Finally, the last series issued during the *Porfiriato*: the 'coat of arms' and 'landscapes', refer to Mexico in terms of symbols and/or places deprived of any human figure at all.

However, if such de-personalization and relative social inclusiveness applied to ordinary stamps, the Centennial commemorative series told a very different story. Not only were they heavily based on individual heroes, but they also included only *criollos,* completely ignoring the later movements and leaders that had far larger *mestizo* and *casta* components. Yet, this contradiction can, in fact, be an eloquent indicator of how the different ethnic groups were "fixed" in the official imaginary to particular moments in the national history: the indigenous are a glorious but distant past, to be remembered in monuments, and – just perhaps – are part of the agricultural and provincial landscapes. However, the creation of Mexico as a modern nation seems to be related to a *criollo* identity, with the single exception of Juárez who (very importantly) was not just an indigenous person, but an *educated* liberal indigenous person that, quite tellingly, was first presented in a stamp designed for the foreign eyes only.

Knowing Mexico through the post: national imaginaries in post-revolutionary stamps

In this section, I will present a comparative study of the stamps issued at different moments in the history of post-revolutionary Mexico, in order to detect how they reflect different national imaginaries. For each section, I will offer a short description of the political environment, a more detailed study of the institution(s) in charge of designing and/or issuing postage stamps, and a study of selected the stamps issued during the respective period.

Postal reorganization after the Revolution

The activities of the postal system were, of course, greatly disrupted by the Mexican revolution. Postage stamp design and issuing were particularly affected. Out of necessity, the different groups involved in the armed struggle continued using stamps from *Porfirismo*, just marking them with an overprint that indicated the respective faction. Furthermore, as they went out of

stock, some local governments and factions also issued their own provisional stamps, for local use only (Fernández Terán 1997).

The issuing of new stamp series by the central postal authority of Mexico restarted only in 1915, by orders of Pres. Venustiano Carranza. The first post-revolutionary official ordinary stamp series was launched, not by chance, on the 16th of September of that year – the anniversary of Hidalgo's *Grito de Dolores*. This series included, first, a stamp bearing the national Coat of Arms (Scott 500), and another with the statue of Cuauhtémoc (Scott 501), followed by four stamps honouring specific heroes (Scott 502-505): Gen. I. Zaragoza, commander of the army that defeated the French army in Puebla on May 5th 1862, Francisco I. Madero, the former President and leader of the revolt against Díaz, as well as stamps for both José Ma. Morelos and Benito Juárez.[130]

This early post-revolutionary series already presented a quite contrasting narrative to those of the *Porfiriato*. This was the first time for Zaragoza, Madero and Morelos to be honoured on stamps. Madero was a rather natural choice given the circumstances, and Juárez already had a stamp. In contrast, the selection of Zaragoza and Morelos shows an attempt to extend the cult of heroes via stamps (see Ill. 70). Hidalgo disappeared from postage stamps until 1950 with the single exception of a 1 cent postal tax stamp of 1941, which was of compulsory use for that year to support the restoration of the city of Dolores Hidalgo [Scott FT 1237].

Ill. 70- First Morelos stamp

Regarding organizational matters, the structure and internal organization of the Mexican postal authority remained without significant changes until Feb 1932, when DGC and the General Directorate of Telegraphs were fused into a single organization (DGTC) only to be separated again in 1942 (Carrera Stampa 1970, 217-218).

Nationalism with a socialist touch: 1934-40

After the Revolution, and starting from the late 1920's and early 1930's, the different presidential administrations became increasingly engaged in developing a unifying national identity, by means of the creation and promotion of an official version of the history and ethno-cultural features of the Mexican nation. Probably the main feature of this official national imaginary was the presentation of Mexicans as a *mixed nation.*

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[130] This series was completed with three further stamps: one depicting a map of Mexico, another the lighthouse of the Veracruz port, and the last the Post Office itself (Fernández Terán 1997, [657-662]; Scott Publishing 2010, [Scott 500-514]).

One of the main sources for such an ideology was the philosopher José Vasconcelos, who took the racial theories and categories typical of the early 20th century but, instead of promoting racial purity, made an explicit argument for racial *mixture*. In his 1925 book *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race, for a bilingual edition see Vasconcelos 1997 [1925]), he argued that Latin Americans were in fact a definite "race", produced by the fusion of the "White race" (Europeans, particularly Spaniards and Portuguese) and the "Indigenous race" (the natives) as well as by further influxes due to immigration of other "races" such as Africans. In Vasconcelos' view, such profound, lasting mixtures had created a "Bronze race" that inherited the best qualities of every single one of the former (Vasconcelos 1997 [1925]; see also Miller 2004).

In this way, it is argued that Mexicans are not only a nation of their own, but a nation defined by the very fact of ethno-cultural and racial mixture –therefore, modern Mexicans are inherently *mestizos.* As such mixture was a shared phenomenon of the former Hispanic and Portuguese colonies, then all the present *mestizo* nations were part of a larger community, namely the "Bronze race" (Vasconcelos 1997 [1925]; Miller 2004). The ideas of Vasconcelos were integrated into the core of the official national imaginary of the post-revolutionary regimes, and promoted both in the public discourse and also through concrete policies, especially during Vasconcelos' appointment as Rector of the National University (1920-21) and Minister of Public Education (1921-24). They also shaped the ideology of both contemporary and later members of political and intellectual elites of post-revolutionary Mexico (see for instance Alonso 2004; Basave 2002; Dawson 2004; Earle 2007; Gutiérrez 1999; Miller 1999; Miller 2004; Vázquez 1975).

Besides public instruction, Vasconcelos also supported the creation of monumental works of art in public spaces, the most salient of these being the products of the painters of the *muralista* movement – Diego Rivera, David A. Siqueiros, and J. C. Orozco among others. Such impulses towards nationalist, public art also expanded to many other to many other artistic and cultural fields (e.g. Béjar and Rosales 2008; Florescano 2005; Manrique 2000; Pérez Montfort 2000; Vázquez 1975). By the early 1930s, the Mexican post-revolutionary regime was also making intensive use of the media and communication technologies of the time, and cinema and radio in particular, as a means to create a unified Mexican national identity (see for instance De la Garza 2010; Hayes 2006; Herschfield 2006).

In this context of intense promotion of a new national imaginary, Gral. Lázaro Cardenas was elected as President in 1934. Shortly afterwards, he went into a political rupture with his political mentor, Gral. Plutarco Elías Calles, former President and founder, in 1929, of the

National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*). After the end of his presidential term (1924-1928) Calles remained as the power behind the throne for another six years – a period known as *Maximato,* because he was mentioned in the public sphere as the *Jefe Máximo de la Revolución* (Supreme Leader of the Revolution. After the rupture with Cárdenas, he went into exile in the USA.

As President, Cárdenas took a pronouncedly left-wing orientation on social and political affairs. In practice, this doctrine was translated into policies, such as the nationalization of both railways and the oil industry previously owned by foreign firms, the institutionalization of a self-proclaimed "socialist education" in public schools, and the collectivization of agriculture (see for instance Meyer 1977b, 2010; Palacios 1999). Cárdenas also promoted a particular view of the Mexican nation, mixing the prevailing ethno-cultural criteria (both regarding *mestizaje* and the emphasis on the indigenous past) with class-based considerations. In this way, in Cardenas' discourse the "true Mexicans" were not just the indigenous and *mestizos*, but particularly those belonging to the rural world and the disadvantaged urban classes: peasants, both industrial and self-employed workers, and small freeholders (see for instance Vom Hau 2007). Correspondingly, the perceived enemies of this "true Mexican nation" were the internal oligarchy on the one hand, and the foreign imperialist forces on the other.

This combination of ethno-cultural and class-based conceptions of the Mexican nation and the regime's goal for sociopolitical unity was well expressed by Pres. Cardenas himself when declaring in 1938 that "a people is not just an heterogeneous mixture of classes, each one fighting for their own interests. [A people] is a big historical unity, with roots in the past and in the common struggle for a shared future" (quoted in Aguilar Camín 1994, 20).

Cardenas' ideas had a direct impact on the ruling party (PNR) as well. He orchestrated a large reorganization, abandoning the previous, territorially-based structure for one built around national corporations or 'sectors': peasants, workers, the "popular sector" (i.e. the self-employed) and the army, renaming it as the Mexican Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Mexicana,* PRM) which is the direct predecessor of the current Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institutional,* PRI).

Cárdenas was thus able to combine an ethno-cultural identification of the nation, with Marxist-based notions regarding social structure and domination (see for instance Meyer 1977a). These notions shaped the *Nacionalismo Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalism) doctrine of the post-revolutionary PRM-PRI regimes. Certainly, the interpretation of such notions, as well as their concrete application as policies, varied widely according to the government in turn. For

instance, the most radical, 'socialist' policies of the *cardenismo* were soon abandoned. Nevertheless, in the Revolutionary Nationalism doctrine, the Mexican state was still deemed as the responsible of, on the one hand, the social and economic development of the nation and on the other hand, of the protection and promotion of the "true" national identity (see for instance Bartra 1989; Basurto and Cuevas 1992; Lomnitz - Adler 2001; Meyer 2010; Segovia 1968; Vaughan and Lewis 2006; Tenorio-Trillo 1995; Vizcaíno 2004).

Projecting the bronze race against the world: early revolutionary stamps

For our purposes, the organization, structure, and functions of the postal authority during Pres. Cardenas' regime (1934-1940) were basically the same as in the old DGC. It is true that Cardenas issued a decree creating the *Oficina Filatélica Mexicana* (Mexican Philatelic Office, MPO) as a dependency within it (Carrera Stampa 1970, 295-296) but, as its name indicates, it dealt exclusively with the sale of stamps and other philatelic-related materials to collectors, and did not have any other postal functions.

Even so, during Cardenas' term, postage stamps were indeed part of an effort to spread ideologically-charged messages. Indigenous motifs were already present during the *Porfiriato*, as seen above. However, these become increasingly common after the Revolution. In particular, between 1930 and 1935, indigenous topics were promoted intensively, not only by depicting objects of indigenous manufacture or meaning (like monuments or artistic/archaeological pieces) but also by the use of ethno-cultural prototypes of diverse indigenous peoples inhabiting Mexico.

In this vein, a new ordinary postage stamp series was issued in 1934.[131] It comprised 12 designs in total (see Ill. 71 for selected stamps). Independence-related topics are present in two stamps, while the colonial era, the 19th Century post-independence period, and the Revolution itself are alluded to in just one each. In contrast, indigenous topics were presented in five stamps of the series. Three of these focused on archaeological themes of diverse origin: the 'Cross of Palenque' (an engraved panel found in a Mayan temple) the 'Tizoc stone' (a large, engraved Aztec monolith) and the ruins of the city of Mitla (of the Zapotec culture). The remaining stamps, which by value were the first of the whole series, presented ethnocultural stereotypes of female indigenous persons: a *Yalaltleca* and a *Tehuana* (see Ill. 71, first two stamps). They were carefully drawn, wearing traditional attires and depicted in front of their homes. In contrast to the archaeological themes, which obviously referred to the past, these two depictions seem to imply

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[131] As this series was issued in 1934, it means it was designed and approved during the previous government (Pres. Abelardo Rodríguez, in office 1932-1934). However, Cárdenas choose to keep such series and in fact, it lasted in circulation until 1950 (see Fernández Terán 1997, #1126-1140; Scott Publishing 2010, #706-720, 837-851).

that those indigenous persons were living in the present –which was in fact the case. Together with the *charro* stamp, to be explained below, this was the first time that Mexican stamps were used to represent 'how Mexicans are'.

The last stamps in the series, with the highest values, presented the national coat of arms and a *charro* in full traditional suit, *sombrero* included (see Ill. 71, last two stamps). This is the first time that such a post-revolutionary cultural icon as the *charro* was presented on a stamp. Furthermore, the ornamental framework represents indigenous stone cravings (probably the god Quetzalcóatl). This is also the first time that a Mexican stamp makes references to both modern and pre-Hispanic topics at the same time.
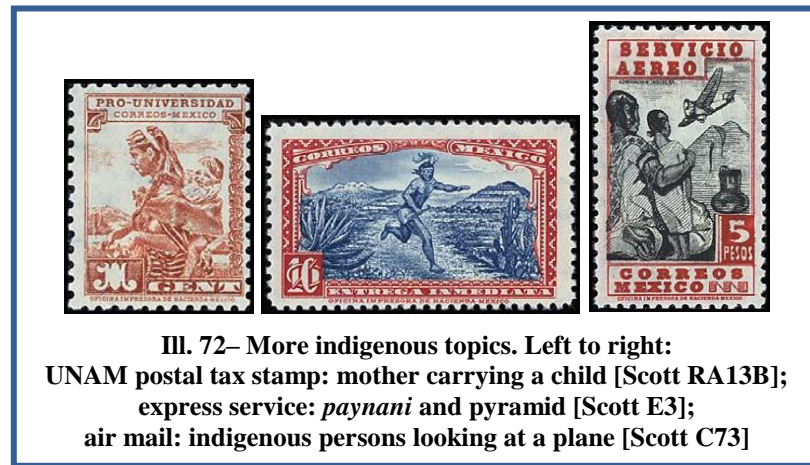

Ill. 71 – The ordinary postage stamp series of 1934 [selected stamps]: from indigenous peoples to *Charros* [Scott 707 – 709, 718 – 720

Overall, this 1934 series presented the first comprehensive narration of the modern, post-revolutionary official national imaginary, in terms of the human composition of the nation (both cultural and ethnic) and its historical genesis, starting from an old, mythical indigenous past, to the diverse periods of the national construction of Mexico up to the Revolution, and then to the modern, contemporary Mexican nation, incarnated in the coat of arms, the indigenous female, and the *charro*: the prototypical and virile mestizo.[132]

Such ideas are reinforced in depictions of stamps issued for other services. For instance, a 1934 postal tax stamp used to raise funds for the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) presented an indigenous mother carrying her child (see Ill. 72, left). Being of compulsory use, this one was surely the most common stamp seen in that year. Then, the stamps for expedited services also presented indigenous motifs, like a *paynani* on the run, passing in front of a pyramid (see Ill. 72, centre). Finally, eight out of nine stamps of the 1934 series for airmail services [Scott C65-C73] were either exclusively or predominantly filled with indigenous ethno-cultural references. One is particularly telling, as it depicts an indigenous mother and her

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[132] I cannot help but notice the gender roles assigned in this series: the *charro* is drawn as the quintessential man, with a very proud, *macho* pose. In contrast, the two women are in front of their houses, one carrying water from a wheel, the other with a basket of fruits. See also Ill. 71.

daughter looking at a plane, as if making a link between the past and the future of the Mexican nation (see Ill. 72, right).[133]

Ill. 72– More indigenous topics. Left to right:
UNAM postal tax stamp: mother carrying a child [Scott RA13B];
express service: *paynani* and pyramid [Scott E3];
air mail: indigenous persons looking at a plane [Scott C73]

Commemorative and special during the *Cardenismo*

From studying the ordinary series, it seems clear that Cardenas' regime was keen on using stamps to spread a new understanding of the Mexican nation; a new national imaginary. Taking this into account, it is very surprising to find that the 125th anniversary of *Grito de Dolores* (in 1935) was completely ignored in stamps.

Instead, the commemorative stamps issued in that year included a single stamp marking the Industrial census [Scott 721] while two stamps were made to celebrate Revolution-related 25th anniversaries: one for Madero's *Plan de San Luis,* and one for Zapata's *Plan de Ayala* [Scott C76, 723], each with a portrait of the hero in turn. Then, a series comprising three stamps was made for the opening of the Mexico City - Nuevo Laredo highway [Scott 725-727]. Finally, one of the most unusual Mexican stamps was issued also in 1935: that celebrating 111 years of the incorporation of Chiapas into the Republic [Scott 722].

The series of the period was issued to support the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), but apparently also to celebrate Cardenas' inauguration (Esteva 1984, 94-95). Eight of these stamps [Scott 698-706; see Ill. 73 for some] exclusively showed indigenous motifs, and only one was ambiguous. It included the (somehow stylized) "portrait of an Indian" (Scott 699), as well as a more realistic and possibly more contemporary "Indian agricultural worker" (Scott 701). It also included a sculptor in the act of engraving the Aztec calendar (Scott

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[133] This series was issued until 1947. For a critical comment, see (Carrera Stampa 1970, 299-300) The previous stamp series for air services, first issued in 1929, showed only the national coats of arms and a plane flying over the Valley of Mexico [Scott MEX AP3].

703) as well as two religious scenes (705-706). In contrast, the stamp showing a "woman decorating pottery" (Scott 700) is peculiar, as it recalls much more a European classical depiction than an indigenous one. A further UNAM series would be issued in September 1934, but for airmail services only; two out of eight stamps made references to indigenous themes, such as the *Teotihuacán* Pyramids and the Aztec Calendar (Scott C55, C61).

Ill. 73 - National University issues: indigenous topics and stereotypes.
[Scott 699, 701, 703, 706, 700, C61].

As we can see, references to the ethnic and cultural composition and past of Mexico were frequent, with evident emphasis on indigenous topics. Yet, other series presented more elaborated narratives, such as those issued for the 16th International Congress of Planning and Housing, held in 1938 (Scott 740-745, C85-C90). This series comprised four stamps with aerial views of places of historical relevance: the just-finished Arch of the Revolution (Ill. 74, left); the Palace of Arts, designed and initiated during the *Porfiriato* but inaugurated in 1934; the Independence Monument (Ill. 74, centre) and, lastly, the *Chichen Itzá* pyramids (airmail services, Ill. 74, right). In this way, such stamps engaged in a backwards-looking narrative, from 1934 and the Revolution itself, to Independence and to the pre-Hispanic world. Significantly enough, no colonial-era structure was included in the series.

Ill. 74 – From the present to the origins: Revolution, Independence, pre-Hispanic world [Scott 740, 744, C88]
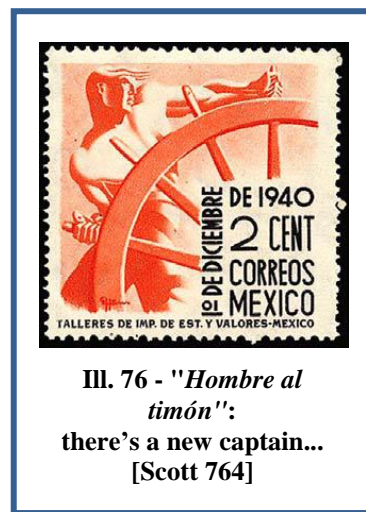
Ill. 75 – Further stamps from the *Cardenismo* [Scott C78, 738, 739]

So far, the study of the commemorative stamps of the period reinforces the conclusions made for ordinary series regarding the ethnic, cultural and historical depictions of the nation that are promoted in stamps. However, and very significantly, other commemorative stamps issued during the Cárdenas era referred to category 9 of my typology ('National Economy and Technological Development'), and particularly to communications and transport infrastructure, as well as to industrial and agricultural activities. Education-related topics were also present (see Ill. 75). Finally, in stark contrast with the complete absence of references to the 125th anniversary of Independence, the 25th anniversaries of different Revolution-related events were profusely celebrated: the *Plan de Guadalupe* [134] alone deserved six stamps (Scott 737-739, C82-C84). This is, again, fully in line with the policies and goals of Cárdenas government, heavily influenced by socialist ideas and putting emphasis on economic and infrastructural development, land reform, education and social benefits.

The very last stamp series designed and issued during Cardenas' regime, is also one of the most symbolically meaningful in Mexican history. This series was designed in late 1940 by one of the most important designers in modern Mexican history, Mr. Francisco Eppens. [135] The series included three stamps of identical design (plus three more for air mail services) and was issued to celebrate the inauguration of Pres. Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) (see Ill. 76). The series does not allude to this event directly, but does so implicitly by naming the date (01 Dec. 1940) and presenting a very strong, idealized man turning the wheel of a ship – therefore being known as the Man at the Wheel (*hombre al timón*) series. Both their

Ill. 76 - "*Hombre al timón*": there's a new captain... [Scott 764]

iconographic and written messages indicated, in a quite clear way, that there was a new man at the helm of the ship of the Mexican state (see Ill. 76).

Interestingly enough, quite frequently the stamps issued during Ávila Camacho's administration had illustrations of churches, as well as other religious motifs – in sharp contrast

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[134] *Plan de Guadalupe* was a call for rebellion made by Mr. Venustiano Carranza against the government of Victoriano Huerta, a military leader who had ordered the assassination of Pres. Madero and then occupied the presidency.

[135] For a review of Eppens work, his enormous influence in Mexican postage stamp design, and in several other artistic manifestations as well, see (Ortiz Gaytán 2009a, 2009b).

with those motifs presented during the *cardenismo*. And yet, the stamp designers were essentially the same for both administrations, Mr. Eppens in particular (Ortiz Gaytán 2009a, 2009b). Pres. Ávila Camacho was not only a self-declared Catholic, but most of his political agenda was devoted to alleviate the social divisions caused by the policies of his predecessor, including in the relations with the Church (see for instance Medina Peña 1974, 1978). So it is more than probable that such variations were not caused by changes in artistic preferences or styles, but by ideological influence exercised by the respective governments.

Some conclusions about the official national imaginary in postage stamps, 1934-1940

As we have seen, postage stamps issued during the Cardenas era demonstrated a well-defined effort to promote the post-revolutionary national imaginary, particularly regarding the human composition, the cultural identity and the historical development of the nation. Furthermore, they also alluded in a very straightforward manner to the goals, policies and priorities of the regime: land distribution, industrialization, communications development (Fernández Terán 1997; Scott Publishing 2010). In this way, Cardenas' regime promotes via stamps an imaginary of "Mexico" and "the Mexicans" as having strong and undeniable indigenous roots that are still present; and yet, at the same time, the future seems to be defined by *mestizaje* and modernization.

The stamps issued during the period of 1934-1940 mark a breaking point with the past, in terms of the representation of Mexican society and history. Until that moment, indigenous peoples were represented only in a symbolic manner, for instance by means of objects, such as a statue for Cuauhtémoc. Furthermore, with only the partial exception of Juárez, up to that moment the Mexican indigenous peoples were represented as a thing of the past (e.g. as a remarkable, even magnificent world… that had vanished already) and not as actual populations still inhabiting contemporary Mexico. Stamps during the Cardenas period represented precisely the opposite, showing that beyond ruins and myths, the indigenous are still present. And yet, it is clear that such emphasis and recognition of the indigenous population still implies a preference for *mestizaje* as the ideal future, incarnated in the *charro*.

On the other hand, never before had Mexican stamps presented such a clear historical narrative, in terms of a genesis: from the glorious, almost mythical indigenous past, to Independence and particularly the Revolution, to post-revolutionary Mexico and its emphasis upon economic modernization, education, and justice for the most disadvantaged social sectors. In such a combination of ethno-cultural, historical and political messages, the stamps from 1934-1940 delineated very clearly the Revolutionary Nationalism project in its *cardenista* version.

Consolidating the Doctrine: Pres. López Mateos (1958-64)

After 1940, the diverse PRI administrations were not as keen to promote left-wing notions and policies as Pres. Cárdenas. In fact, Pres. Manuel Ávila Camacho (in office 1940-46) distanced himself from many of the policies of his predecessors, particularly regarding the Catholic Church. Pres. Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-52) inaugurated the era of civilian presidents; in many senses, the policies implemented by Pres. Alemán can be considered as the precise opposite of Cárdenas', in all social, economic and diplomatic terms. The succeeding administration of Pres. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-58) marked a new turn, towards centre-left politics.

Despite such ideological fluctuations, the regime's Revolutionary Nationalism doctrine was not fundamentally altered: the Mexican nation was still seen as a fundamentally *mestizo* nation. Yet the identification of the "true Mexicans" with the lower social strata only was generally avoided, not only due to the ideological changes during the 1940s, but also because the booming Mexican economy in the period created an important sector of urban middle classes. Instead, the PRI regime after Cárdenas actively tried to promote a "national unity" ideal, encompassing all social sectors and also most of the ideological trends within Mexican public life (Mabire 1999, 1994; Vizcaíno 2002).

<u>The technification of the postal service.</u>

In 1942, the General Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs was divided back in its two components, so the postal service became autonomous again under its old name (DGC). There were some organizational modifications, such as in 1947 (Carrera Stampa 1970, 65-66; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 228) but a comprehensive modernization of the postal service did not take place until 1953. That year, the Mexican Postal Guide (*Guía Postal Mexicana*, GPM) was published. Like the old Postal Code, GPM was a large compendium of new regulations and specifications in all aspects of the mail services.

The new GPM also included a revision of DGC's structure. Therefore, an Office for Stamps and Securities (*Oficina de Estampillas y Valores,* OEV)[136] was set up within DGC (see SCOP 1953). Despite its name, this office was not directly in charge of stamp design, but only of commissioning designs to the printing offices of the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit *(Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público,* SHCP) and then of distributing such stamps to the post offices, as well as keeping stocks. Therefore, it had the same basic functions as the 1900's

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[136] The *Oficina de Estampillas y Valores* was also known by the essentially synonymous name *Oficina de Estampillas y Formas Valoradas.*

SATP[137] (see SCOP 1953, 41, 559-580; SCT 1964). It is not clear if the stamps were designed entirely at SHCP printing offices, or if DGC had a direct role in the process. However, it should be noticed that one of the nine 'sections' within the OEV, one was a 'Representation to SHCP'.[138]

Right after Pres. López Mateos took office in 1958, the Ministry of Communications and Public Works (*Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas,* SCOP) was divided in two. As part of it, the Ministry of Communications and Transports (SCT) was created, and DGC was incorporated into it. Such changes reflected the growing importance of postal services, which, since the 1950's, had experienced an accelerated growth. This trend would continue during Pres. López Mateos' administration: in 1958 alone, 880,881,678 pieces of mail were handled, but by the end of 1964 the number had reached 1,155,469,932 (SCT 1970, 34). Together with the circulations of letters, the use of stamps was also increasing.

Ordinary stamp series: the consolidation

The López Mateos' administration did not create new ordinary stamp series, so it inherited and maintained those made during the previous periods. One of these series (Scott 897A-900, FT 1586w-1590z) was first issued in 1956 as a commemoration of the Centenary of the 1857 Constitution, therefore presenting portraits of heroes of time. Yet these stamps were later transformed into an ordinary series that would circulate until the mid-seventies. Another inherited and very successful series was that for air mail. Once more, it was designed by Francisco Eppens, and also lasted until the mid-seventies. It had a good deal of indigenous motifs (7 out of 13 basic designs) and only two personalities were presented on it: Cuauhtémoc and Hidalgo (FT 1438-1449, several variants; see also Ortiz Gaytán 2009b, 29-31).

However, the most interesting case for us were the small stamps of the "Architecture and Archaeology" series (FT 1438-1449, see Ill. 77). Despite their nickname, the series also included stamps devoted to particular persons like Benito Juárez or Francisco I. Madero. This series presented a combination of old and new motifs; for instance, half of the buildings were modern, while the other half dated back to colonial times. Furthermore, there was an indigenous presence in at least four stamps (five, if we include Juárez).

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[137] SHCP was also in charge of designing banknotes and other official documents (SCT 1964, arts. 103-105; SCOP 1953, 41, 559-80).
[138] The other eight sections of the Office were of a purely administrative/logistical nature i.e. "Accounting section", "Dispatch Section", "Stocks" etc.

Ill. 77 - "Archeology and Architecture" series. Left to right:
Cathedral of the city of Puebla [FT 1442];
indigenous dance from Michoacán state [FT 1443];
monumental pre-Hispanic, Olmec carved head [FT 1444];
Mestizaje **stamp [(Hoyo), corresp. to FT 1446];**
Fco. I. Madero [FT1448];
Social Security main building, Mexico City [FT 1449]

The most significant stamp of this series is the 1 peso (FT1446, fourth in Ill. 77). This depicts *both* a colonial building (a Catholic convent, in fact) and the head of one of Tula's *Atlantes:* a set of large, tall stone pillars carefully engraved as male warriors, at the top of a pyramid at the former Toltec capital of Tula (*Tollan*). This is the second time that *mestizaje* was presented so clearly in a stamp (only after the 'charro' stamp of 1934) but this stamp took it a step further, by combining both pre-Hispanic and *colonial* elements in the same stamp.[139]

When we think in terms of the diffusion of a national imaginary, we can see that these stamps do not present a truly new narrative, but rather a refinement and consolidation of the existing one. They maintain the idea of Mexico as having a *mestizo* identity with strong indigenous roots; however, they also introduce colonial topics (that is, the *Hispanic* element of mestizaje) and do it in such an evident way by visually superposing colonial and pre-Hispanic elements.

Yet these are simple, dichromatic, small stamps. There is no open intention of "catching the eye" as there was in stamps during the *cardenismo,* with their appealing designs, rich iconographies and complex narratives*,* in order to convince the postal user of the existence of a *mestizo* nation. Quite the contrary, the ordinary series in circulation during the 60's, seem to aim for a simple <u>consolidation</u> of such an idea, by means of everyday repetition of simple messages and symbols (see Billig 1995).

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[139] In contrast, in the *charro* stamp the mestizaje was presented by means of the figure itself; there was no mention to colony.

<u>150 years of… a bell?</u>

In 1960, the 150th anniversary of *Grito de Dolores* was indeed celebrated in stamps, in sharp contrast to 1935. Two commemorative series were made for the occasion, one for standard services and the other for airmail. Both presented evidence of quite interesting changes in the narratives and depictions used.

The stamps of these series included one presenting the *Campana de Dolores,* a church bell which is allegedly the same that Hidalgo used in 1810 when calling to rebellion, and which is still rung by the President every 15th of September in the main square (*Zócalo*) of Mexico City (see Ill. 78, left). A second stamp presented the Independence Monument, also in the capital (see Ill. 78, centre) while the third presented both the *Campana* and Miguel Hidalgo (Ill. 78, right). The stamps for airmail services presented
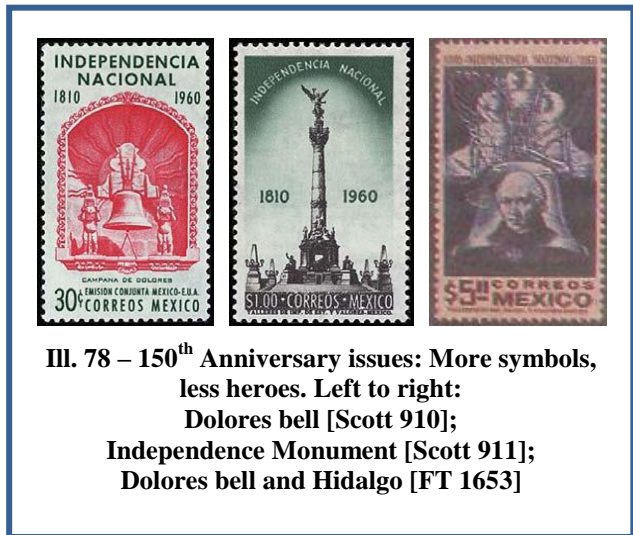
Ill. 78 – 150th Anniversary issues: More symbols, less heroes. Left to right: Dolores bell [Scott 910]; Independence Monument [Scott 911]; Dolores bell and Hidalgo [FT 1653]

first a simple, dichromatic Mexican flag (see Ill. 79, left), the Bell with an eagle (Ill. 79, centre) and an image of the Church of Dolores, where Hidalgo performed the *Grito* (Ill. 79, right).

Ill. 79 – 150th Anniversary issues: More symbols, less heroes (pt. 2). Left to right: Flag [Scott C250]; Dolores bell and eagle [FT 1655]; Church of Dolores [FT 1656]

Except for one case, these stamps constituted a clear shift from the 1910 depiction of individuals, focusing on objects and symbols instead. The Dolores' Bell is present in half of the series. This is even more interesting, given the fact that this is the first time such an object was depicted in Mexican postage stamps of any kind. Out of all possible Independence heroes, only Hidalgo appears, on a single stamp only, and not even as the main subject: the bell is significantly larger than him (see Ill. 78, last stamp).

In contrast, the stamps that were issued simultaneously (but as a different series) to mark the 50th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution were full of human figures representing social

groups (see Scott 913-914/FT 1657-62). Furthermore, all other stamps of the same period that were issued for the birth/death anniversaries of Mexican personalities, always presented their portraits.

However, the most impressive fact is the number of *foreign* personalities who were honoured with portraits on Mexican stamps. These included not less than nine heads of state, ranging from Kennedy to Tito, on the occasion of state visits.[140] Kennedy appeared twice in fact, as another stamp presented both him and Pres. López Mateos shaking hands, after settling the boundary dispute regarding the "Chamizal" zone (Scott C282). This is one of the extremely rare occasions that a Mexican president has been depicted in a stamp while still in office.[141] Other personalities like Eleanor Roosevelt (Scott C280) and the Philippine national hero José Rizal (1861-1896) also got their own stamps.[142]

Therefore, given the abundance at the time of stamps with portraits of both national and international personalities, the lack of human depictions in the stamps issued for the 150th anniversary of Independence cannot be attributed to a simple artistic mode. An alternative explanation is that such commemorative stamps avoided pointing at specific groups or personalities within the Independence movement, except for a small gesture to the person who made the original call. Instead, the stamps seem to present a ostensibly comprehensive, coherent and, so to say, 'institutional' approach to the national history, supplanting individuals or groups with overarching symbols. In this sense, we can remember the utility of national symbols as overarching references, that should be 'as empty as possible' (Eriksen 2007, 5) so that persons can fill such symbols with their own meanings and interpretations.

Of course, it can be difficult to prove beyond any doubt that this was the actual intention of the 1960 stamps. Yet, we will find further reasons to support such ideas by studying other policies during López Mateos' administration, dealing with the promotion of a unified national imaginary. As an example, in 1959 a program for the reorganization of basic education was launched (the "Eleven-year Plan") which set out among its goals to "put an end to the

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[140] The use of stamps to mark such occasions was a novelty at the time. The complete list is: Belgium, Queen Fabiola and King Baldouin [Scott C306]; Bolivia, Pres. Víctor Paz Estenssoro [940]; Brazil, Pres. Joao Goulart [921]; Chile, Pres. Jorge Alessandri [927]; France, Pres. Charles de Gaulle [C281]; Netherlands, Queen Juliana [C283]; USA; John F. Kennedy [C262]; Yugoslavia, Josip Brodz Tito [C275]; Venezuela, Pres. Rómulo Betancourt [932].

[141] The only other previous case that I could detect, was a 1916 stamp with Pres. Venustiano Carranza's portrait, and two where the face of Miguel Alemán was included as a detail within larger compositions [Scott 574-575, C199-C200 respectively]. A later, 1977 stamp presented both Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, and the Mexican Pres. José López Portillo, to celebrate the re-establishment of diplomatic between the two nations, which were broken after the Spanish Civil War [see FT 2251].

[142] The Rizal stamp was issued to mark "400 years of Mexican – Philippine friendship" (see Scott 956).

proliferation of textbooks with differing versions of Mexican history" and substitute these with a single official version, which would be coherent and straightforward (see for instance Gutiérrez 1999; Segovia 1977; Vázquez 1975). The creation of such a narrative certainly helped, or even demanded, the setting aside of the different ideological, social and regional backgrounds of the leaders within the independence movement, as well as their competing interests. In this sense, the de-personalization of the Independence commemorations and the use of flags and the Dolores bell as symbols instead, certainly seemed very helpful.

The post-revolutionary consolidation stamps: some reflections

The series of the period from 1958-1964 shows a development of the national imaginaries presented in Mexican stamps. On one hand, the ordinary series discarded part of the ideological activism and visual attractiveness that characterized the stamps during the *cardenismo*. Certainly, the new series did not cast away the emphasis on indigenous roots, and also kept the core doctrine of Mexico as an essentially *mestizo* nation in the ethno-cultural and historical terms. On the other hand, the new stamps also demonstrated a subtle drive for the incorporation of colonial history and Hispanic influences in such narratives.

Overall, the stamps of the ordinary series during the period were still certainly framed by Revolutionary Nationalism ideas, and also presented some gradual innovations. However, they were less prone to making explicit nationalist statements, especially when compared to those issued during the *cardenismo*. In Billig's terms (1995) the stamps of the ordinary series 1958-1964, were much more "banal" than "waved."

But what about commemorative stamps - that by nature, are meant to be "waved" the most? In this regard, the stamps issued for the 150th anniversary of Independence marked a turning point in how such processes were presented to the audience. The preference for symbols instead of specific heroes was new and, as argued above, tied in with the efforts during López Mateos' administration to create a comprehensive, lineal, seemingly coherent official national history – one where the use of overarching symbols will allow us to oversee the differences among specific heroes and groups fighting during the Independence process. The fact that stamps of the same period, but devoted to other topics, were very prone to identifying specific persons (e.g., in international relations) and/or groups (such as in the stamps for the Revolution anniversary), seems to support this view.

Postage stamps in the seventies: "disseminating the national self"

Some organizational changes from the second half of the 1960s and the 70s had important consequences on how postage stamps from Mexico were used, and for what goals. For instance, directly after Pres. López Mateos' administration, the so-called National Postal Program (1965-1970) was launched under Pres. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. This program stated that, for the Mexican government, philately was not just a source of income, but a true "means for cultural approach and cohesion between national and international interests". Therefore, Mexico should commemorate in stamps "dates and facts *that directly concern or involve our history,* as well as international events of universal interest" (SCT 1970, 113, my italics).

A further, essential change concerned the particular institution in charge of postage stamp design and issuing. As noted before, up to that moment the role of DGP (through the OEV) regarding stamps was mostly to order, distribute and keep stocks of stamps, but without an explicit role in stamp topic selection and design. This would change in 1966, when a new Postal Issues Department (*Departamento de Emisiones Postales,* DEP) substituted the old OEV. The new DEP acquired key new roles, such as: preparing the draft Annual Emission Stamp Programs, as well as the individual draft Presidential decrees on stamp-related topics; studying the "technical, postal and artistic" aspects of each series; and last but not least, hiring designers and engravers for the design of stamps (Carrera Stampa 1970; Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 241; SCT 1970, 55).

In order to deal with the most technical part of these tasks, a particular branch within DEP was established: the Office of Promotions and Projects (*Oficina de Proyectos y Promoción,* OPP). A further 'Philatelic Office' also existed , but dealt with distribution only (SCT 1966, 7-8; Carrera Stampa 1970, 73). During the second part of the sixties stamp design was fully centralized in the DGC in this way.

Such changes can be interpreted as purely administrative, responding to demands for more extensive and efficient postal services. In fact, mail traffic reached 1250 million pieces in 1966 alone (SPP 1981, 414). However, the centralization in DGC of all matters regarding stamps, on the one hand, and the explicit goal set for them to mark relevant "dates and facts" of the national history, on the other hand, reflected governmental awareness regarding the use of stamps for the purposes of spreading ideological and nationalist messages. Later on, this would become an explicit mandate.

A 1977 decree by Pres. José López Portillo (1976-82) created the Consultant Commission of Commemorative Postal Emissions (*Comisión Consultiva de Emisiones Postales Conmemorativas*, CCEPC). Its main roles were, on the one hand, to give opinions on those petitions received from public, private, social and international organizations to issue stamps; and on the other hand, to propose the issue of special and commemorative series "about historical, cultural or scientific topics *that disseminate our national self*" (Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 271, my italics).

Besides public officers from SCT, and postal specialists from CDG, the Commission should include "a historian of high prestige" (Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 271). It is very significant that this role was given to Miguel León-Portilla, one of the most influential historians in the country, who had devoted most of his work to the study of the national identity as well as the pre-Hispanic history of Mexico (see for instance León-Portilla 1959; 1974; also 2003). The goal of embedding nationalist and/or nationally-framed messages in Mexican stamps could not be clearer.[143]

After 1977 there was thus a very noticeable, sudden emphasis in indigenous topics (and ethno-cultural depictions in general) in Mexican stamps. In 1979 CCEPC was detached from SCT, becoming responsible to DGC's General Director only (Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 264), therefore giving DGC even more autonomy to comply with the mandate of "disseminating the national self". The emphasis in ethno-cultural depictions, particularly indigenous ones, would last until the mid-eighties.

For example, in 1980, two new ordinary series were launched, the first devoted to "Pre-Hispanic Monuments" (FT 2357-2359, 2377-79) and the second to "Pre-Hispanic Rulers" (e.g. FT 2370-2372). This time, not only Cuauhtémoc, but also many other indigenous figures were represented, including *non*-Aztecs or Mayans. A further series, issued in October 1982, had indigenous codices as a topic.

Ill. 80 – National framing of events.
Left: the Aztec god of disease and rebirth (Xipe Totec) as means to commemorate a world surgeon congress.
Right: the "Rabbit on the Moon" symbol to celebrate the 10th Apollo 11 landing anniversary. [(Hoyo) corresp. to FT2373; and Scott C624]

Besides the simple quantitative increase in stamp series with indigenous references, there was also a qualitative change. For instance, even

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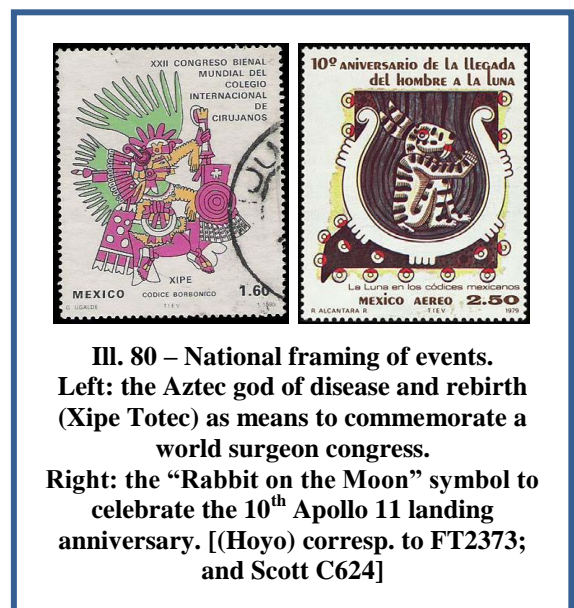
[143] In 1979 CCEPC was detached from the SCT aegis, becoming responsible to DGC's General Director only (Cárdenas de la Peña 1987, 264).

apparently neutral events, such as an international medical congress, were commemorated by means of an indigenous reference (see Ill. 80, left). Moreover, international feats were also translated into local terms: the 10th anniversary of Apollo 11 was celebrated not by displaying a spacecraft, or any other modern and/or international reference, but by one of the indigenous symbols for the moon, the rabbit (see Ill. 80, right).

Despite such pre-eminence of indigenous topics in stamps, some series also promoted other ethno-cultural expressions. Some of these were related to the Hispanic influence, e.g. a 1980 series on 'colonial monuments'. A further special series from the same year treated 'traditional Mexican customs', which apparently have mostly *mestizo* influences. In sum: starting from the sixties and until at least the early 80s, the use of postage stamps to promote a particular vision of the features of the Mexican nation became an explicit and even mandatory task for the postal authorities, and almost all topics and events available were of potential use for this purpose.

However, this same period of 1970–1982 (corresponding to the presidential administrations of Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo) was marked by pervasive economic, budgetary and corruption problems. As a result, in 1980-1982 Mexico fell into one of the deepest crises of its modern history, which included the default on its international debts and a series of devaluations of the Mexican currency. The impact on the popular legitimacy of the PRI regime was so severe that a new generation of politicians within the party, composed mostly of economists with high degrees of specialization (the so-called 'technocrats') took power after the elections of that year (Meyer 1996).

The technocratic turn: 1982-1988 and the road to SEPOMEX

After the economic debacle during the 1980s, the newly elected President, Miguel de la Madrid embarked upon a profound economic reform, following neo-liberal economic doctrines and policies that profoundly transformed the Mexican economy, completely dismantling the former protectionist model ('imports substitution') which had been a key factor in the post-revolutionary industrialization of Mexico.

The arrival of the new 'technocratic' elite also produced a very profound ideological change. The *mestizaje* notion was kept as the ethno-cultural basis of the nation, but the Revolutionary Nationalism doctrine regarding most other social, political and international matters was "toned down" by Pres. de la Madrid and his successors (Mabire 1994, 1999). For instance, the former prudence regarding, and even mistrust of, the United States of America was

replaced by an increasing cooperation with it, while relations with leftist governments (particularly Castro's Cuba) became increasingly distant (e.g. Aguayo 1998; Meyer 2006; Covarrubias 2003; cf. Ojeda 1976).

As part of the 1982-88 reorganization of the Mexican public administration, the Mexican Post underwent its most important transformation in modern times. A 1986 presidential decree created the Mexican Postal Service (*Servicio Postal Mexicano,* SEPOMEX) as a decentralized governmental agency, giving it a large degree of political and budgetary autonomy. It was divided into four directorates, and one of these, the Postal and Services Directorate (*Dirección Postal y de Servicios,* DPS), took charge of all matters related to postage stamps. Moreover, CCEPC was abolished (see Mexico 1986; SEPOMEX 1986).

Two different offices within DPS dealt now with stamps: firstly, a Postal Services Administration (*Gerencia de Servicios Postales,* GSP) that was in charge of coordinating the "philatelic policy" of the institution; and secondly, a Philatelic Services Administrations (*Gerencia de Servicio Filatélico,* GSF) that dealt with "the issuing and commercialization programs for both commemorative and special postage stamps" and with "coordinating philatelic expositions and related events" (Correos de México 2009, 12; SEPOMEX 1986). Stamps now required an explicit "philatelic policy", but one that would not necessarily follow the ideological lines set during the 60s, 70s and early 80s – especially since CCEPC did not exist anymore – but one that would put the accent in economic and financial objectives instead. Indeed, after 1987, we can see a change in postage stamps, trying to attract collectors: as an example, stamps dedicated to the F1 Grand Prix (Scott 1517, 1548) or to the World Boxing Council (Scott 1566). However, far from being a pure commercialization of postage stamps, such stamp topic changes also reflected ideological changes amongst the ruling elites, as we shall see.

The 1982-88 ordinary series: Stamps for a new Mexico?

First, it must be noted that the administration of Pres. de la Madrid inherited and continued what is probably the most well-known stamp series in Mexico's history: the *México Exporta* (Mexico Exports). This series, based on very simple, yet eye-catching designs, was meant (as the name suggests) to present the products that México was producing and exporting at the time (see Ill. 81). The goal of promoting Mexico both locally and abroad, as a rising economic power, could not be clearer, despite the profound economic crisis that Mexico was facing precisely at that time. The *Exporta* series was issued from 1975 to 1993, and was so widely produced and used, that philatelists are still uncertain about how many types and variations actually exist (see for instance Hill 2008).

Further ordinary series, issued previously but continued during de la Madrid's administration, were: a series comprising small, colorful stamps that promoted "touristic Mexico"; another devoted to noted Mexican scientists and artists, and a final one presenting, Colonial-era buildings. Yet interestingly enough, all the previous series regarding pre-Hispanic topics almost vanished from sight; the last was issued two months before de la Madrid's inauguration. Such ordinary series would be re-issued only until 1987, when the presidential term was almost

Ill. 81 - Examples of *Exporta* series: from Tequila and tomatoes, to electronic circuits and heavy industry products [(Hoyo) collection]

over. Therefore, the ethno-cultural topics, and particularly the indigenous ones, were left for special and commemorative series, and even in those cases were not used as often as expected. [144] In this way, the accent in Mexican stamps changed radically from an emphasis on ethno-cultural and particularly indigenous depictions, to the unmistakable promotion of a 'modern', developed Mexico that had scientists, beautiful places to visit, Colonial buildings and that, most important of all, produced goods for export.
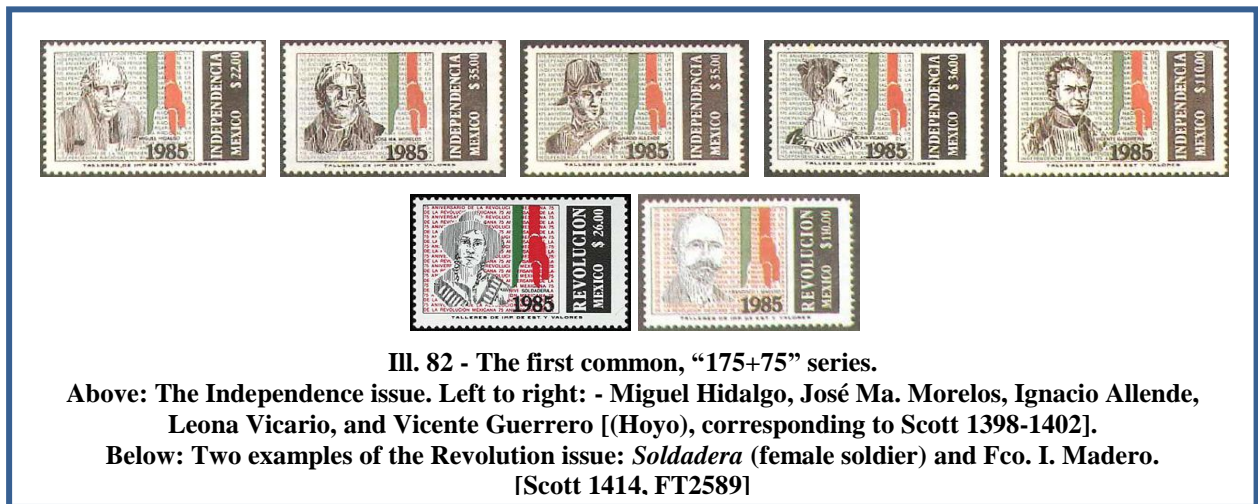
Commemorative issues: 1985 = 175+75?

1985 was the first time that a common stamp series was issued to commemorate both Independence and the Mexican Revolution (the 175th and 75th anniversaries, respectively). These stamps were certainly not the most successful or spectacular ones, at least in a philatelic sense. In fact, they were disappointingly small, rather plain, and of low technical quality. Yet, they offer some interesting features for our analysis.

In a display of egalitarian spirit, all stamps of this series had the same size; the same basic design with only minor differences in the background, and also presented a common

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[144] I must acknowledge that that was not an iron law, at least regarding commemorative issues. In some of these there are quite straightforward statements regarding the historical and ethno-cultural elements of the Mexican nation. A case of this kind was that of the stamps issued (in some cases, well in advance) to mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival to the so-called New World. As I have argued elsewhere, the Mexican stamps issued for such occasions helped to spread a very clear, political message during these celebrations. In stark contrast to many other countries (Spain in particular) in Mexico this event was not presented as the "discovery of the Americas" but as the "*encuentro de dos mundos*": the encounter of two very different, yet essentially equal worlds (See León-Portilla 1992). Several Mexican stamps issued between 1988 and 1992 made this claim by means of both iconographic elements and slogans (See Hoyo 2010a).

central symbol: an allegory of the Mexican flag, where the red colour created the shape of the Monument to Revolution in Mexico City, while the white and green colours formed the shape of the Dolores bell (see Ill. 82). The persons honoured for Independence were Miguel Hidalgo, José Ma. Morelos, Ignacio Allende, Leona Vicario and Vicente Guerrero, presented through pencil-style drawings; the same technique was applied to Revolutionary figures (Fernández Terán 1997).

Ill. 82 - The first common, "175+75" series.
Above: The Independence issue. Left to right: - Miguel Hidalgo, José Ma. Morelos, Ignacio Allende,
Leona Vicario, and Vicente Guerrero [(Hoyo), corresponding to Scott 1398-1402].
Below: Two examples of the Revolution issue: *Soldadera* (female soldier) and Fco. I. Madero.
[Scott 1414, FT2589]

The first and foremost characteristic of the series is the unambiguous return of the cult of individual heroes. Second, as mentioned before, they marked the first time that both Independence and Revolution were celebrated in the same scheme. Third, it was the first time in postal history for Morelos and Guerrero to be presented in a series that commemorated the Independence movement.

In this sense, the 1985 stamps introduced a more inclusive narrative of the Mexican past, but also a more linear and simplified one. It was more inclusive, as the stamps presented not only the best-known leaders of the original, mostly autonomist, *criollo*-led movement of Hidalgo, but also the latter, more multi-ethnic, and genuinely independence-driven movements of both Morelos and Guerrero – even if these stamps did not offer any details about the leaders, except their portrait and name (see Ill. 82).

However, the narrative of such stamps was also more linear and simplified, by straightforwardly linking Independence to Revolution, without considering the very large historical, social and political differences between these two processes – not to speak of the quite contrasting movements, interests and goals in each. Yet in the series, all differences disappear into uniformity, to the point that the heroes themselves are presented in the same way!

In this way, the stamps from 1985 seem to present both Independence and Revolution as nothing but steps in an ostensibly coherent, linear saga of the Mexican nation. This is visually and symbolically reinforced by the fact that, in the background, both the Dolores bell and the Monument to the Revolution share not only the same space, but are part of the same flag. In this way, the overall message is not only of a certain historical homogeneity, but also of national unity – a necessary appeal after the deep socio-economic crisis just endured by the Mexicans, and the loss of legitimacy for the PRI regime that ensued.

Posting the post-revolutionary nation: some conclusions about the national imaginaries in Mexican stamps

The changes in the organization and goals of the postal authorities, particularly regarding stamp design and issuance, responded to two main inputs. On the one hand, there were obvious, undeniable administrative needs, such as the continuously growing demands to extend the coverage and increase the efficiency of the postal services in Mexico. Yet, on the other hand, there were also political needs dictated by the governments and elites in turns, and the changes in postage stamp topics and depictions make this evident.

During Pres. Cárdenas' administration, postage stamps helped to spread a national imaginary, which was heavily influenced by class-based considerations, and which relied not only upon the glorification of the indigenous past (as during the *Porfiriato*) but also on the recognition of the indigenous *present,* without renouncing, of course, the claim of an essential *mestizo* nature of the Mexican nation. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, a less left-wing version of Revolutionary Nationalism was promoted in stamps. However, in ethno-cultural topics, the messages and depictions in postage stamps still underlined *mestizaje* as the basic element that defines Mexico as a nation, combining this with a de-personalized historical discourse that replaced individual heroes with overarching symbols.

Later, the 1970s witnessed the arrival of a new wave of indigenous- related topics in stamps, to a degree not previously witnessed, and produced by the explicit mandate set over DGC to promote 'our national self' in stamps – a policy that had a direct link with the fierce populist discourse of the elites of the time. Finally, the 80's present a profound renovation of the narratives in stamps: the ordinary series tried to present a modern, open, economically dynamic Mexico (despite all the evidence to the contrary), while the special and commemorative series appeal to individual heroes, but present all of them as contributing to a 'common project' that now includes both Independence and Revolution: a very convenient claim for national unity at a time when the PRI regime had suffered a strong blow to its legitimacy.

It is thus clear that stamp depictions had followed not only the ideological inclinations of the regime at large, but also concrete political goals pursued by the ruling elites at a given moment. The variations detected in stamp depictions and topics in the cases studied above support this idea. And, if that is the case, there must be even more important contrasts between the stamps issued during the 70-year PRI regime, and those issued after the democratic transition in 2000.

Democratic Transition and Post-Transition

In this section, I will deal with the stamps issued for the 2010 Bicentennial celebrations. Being such a recent commemoration, the availability of sources was far greater than in the other cases, allowing me to conduct a much more detailed study. My expectation was that, after the end of the PRI regime in 2000, the narratives in stamps would show a significant change on how "Mexico" and "the Mexicans" were presented to the world; after all, as Brunn (2011) has demonstrated, stamps have been also messengers of political transition.

Background: contemporary stamp design processes

The changes in the Mexican postal system did not stop with the 1986 reform that created SEPOMEX. Further reorganizations were undertaken in 1989 and particularly in 1994, reinforcing its organizational autonomy as well as its role in the design of postage stamps.

As a result of such reorganizations, in 1994 the DEP ceased to exist. Instead, philatelic matters were integrated into a whole new section, the Commercial and Services Directorate [*Dirección Comercial y de Servicios,* DCS]. A Philatelic Administration [*Gerencia de Filatelia*] was established within the DCS, comprising two Departments: Postal Culture and Philatelic Promotion.

Another reorganization was carried out in 2003. A new Philatelic Underdirectorate [*Subdirección de Filatelia*, SubFil] was established being responsible for the planning and development of postage stamp issues, the commercialization of other philatelic products and the diffusion of postal-related events. Yet, it was explicitly stated that all these activities should be done to promote "the communication, unity of the peoples and universal peace, by means of [stamp] designs..." (SEPOMEX 2003a, 9; 1994). In this sense, stamps were still considered means to carry ideological messages, even if in this occasion, they seem to promote much more cosmopolitan values than nationalist ones. Yet, this would not be the last change.

In 2007-2008 SEPOMEX was again subjected to a profound organizational reform, allegedly to make it more efficient, modern and not so dependable upon governmental resources. It changed its name to Mexican Posts [*Correos de México*, CdeM] which is the official denomination up to this day (Correos de México 2009; see also Luján Ponce 2008). In many aspects, CdeM remains very similar to SEPOMEX; for instance, the branch in charge of stamp design and issuing is still the Philatelic Underdirectorate (SubFil).

All of these reforms reinforced the autonomous status of the organization. At least on paper, some external governmental agencies still maintain a role in CdeM, for example as members of the General Directorate – which includes representatives of SCT, SCHP, the Ministry of Economics, and that of Foreign Affairs (SEPOMEX 2008d, art. 5). SCT also have other functions, such as being the intermediating agency between the CdeM and the President for some procedures, including the drafting of the presidential decrees regarding the issue of commemorative stamps (see SEPOMEX 2008d, art. 2-IV). However, during the interviews in CdeM Headquarters, it was insisted that such a step is just a formality, as SCT does not interfere in SEPOMEX/CdeM decisions as a matter of principle, to the point that even the draft presidential decrees are written there and not at SCT (CdeM Official 'A' 2010).

Since the change from SEPOMEX to CdeM, new organizational manuals and internal norms had been created, arguably reflecting a new approach to service, although the branches and departments involved in stamp issuing had remained the same. However, the role of stamps in spreading messages had become more explicit. For instance, one of the explicit institutional objectives of CdeM (that is: of the postal authority as a whole) is to use stamps to help to "improve the diffusion of culture and values" (Correos de México 2009, 17 - see point 6). When we study the internal norms and goals of the CdeM's diverse internal branches, we can find that one of the explicit objectives of the SubFil is to ensure that postage stamps will constitute

> […] means of diffusion of the national values [of Mexico]; of its natural and cultural richness; of its history and political, social and economic evolution; of its great figures and events; of its relation with the world, and many other aspects connected with the national interest (Correos de México 2009; see also SEPOMEX 2008b).

In this sense, the use of stamps to spread messages is not only allowed, but actually promoted or even mandatory. Therefore, the specific processes followed to embed such messages and ideas in stamps take on special relevance.

From both internal documents and the information obtained during the interviews in CdeM's headquarters at Mexico City,[145] it is clear that the process of creation of commemorative postage stamps has not fundamentally changed since the seventies (see Carrera Stampa 1970, 294-295). The initial input can be of one of two kinds. First there are external sources, such as social organizations, private institutions or governmental agencies other than from SEPOMEX/CdeM, that want to celebrate a particular event relevant for them by means of a commemorative stamp. For that, standardized processes and fixed commercial contracts exist (SEPOMEX 2003b, 2007). As an external input, the production of such stamp series depends primarily on the demand. However, SEPOMEX/CdeM is still in charge of the actual design of the stamps – even if, of course, the client can supply as much information as is considered necessary for the stamp, and also can make suggestions regarding its design (SEPOMEX 2008a, 2007).

Second, there are internal inputs for stamp series. That is: the general topics to be presented in one or more stamp series, as well as the specific criteria that will be followed to produce the individual designs, both had their origin in decisions and actors within CdeM itself (SEPOMEX 2008b; CdeM Official 'B' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010). In such cases, the procedure is as follows: the Assistant Director in charge of the SubFil, and its Philatelic Emissions Manager (*Gerente de Emisiones Filatélicas,* GEF) propose and discuss a draft list of topics to be celebrated in stamps of the following year. When reaching an agreement, they produce a Draft Annual Program of Commemorative and Special Issues, for the next year. Then they propose such a draft to the superior levels within CdeM, namely the head of the Commercial Directorate [*Dirección Comercial,* DirCom] and the CdeM's Director General. After being approved, the draft is presented to the General Directorate of the organization (CdeM Official 'B' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010; SEPOMEX 2008b). All of these levels can make changes, suggest new commemorations, or take some topics/stamps out of the list.

After the Draft Annual Program is approved, it returns to SubFil where the Philatelic Emissions Manager selects a given designer, explains to her/him the general topic of the stamp series, and provides some preliminary data, e.g. on the historical facts, who was involved, etc.

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[145] These interviews were conducted between November and December 2010, with both civil servants and engravers/artists. These persons wished to remain anonymous.

He also provides the designer with (quote) "broad guidelines" regarding of how the topic should be presented, and what basic elements must be included in the design. These guidelines, as well as the information for each particular stamp, are given by both GEF and AD-SubFil on a case-by-case basis; there are no general patterns or procedures that should be followed in all cases.[146]

Both the civil servants and the stamp designers interviewed agreed on the wide degree of freedom that the designers have, regarding the artistic/visual particularities of the essays[147] they send for evaluation (CdeM Designer 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010; see also SEPOMEX 2008c). I should mention that during a later interview with a different designer, who was hired by SEPOMEX during the late 80s and early 90s, it was also stated that the designers of that time had "a large degree of freedom" as well; that they tended to work in a quite independent form, and only had meetings with the civil servants of the (then) SEPOMEX to "reach agreements and receive indications" (CdeM Designer 'B' 2011).

The designer must submit at least three different essays to GEF. These are reviewed and discussed in successive meetings in GEF's offices at the Postal Palace. Then the selected/refined versions are presented to the SubFil Assistant Director, who can either suggest changes or ratify the designs. In theory, the essays can still be subjected to revision/approval by superior instances (e.g. the Commercial Director and/or the Director General himself); however, the persons interviewed stated that in most cases, the designs selected by GEF and SubFil will be the definitive ones (CdeM Designer 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010).
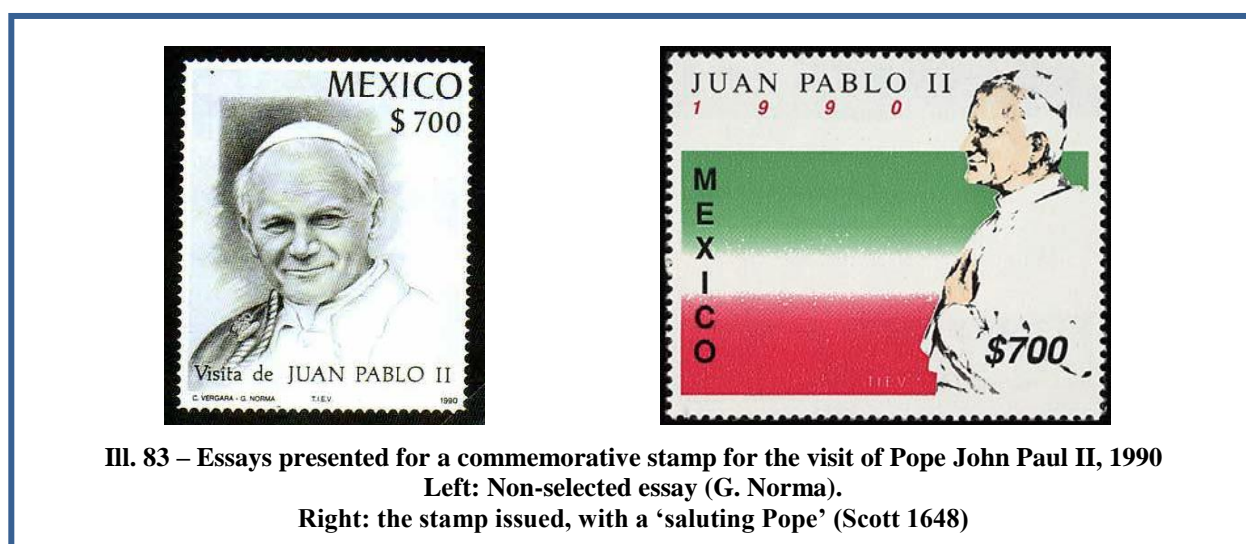
Accounts or proofs of an open intervention by an *external* authority, such as a governmental or political actor not belonging to SEPOMEX/CdeM, are quite scarce. I could find only one account of such a situation. A designer who worked for SEPOMEX/CdeM during the 90's recalled one occasion where one of her essays was in fact subjected to external interference, by none other than the President, Mr. Carlos Salinas de Gortari (in office 1988-1994). It involved a stamp commemorating the visit of Pope John Paul II to Mexico in 1990. The designer interviewed stated that it was Pres. Salinas who "personally chose the [winning] design" and that, despite Mr. Salinas' demonstrated appreciation for her work (a large, artistic portrait of the Pope – see Ill. 83, left), he did not choose it, preferring instead another where the Pope's figure

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[146] The only exception mentioned by the persons interviewed were the technical specifications established by UPU for all the stamps of the world (see Ch. III).

[147] In philatelic terminology, an 'essay' is a draft stamp design, made for the consideration of the involved authorities only. Therefore it is created as an artistic piece, e.g. as a watercolour over special paper and, in some cases, also in a far larger format than a stamp. Once a given essay is approved, a limited number of 'proofs', (trial, stamp-size printed reproductions of the accepted essay) are made in order to check and match dye colours with the original essay, and to oversee the final appearance of the design when adapted to a postage stamp size. Only after such proofs receive a final approval, the actual postage stamps will be printed.

was "very small, at the left, and with three coloured lines representing the Mexican flag, which occupied more space than the Pope [himself]" so the result was "like [if] the Pope is making a reverence" to the flag (CdeM Designer 'B' 2011, 2012). Indeed, this is a very adequate description of the stamp that was issued (Ill. 83, right). Comparing it with the non-accepted essay, it seems indeed probable that political, not aesthetic considerations were the most important ones when selecting the winning design.[148]

It seems thus that there has been selective intervention on postage stamp design by other political actors –the President himself, in this case. Yet, this seems to be an exception rather than a rule, e.g. in cases where the events or topics celebrated could have political, ideological or religious connotations. I had expected that an important event such as the Mexican Bicentennial would also be subjected to such close examination.

Ill. 83 – Essays presented for a commemorative stamp for the visit of Pope John Paul II, 1990
Left: Non-selected essay (G. Norma).
Right: the stamp issued, with a 'saluting Pope' (Scott 1648)

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[148] The Pope's visit happened right in the midst of a profound transformation of state-church relations in Mexico (see Loaeza 1996). In 1988, Pres. Salinas started a series of mild reforms, relaxing the radical laicism enforced by most post-revolutionary regimes. This explains the symbolical and political importance attached to this particular stamp.

Dealing with the past: the Bicentennial stamps of Mexico

In 2010, Mexico celebrated both the 200th anniversary of the start of its Independence movement, and the 100th anniversary of its Revolution. The corresponding commemorations were prepared over several years, under the coordination of a federal agency specifically created for this purpose. These celebrations received much attention from both national and international audiences, involved a number of individual activities throughout the country, and of course, were also marked by items such as commemorative coins, banknotes and postage stamps.

Without doubt, the commemorative stamps issued for the Mexican Bicentennial are truly outstanding. Not only were they wonderful philatelic pieces, extremely well crafted and of a very high aesthetic quality; but they were also issued during three consecutive years (2008-10) thus comprising 31 stamps in total: two series of 5 stamps each for 2008 and 2009, whereas in 2010 they were 5+6. (These numbers do not include those stamps devoted to the Revolution, which were issued as a separate series). Also, each of these annual series included a larger, very attractive imperforated piece.

<u>Actors and processes involved</u>

It is evident that Bicentennial stamps followed a coherent design pattern through all their production processes. They are all reproductions of historical drawings, paintings and objects of the 19th or the early 20th century as the latest. That is: there are no "newly-made" depictions. Also, their general philatelic characteristics (sizes, imperforations etc.) remained the same through the different annual series.

I expected that such important philatelic work would be influenced, or even directed, by external actors – particularly the National Commission for the 2010 Commemorations [*Comisión Nacional Organizadora de las Conmemoraciones de 2010*][149] or even the Presidential Office itself. However, the public officers interviewed at CdeM headquarters did not mention any influence of other institutions on the creative process of these series. On the contrary: they repeatedly underlined the intellectual, artistic and organizational autonomy of CdeM. I asked, on more than one occasion, for any external limitations of political or ideological nature that could be set to the Bicentennial series stamps. Every time, any interference was emphatically denied by the interviewed party. Furthermore, both civil servants and designers agreed that the really important limitations, if any, were firstly technical (e.g. to fit monumental paintings into stamps

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[149] This commssion changed names, leadership and organization on several ocassions, so the final official name was *Comisión Organizadora de la Conmemoración del Bicentenario del inicio del movimiento de Independencia Nacional y del Centenario del inicio de la Revolución Mexicana.* For obvious reasons, it was known by shorter names; the most common was the one used here.

can sometimes lead to visually inconvenient results) and secondly legal, as not all the proposed designs for the Bicentennial obtained copyright clearance from the owners (CdeM Official 'B' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010; CdeM Designer 'A' 2010)

I was also expecting that a special internal procedure would be used for the Bicentennial series, due to its special relevance. Yet, in the interviews it was found that, at least concerning organizational matters, these stamps did not receive any special treatment. Or course, they were subjected to more attention than the usual stamps, due both to the importance of the event itself, and the large number of stamps involved; however, they were still made according to the standard procedure, as described above (CdeM Official 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010).

Yet all of the above does not mean at all that CdeM, and particularly its sections dealing with stamp design, are seen as purely apolitical by the officers involved. On the contrary, during the interviews it was also clear that CdeM authorities are well aware of the fact that postage stamps do narrate "an *official* history" (CdeM Official 'A' 2010, emphasis made by the interviewed) and that, because stamps are "representatives of the Mexican state", there are limits to what can be displayed and/or commemorated on the postage stamps of Mexico. When I asked what would happen if someone proposed a stamp commemorating the 1994 *Zapatista* uprising, the answer was a gesture meaning "no way!" (CdeM Official 'B' 2010).

During the interviews, I found that such self-limitation is made *within* CdeM, and well before any of such decisions can reach other instances of the Mexican government or the public debate. Not by chance, the areas that are most responsible for such self-limitation are, precisely, those dealing with philatelic design (CdeM Designer 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010).

In this sense, it can be argued that the commemorative postage stamps of the Mexican Bicentennial were inscribed within a general nationalist framework (that of the 2010 Commemorations) but they were also the outcome of standard processes, allegedly autonomous from most external influxes, including the ideological ones, and just following self-imposed limits as to what can be shown. Next, we will analyse the products of such processes.

<u>A fresh view of the classics</u>

The Mexican Bicentennial stamps continued with the emphasis on persons. Only two stamps out of 31 did not have individuals on them, while three more presented only groups with no identifiable faces, or where a particular hero was allegedly depicted, yet very difficult to distinguish. Portraits of national heroes (some stamps including more than one) and key historical passages represented by means of groups in action, made for the most frequent topics (see Ill. 84 and Ill. 85 below)
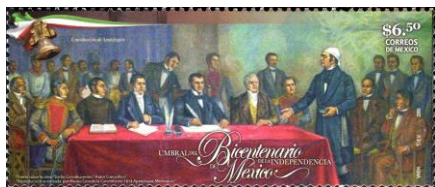
Ill. 84 – Selected Bicentennial stamps, 2008-2009. Top to bottom: Ignacio Allende; Josefa O. de Domínguez; Apatzingán Congress, headed by Morelos; capture of Hidalgo and the "main leaders of the movement." [WNS MX017.08, 019.08, 029.09, 024.09]
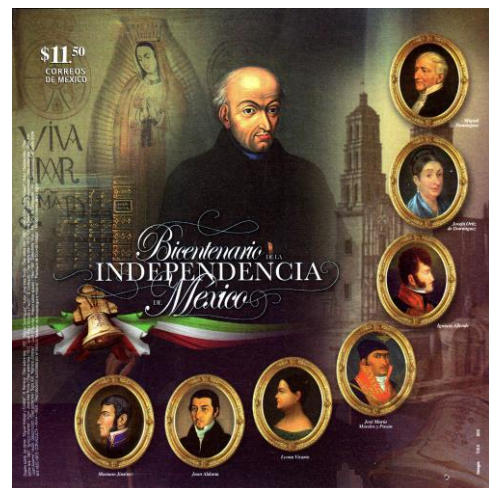
Ill. 85 – Selected Bicentennial stamps, 2010. Top to bottom: Pedro Moreno; Vicente Guerrero; Miguel Hidalgo and other leaders. [WNS MX021.10, 027.10, MX 031.10]

However, such an emphasis on portraiture did not imply a return to the 1985 type, or to the iconic style that permeated almost all stamps issued for the birth/death anniversaries of Mexican heroes. Instead, during the interviews it was stated more than once that the core idea driving the whole Bicentennial series, was to give a 'human face' to national heroes, therefore explicitly rejecting the traditional style that was considered as "cold" and uninformative by the officers interviewed. Furthermore, an explicit goal of the new series was to add context and meaning, thus giving more information to the public not only about the person depicted, but also

about the historical processes she/he was involved in. Finally, it was also stressed that the series as a whole, should become the narration of a historical process (CdeM Official 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010).

The goal of presenting the heroes with a human face, in their context, and as part of a national narrative required departing from many previous traditions. It also implied looking for previously less well-known depictions of such heroes and events.[150] The 1831 portrait of Hidalgo by Serrano, which is the motif of one of the two larger and most valued stamps issued in 2010 (see Ill. 85, large stamp) was mentioned as an example by those interviewed. However, other stamps certainly follow a similar pattern –such as the 2008 one showing Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (see Ill. 84, second stamp).

There are other cases that took the "fresh view" even further. For instance, the stamp dedicated to Hidalgo's execution (see Ill. 86) was particularly striking. On it, the 'Father of the Nation' is presented in a way that is completely opposed to the established narrative. He is being shot in the back while facing the wall. In contrast, the official history and mythology has long underlined that Hidalgo, when taken to the execution place, emphatically refused to be shot in the back, winning the argument in the end, so he was executed while facing the piquet. Almost every

**Ill. 86 – Hidalgo's execution
[Scott 2632]**

piece of national artwork, narrative, textbook or patriotic movie show the scene in this way – even if there are disagreements about whether he was standing up or seated when shot. In this sense, the selection of that particular depiction goes completely against the established nationalist narrative regarding the most noted of all the Independence heroes and regarding a particularly significant moment.

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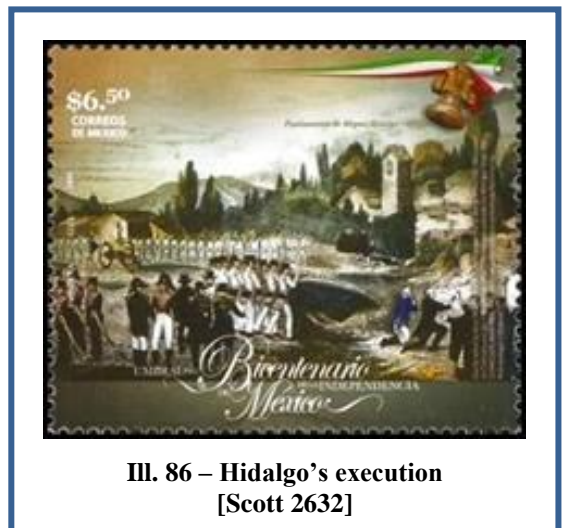
[150] Such a task was described by the interviewed parties as arduous and very time-consuming, as in many cases these paintings, depictions etc. were indeed unknown, or their whereabouts difficult to ascertain (CdeM Official 'A' 2010; CdeM Official 'B' 2010). These difficulties can be a reason to find, in some stamps of the series, the "traditional", iconic-type depictions.

As we have clearly seen, the Bicentennial stamps put the emphasis on heroes as well as some symbols, while other topics such as culture are not as richly presented. Yet, their study can tell us some relevant things when compared with stamps of former celebrations. As we have seen, the 1910 stamps put emphasis on the *criollo* group of the Querétaro/Guanajuato zone. Stamps from 1960 showed symbols almost exclusively, and the very design of the 1985 stamps made it difficult to detect any particularities of the national heroes depicted. In sum, after the Mexican Revolution, stamps did not tell us much about the background of the persons depicted, such as their social, regional and ethnic attributes. This does not mean that the ethnic/cultural dimension has been absent from Mexican stamps. It is just that such topics were generally avoided in stamps specifically issued for independence commemorations.

As we noted before, 1985 was the first time that an Independence commemorative series included Morelos. That was not a minor change. Unlike most of the original *conspiradores,* which were mostly rich *criollos* from those provinces close to Mexico city, Morelos and Guerrero were *mestizos* linked with Southern Mexico. Morelos, in particular became an open supporter of full independence, at a moment when many *criollos* rejected it, demanding home rule instead. Morelos was also the one who took the lead after Hidalgo's execution and in 1813 Morelos convoked the first National Congress in Chilpancingo, which formally declared independence and also issued what is regarded as the First Constitution of the country (see for instance Vázquez 1999).

This trend of "widening the ethnocultural/territorial sample" beyond Hidalgo and the *criollo* group, continued in other Bicentennial stamps. The large number of stamps allow for the incorporation of more faces, so that even a Spaniard (Francisco Javier Mina) had a stamp devoted to him (see Ill. 87, left). Moreover, the use of paintings on such stamps allowed to clearly identify features like skin colour, as in the portrait

Ill. 87 – F.C. Mina and J. M. Morelos

of Morelos (see Ill. 87, right). In this way, the Bicentennial stamps overcame some of the homogenizing effects of former Independence stamps.

Such widening also took on a different dimension. The stamps of previous commemorations left the observer with the idea that those figures depicted were "Mexicans" and nothing else, due to both the very stamp design, and to the lack of information thereupon. In stark contrast, several Bicentennial stamps made an explicit link between the particular hero and a given region within Mexico. For instance, Primo de Verdad is related to the Mexico City environment; Morelos and some others to Michoacán, as are the López Rayón brothers, even if in a less explicit way (see Ill. 88); Hidalgo, and to an extent Pedro Moreno, are linked to Guanajuato. Even more remarkably, Morelos' campaign is clearly described by means of a map (see Ill. 88, right). This is the first time such a territorial dimension is made that explicit in Mexican stamps.

Ill. 88 - Regional allusions in Bicentennial stamps.

 Left: Primo de Verdad;

Centre: López Rayón brothers;

Right: Map of Morelos' campaigns.

The Bicentennial stamps: analysis and conclusions

When analysing the Mexican stamps issued for the Bicentennial, we can detect a change in the manner in which the heroes are represented. Instead of the icon-type depictions (so frequent on stamps issued after the Revolution) the Bicentennial stamps tried to show them as persons acting during complex historical contexts, which involved a number of actors, events and decisions. In this way, the 2008-2010 stamps introduced a large array of figures and even those as traditional as Hidalgo were presented in a quite different manner. This definitively departs from the way independence heroes were treated in the imaginary of Revolutionary Nationalism, just ten or twenty years before: as distant, static, almost untouchable idols.

Secondly, in the stamps issued for the Bicentennial, we can see an effort to present a more diverse view of Independence than ever before. This includes, for instance, both territorial

and ethnic realms. As seen before, the 1910 Centennial stamps had a clear preference for Hidalgo and the *criollo* group, and the post-Revolution stamps of 1960 were at first reluctant to point at particular leaders, and later (1985) they included Hidalgo, Morelos and Guerrero, but without any differentiation between them. In contrast, the 2008-2010 stamps not only included a number of figures, but also made the territorial and ethnic differences among them detectable, in some cases even very evident –for example, when issuing stamps indicating which region the particular leader was linked to. This is a further departure from the Revolutionary Nationalism doctrine, and its representations of national history as a coherent, fairly homogeneous saga that erases all differences amongst (selected) leaders and groups, and even links processes as different as Independence and the Revolution in a rather unproblematic way.

However, we can also see in the Bicentennial stamps that parts of the historical narrative of Revolutionary Nationalism are still deeply embedded. First of all, the general account of Mexican history is still heavily centred on particular national figures, which are presented as heroic, superior – this despite the aim and efforts of the persons in charge to present independence as a process, and the involved leaders as human beings. It still lacks a deeper understanding of the social composition, interests and political goals that each revolutionary group had, which were far from homogeneous.

Secondly, the narrative of independence in Bicentennial stamps was still much more focussed upon the process itself (the revolt) upon its success (the creation of the Mexican state). If the Bicentennial stamp series aimed to present independence as a process, then there was no way to avoid dealing with its achievement. In other words: the very problematic figure of Iturbide could not be ignored. Certainly, Iturbide and his group were present in the Bicentennial stamps, but always in a rather indirect, symbolic way.

In the end, it is clear that the Mexican Bicentennial stamps presented a historical narrative still influenced by the national imaginary inherited from PRI times. Yet, the stamps also show that this imaginary is being revised to some extent, and its events and figures presented in a different way. All these changes, continuities and reinterpretations of the national narrative (as shown in stamps) were allegedly made by a group that cannot be identified either as the "elite" or as member of the "masses", but rather as administrative specialists. This was a very unexpected discovery: I had anticipated a very close, top-down control regarding the messages and images in such important stamps as these.

Conclusions: national imaginaries in the postage stamps of Mexico

In this chapter, we have studied very diverse stamps, issued at diverse moments of Mexican history; and the attention has been focused not only on the stamps per se, but also the organization that was responsible for selecting the topics and motifs for such stamps, and how both depictions and organizations responded to changes in the political environment of diverse governments and political regimes. Can we now conclude that the postage stamps of Mexico have been used to spread a particular account of the history, features, composition and development of "the Mexicans" – that is, an official national imaginary?

The short, straightforward answer is "yes": stamps have been indeed used for this purpose, in a quite evident and sustained way. The topics depicted in stamps, such as the ethno-cultural composition and historical development of the nation; the fact that the postal authority has become increasingly explicit about the use of stamps for such a role; and the careful choosing of symbols, iconographic elements and messages, are sufficient proofs. In this sense, hypothesis H1 and particularly sub-hypothesis h1a (see Ch. I) have been confirmed for the Mexican case.

Yet, it is evident that the official imaginary presented in stamps has not been uniform at all during the 100-year period studied in this chapter. Great variations are detectable regarding the selection of the symbols, individual heroes and the specific moments that should be put on stamps. How are such variations related to the wider Mexican political processes?

To answer this question, we must remember that stamps do not just present or depict cultural artefacts, symbols or moments. Instead, stamps present specific artefacts, certain symbols and particular moments; and the selection of all of these is directly related both to the ideology of the regime as a whole, and to the goals and actions of the political elites in turn. Vizcaíno is right when he argues that, also for the Mexican case, any collection of symbolic, material or sentimental elements does not constitute nationalism *per se,* but only becomes so when used for a political or governmental goal (Vizcaíno 2002, 270; 2004).

In this vein, the indigenous groups and their cultural manifestations have been always "there", in the sense that they have developed and managed their own ethno-cultural manifestations, symbols, and group identities – which in many cases have been quite autonomous from the state, or even created in open confrontation with it. It is only when a state institution (the postal authority, in our case) uses them for a political goal, that they become part of the nationalist doctrine of the regime. As explained above, the intense usage of indigenous

iconography in stamps by the Cárdenas regime, can be linked to a general effort to link the Revolutionary Nationalism doctrine specifically with the lower, agrarian social sectors. The usage of an apparently innocent symbol (the *Dolores* Bell) by the López Mateos government to avoid pointing at particular Independence heroes in commemorative stamps, presenting thus a seemingly coherent and de-personalized narration, is just another illustration. The later intimate linkage of Independence and Revolution in stamps, as well as the Bicentennial "broadening of the ethno-cultural and territorial sample" in stamp depictions, can be related to the particular goals and political agendas of specific regimes. In this sense, hypotheses h2a and h2b are also confirmed, at least for the Mexican case.

Yet, there is a remaining question of whether, and how the national imaginaries in stamps are results of a *conscious* political effort. For this, I focused on the case for which I had the most recent and credible information: the Bicentennial celebrations. The outcome of the process-tracing analysis was, in fact, quite different from what I had expected. Both the organization (CdeM) and the particular sections within it that deal with stamp design and issuing (SubFil, DEP), turned out to be quite autonomous regarding what to put – or what not to put – on stamps. The persons interviewed underlined quite emphatically this autonomy and, from the documents studied, no interference from external actors (not even *state* external actors) could be detected.

Furthermore, I was expecting that after the Mexican transition to democracy, the Bicentennial would also become a space for re-interpretation of the nationalist narrative. As stated above, there were elements that were certainly different vis-à-vis previous celebrations; yet, I was more surprised by the relative *lack* of changes in the national imaginary in stamps, in spite of the opportunities given by the 2000 transition to democracy and the corresponding political and ideological change in the regime. On the other hand, I also detected at least one case where an external actor (none other than the President himself) boycotted a stamp essay on political grounds. Therefore, the answer to hypothesis h2c is more ambiguous in the Mexican case.

In the end, it seems that, at least for the Mexican case and particularly for the Bicentennial stamps, there was no top-down control of messages in stamps, on behalf of the elites. Instead, it seems that most of the time, CdeM members 'know' beforehand what to present and what to avoid in stamps; and they apply this self-control both to those requests made by external actors, and to their own internal projects and proposals. Even without clear written guidelines, CdeM members have enough knowledge of what can be said in postage stamps, and of what cannot. It seems that only in very specific cases, such as singular events or specific

topics with strong political/ideological consequences, a kind of final supervision and evaluation takes place – as in the case of the stamp commemorating John Paul II's visit.

The study of the Bicentennial stamps opened thus a more interesting question for me. In this case, we have a particular, quite small group of mid-level civil servants and designers, which certainly are not just "common citizens", but are not "political elites" either. They are, in fact, a middle stratum between citizens and elites. However, and far from just passing information and complying with orders from above, this group actually had the central role in the selection and design of an official product of the Mexican state (because a postage stamp is certainly that, after all) and therefore determine, to a good extent, their nationalist narratives and symbols used – even presenting new ones that go against the established official history. This finding is an invitation to reconsider the role of the "middle-range" sectors in the creation, transformation and diffusion of national imaginaries. This, however, exceeds the scope of the current project.

CONCLUSIONS

This research started with two puzzles: Why are postage stamps always so rich in messages and depictions, most of which have no relation to the postal functions of a stamp? And why do nation-states give so much attention to stamps, even establishing governmental agencies in charge of their design and production? A first intuition was: postage stamps were performing more roles than their purely postal ones. Most probably, they were being used to spread messages on behalf of a nation-state.

It then became clear that, if this was the case, most such messages concerned the characteristics of the nation-state that issued the stamp. Therefore, my research attempted to answer the following question: How, and why, have postage stamps been used to promote a specific doctrine about the social, territorial, political and historical features of the issuing nations?

It promptly became clear that such research would be, in many aspects, atypical. For instance, I could not rely upon secondary sources: as stated previously, postage stamps have been virtually ignored in academia. For reasons I am still unable to grasp, there is a strong reticence in many circles to consider postage stamps as valid academic sources. In the worst case, they are belittled as objects the study of which is proper for 'simple philatelists' rather than for serious scholars. When stamps are used in academic works, normally they feature in supporting roles only: as occasional illustrations, even as nice book covers, but very rarely as parts of the analysis *per se*.

Only a few scholars have taken postage stamps seriously. Their studies, most of them mentioned in Ch. III, are very valuable as individual pieces of research; however, they are still very limited when compared to the almost endless opportunities that stamps could offer. In particular, it is truly impressive how political science as a discipline has disregarded the study of such patently ideological items as postage stamps.

The majority of studies based in other disciplines (art history, anthropology, geography…) share one assumption: that there is an automatic, linear relation between the ideology or political aims of the state, and the topics, messages and depictions in the stamps issued by it. This is implied in some of the adjectives used to describe stamps: "windows of the state", "paper ambassadors"…

The relationship between the ideology of a state and the specific messages in stamps can be more complex, however. Firstly, a state is not a uniform, homogeneous structure with a single perspective; there are several divisions, organizations, groups and actors within it that in many cases can hold competing views about the nation itself. Secondly, any nation-state is subjected to profound changes in its hierarchies, organization, ideology, and goals, even in relatively short periods of time. All these can impact not only on its policies, but even on its self-identification as a national community. In sum: even if we want to see stamps as mere "reflexions" of a given national ideology (which is already problematic) it is still far more plausible that such an ideology is not the one defended by the nation-state *as such*, but by single, specific political regimes during particular periods.

Therefore, my original intuition was formalized in two main hypotheses, each including some sub-hypotheses (see Ch. I). I argued that (1) postage stamps have been used to spread ideological messages, particularly those promoting an official account of the history, features, composition and development of the issuing nation; (2) such messages were the conscious result of a process influenced by the ideology, interests and goals of state agencies and political elites, but other actors including competing elites, institutions, and/or interest groups, would also attempt to influence such messages in stamps.

Therefore, it was clear that my research involved several steps, as described in the research outline (see Ch. I). First I had to develop an adequate framework to guide my study. Drawing upon Charles Taylor's (Taylor 2004) concept of social imaginaries, I developed the concept of a *national imaginary*: namely, a system of ideas and beliefs that allows the internal identification, the constitutive identity, and the external differentiation of the nation as a single group. A further development of the argument, together with a discussion of the literature regarding the forms through which a nation is represented, allowed me to define ten categories of messages about the nation, which would guide my analysis of messages in stamps.

Secondly, I had not only to assume, but actually to prove that stamps were being used as carriers of ideological messages. This in turn implied offering explanations for such usage (why stamps precisely?) and, most importantly, to study the diverse messages that can be found in stamps. The absence of political science-based studies in this field meant that I had to use primary sources only: 1,000 stamps, selected randomly. It also implied that I had to set my own criteria for stamp selection (e.g. to exclude some type of stamps, in order to avoid sample bias) as well as designing my own typologies, categories, and deciding upon methodological considerations for the analysis.

Thirdly, I had to demonstrate the intentionality of (nationalist) messages in stamps. In other words: in order to sustain my claim that stamps were promoting an official national imaginary, I had to prove that those messages were the conscious products of a process directed by state authorities according to political/ideological considerations – instead of, for instance, the results of an artist's personal inspiration and ideals. I also had to test whether, besides political elites and state agencies, other actors played a role or at least tried to influence the selection of topics and messages to be printed on stamps. I further had to control for socio-political changes in the issuing nation-state that could affect the core ideological doctrines, political allegiances, and governmental structures thereof.

All of the above entailed that, in order to prove that postage stamps were actually presenting an official national imaginary, I had to use case studies to determine the actors, goals and processes involved in stamp topic selection and design. For this purpose, two cases were selected: the United Kingdom, 1950-1970, and post-revolutionary Mexico. In both, a process-tracing methodology was used in order to determine the actors, processes and goals involved in stamp topic selection and design.

The first task – to provide support for hypothesis H1 and sub-hypothesis h1a – was carried out in chapters III to V. First, some reasons making stamps so suitable for the spread of ideological messages were outlined. Then, the analysis of the random sample was carried out, finding that indeed, stamps have been used for this purpose. This was anticipated, and yet, the frequency of such ideological usage of stamps was even higher than I expected: non-ideological stamps – those being either 'minimalist' or 'neutral' – represented a mere 2% of the sample even if, from a purely administrative point of view, these should instead be the majority. Therefore, it seems very clear that almost every issuing authority in the world was eager to use stamps as means of promoting its own ideas.

The same applied to stamps presenting nationalist content. I had anticipated that a large share of the sample would be of this kind; but the final proportion (almost 80% of the sample) was beyond my own expectations. Some results for the other ideological categories were surprising as well. Stamps with supranational/cosmopolitan content were much more common than anticipated. In contrast, the limited number of civic, religious, and Marxist-inspired messages was surprising to me. It is clear that nationalist, or at least nationally-framed topics, are the main reference point for stamps; and this is evidence of the pervasiveness of the nation as a mental and ideological framework, pervading even the most unlikely objects of everyday life.

Those stamps identified as having nationalist content were analysed in Chapter V, using a second typology that included ten different categories of messages. Each one of these categories was developed following the theoretical discussion in Chapter II, regarding the concept of national imaginaries, as well as its roles and components. In this way, they were able to tell us not only what aspect or feature of the nation was promoted, but also how these aspects were related to the national imaginary at large, and to the defining elements of the nation, in particular its human specificity, genesis, and collective rights.

With regard to this typology we can detect more equilibrium: most categories were present in between 15% and 20% of the cases. Messages regarding the *National Territory* category fell slightly below such a scale. This is a fact worth mentioning, as territorial depictions and reclamations form precisely the topic that has been most covered in academic literature regarding stamps. I had expected that messages about the *Human Composition* of the nation (ethnic stereotypes in particular) would be very common in stamps and yet they were not. It seems that nation-states are not so keen to identify themselves with a specific ethnic profile.

Three categories stood out. Messages about *Individual Accomplishments* ranked last of all, which was surprising given the predilection for states and political elites to designate individuals as role models for the whole nation. The fact that many personalities were omitted from the category due to overlapping can partially account for such low marks. In turn, messages about *Cultural Identity* first, and *Historical Development* second, were indisputably the most common ones. A probable factor for this trend is the intrinsically general character of such categories. Yet, it is very significant that, at the moment of choosing a specific form of representation of the nation, states do so not via through natural attributes, national symbols, identifiable leaders, or ethnic profiles, but rather by appealing to cultural references and historical events – which, by their nature, are the categories most open to 'interpretations' in the official discourse.

After proving this point, the research went into the second phase: it was necessary to determine how such messages were communicated via stamps, and the actors and political rationales involved. This task was undertaken in Chapters VI and VII. Firstly, in the case of the United Kingdom 1950-1970, it was very evident that state agencies and political elites had a very important role in stamp design. Not only the postal authority itself (GPO), but also other state- or state-appointed institutions (SAC in particular), acted as "safeguards" in matters of both aesthetics *and* politics. All these institutions carefully chose stamp topics and designs setting

rules regarding what could be celebrated and who would appear in stamps or later indicating which social groups should not be alluded to (as in the case of Othello), and specifying how the four constituent countries of the Kingdom should be represented equally, if represented at all.

The political control over stamps was further reinforced by some state institutions that would intervene if a given topic was considered to be politically risky. Buckingham palace got involved not only in matters concerning the royal image and regalia, but also in more substantive topics such as internal and foreign politics (as in the CEPT, 'not Europa!' stamp series). Some other state institutions for instance the Foreign Office, also intervened from time to time.

In this sense, stamp depiction was subjected to close control in the UK. However, this case also made evident the pressure exerted by non-governing elites and social actors to influence stamps. A particularly strong pressure came from local actors, at a moment when the central authorities in London were facing demands for more autonomy and recognition for the constituent regions, particularly Scotland. Local political actors, from mayors to MPs representing regions beyond England, became very active in demanding that UK stamps should present local references, events and figures, such as Robert Burns for Scotland. Finally, external pressure also came from individuals, either promoting the representation of a specific topic (e.g. the Gandhi Centennial stamps) or criticizing a given selection of topics and symbols, like those used for the Battle of Britain series.

Finally, the UK case demonstrated that the promotion of official national imaginaries is heavily influenced by the goals and ideology not of the state as a whole, but of the political regime in turn and, what is more, of particular groups and individuals within the ruling elite. As a matter of fact, the whole change in stamp policy in the period 1950-1970: from a very limited one that presented almost exclusively Crown-related topics, to another where a number of topics and events of *national* connotation were presented, was the direct consequence of first, the arrival of a Labour government after years of Conservative ones and second, of the personal agenda of members such as Tony Benn, who pursued very progressive, provocatively Republican ideas.

The case of post-revolutionary Mexico confirmed these trends, but also qualified them. Stamp topic and design selection was controlled by the Mexican state as well; nevertheless, such control was exerted in a less rigid manner than in the UK especially before the 1960s. Limited influence on the part of external actors was always allowed; postal authorities were much more

autonomous in choosing topics and designs; and external authorities were less keen to intervene – all this, expect for a brief period in the 1970s. It seems also that the Mexican postal authorities were much more autonomous than their UK counterparts: they operated with many fewer formal restrictions but, at the same time, they had clear non-written limits and exerted a kind of self-control instead. Only in particular cases did other state organizations intervene, such as the Presidential office regarding the stamp issued for the visit of Pope John Paul II. When some governmental agency wanted a stamp issued, this was accomplished via a formal agreement with almost commercial characteristics.

Certainly, rules regarding topics and designs in Mexican stamps varied during the long period covered in the study. If such rules were rather imprecise at the beginning of the period, by the 1970s it was officially required for stamps to "*disseminate the national self*", and institutions were established to ensure this (CCEPC, for example). Then, after a political change that brought a technocratic, open-market, neo-liberal elite to power, such stipulations and institutions were relaxed or abolished.

The influence of such changes in the messages in stamps are quite clear, particularly when comparing how the different regimes chose to celebrate the various Independence anniversaries: first, the 1910 Centennial, a pre-Revolutionary version that completely focused in the *criollo*-led revolt and its heroes; second, a complete absence of Independence-related topics in 1935, when these were substituted for other commemorations with mostly revolutionary and/or class-based connotations; third, the 1960 celebrations that avoided mentioning specific figures or groups within the Independence movement, making use of overarching symbols instead; and, fourth, the 1985 celebrations that merged both Independence and Revolution into a single narrative with shared symbols, returning to the cult of heroes but with a slightly more inclusive approach – for instance by alluding for the first time to Morelos and Guerrero, though failing to give any detail about who they were and what they represented.

Finally, the 2010 Bicentennial, which was celebrated with a different political party in power for first time in seven decades, was also the first time that the inherent plurality of the Mexican independence process was recognized. It was also the first time that the very problematic figure of Iturbide and his role regarding Mexican independence (that is, problematic for the official post-revolutionary narratives) was ever acknowledged in a commemorative stamp issued for the occasion. And yet, he was only alluded to in an indirect, subtle way.

In this way, we can trace clear differences in the messages in stamps celebrating the key foundational moment of Mexico (the 1810 *Grito de Dolores*) and the Independence process in

general. At the same time, we can detect a sort of 'progression' in the narrative about Independence: from a very specific narrative, focused upon Hidalgo and his group, to an increasingly general view that avoided differentiating between the groups involved, until the 2010 breaking point when the heterogeneity and complexity of this historical process was finally acknowledged.

Similar patterns can be detected regarding the ethno-cultural features of the Mexican nation. Starting from the few (if any) allegorical representations before the Revolution of the pre-Hispanic past of the country, to the 1930s radical emphasis on such indigenous origins and the identification of the "authentic" nation as the poorer strata of both mestizos and indigenous groups. Then came the first, timid recognition of the Hispanic influence and the avoidance of class references during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the marked return to Indigenous topics during the 1970s, and finally the promotion of a "modern" Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s, with few ethno-cultural references except when strictly necessary, for instance during commemorations of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus to the continent. Again, all these changes can be traced to transformations in the political elites. However, it is also clear that, at least since the Revolution, there is a core idea that was never challenged: the essentially *mestizo* character of the modern country.

The study of the Mexican case also offered a further revelation– one that I did not expect. Besides the influence of state agencies and political actors, it is clear that some intermediate actors had a far more important role than had been anticipated: the specialized, bureaucratic structures in charge of stamp issuing were not just operationalizing ideas and following instructions from above. As the research on the specific case of the Bicentennial stamps has demonstrated, these intermediate actors (e.g. middle-range public officers) were quite able to influence stamp topics and depictions, by using their own views, experiences and knowledge regarding the nation. They were also able to sustain or modify some specific parts of the official historical narrative, as the treatment of Hidalgo and the rest of the heroes in the Bicentennial series made clear. They were also fairly autonomous in selecting both the general topics and the specific depictions for commemorative stamps, year by year.

Certainly, these middle-range public officers do not take decisions on the creation of national imaginaries "at large". Nonetheless, they are able to exert a quite significant influence in messages and narratives that are promoted through specific means; stamps in this case. This influence could only be verified for the Mexican case and specifically for the Bicentennial stamps, mostly due to the availability of these persons for interviews. Yet, it is quite plausible

that the same state of affairs applied to other moments in the Mexican case, as well as in the UK. This presents interesting questions regarding the role of such intermediate bodies (which are neither true political 'elites' nor common citizens) in the promotion of official national imaginaries.

To summarize: This research has made it evident that stamps <u>do</u> spread ideological messages and, in particular, what I have defined as 'official national imaginaries'. However, the promotion of these messages is quite a complex political process. On the one hand, state agencies and political elites will certainly try to control the diffusion through stamps of such official national imaginaries. On the other hand, competing elites, social actors, other institutions and some intermediate structures within the postal authorities will try to influence those messages according to their own political and/or ideological considerations. *In this way, both hypotheses H1 and H2 and the corresponding sub-hypotheses have been confirmed.*

I believe that this research has offered some relevant contributions. The first and most basic is an analysis of the promotion through postage stamps of ideological messages, and national imaginaries in particular – a field that, at least in political science, *has been almost completely unexplored so far*. Secondly, this research helps to corroborate in an objective, evidence-based way that stamps are not only valid, but also extremely useful *sources for academic research*, particularly with regard to the topics of nationalism, political discourses, and ideological propaganda.

Yet I believe the present research has also made contributions to nationalism studies in general. One is *theoretical,* regarding the concept of national imaginary, its roles and components, and its relationship with the defining elements of the nation, as presented in Chapter II. Such a theoretical framework can be discussed, applied, or adapted to other studies, particularly those dealing with nationalist discourses, official narratives of the nation, and mass nationalist propaganda, including, but not limited to, visual means.

A further contribution is *methodological*: the typologies, categories, and methodologies developed and presented in Chapters IV and V could be used in studies on ideological content in visual-based media. This could include both 'classical' cases such as banknotes, as well as 'new' ones such as official web pages. The same methodology, or a modified version thereof, could be also used for case studies of nationalist discourse.

A final contribution concerns the possibilities of *generalizing the arguments and findings* of this research. Certainly, a more extensive and detailed research would have been needed to verify or qualify my findings. However, the use of a most-different systems approach for the selection of case studies, enables me to extrapolate some generalizations that can then be tested in further cases and researches and, quite possibly, also for official products different than postage stamps.

First, the processes involved in the creation and promotion of official national imaginaries are not always as linear and top-down as a realist approach would assume. In fact, these are very complex processes, involving negotiations among a number of elites, counter-elites, individuals as well as pressure/social groups; all attempting to advance their own ideas and influence the vision that the state will promote about the features, composition and historical development of the nation as a whole. It is also clear that such official "openness" to external demands and debates about the official national imaginary depends, in a large degree, on the nature of the political regime itself. The more centralized and authoritarian it is, the less it will accept external inputs regarding the official national imaginary it wants to promote, therefore, being closer to the realist view of a monolithic entity with rigid top-down hierarchies. And yet, this might be true only in few cases.

A second finding of my research can further qualify the realist vision, and introduce a new level of analysis in the creation of official national imaginaries. As it was evident in the case of PMG Benn, ruling elites themselves are not monolithic, unified structures with a shared vision about the nation. There are intra-elite subgroups that will also try to influence the (arguably unified) state-sponsored vision about the nation, according to their own views. The degree such intra-elite groups can influence the official national imaginary depends, of course, also on the configuration of the political regime. For example, in a parliamentarian democracy like the UK, it was comparatively easier for a specific individual such as Tony Benn to advance his own ideologically ambitious agenda, despite that it was not shared by the rest of the government, the Labour Party, and the Prime Minister. In this sense, we must introduce a new layer of analysis in the study of official national imaginaries. In some cases, there is no such a "unified ruling elite" vision in regards to the nation, but only a series of elite compromises on the matter.

A third conclusion certainly deserves more attention. It is regarding the role of an intermediate stratum in charge of promoting an official national imaginary, which actually has a much more important role than what has been conceded in most schools of thought; from political realism, to the most basic forms of sociological institutionalism, to historical analysis.

During the process-tracing performed in my two cases, it became evident that such strata (e.g. middle-rank officers at central postal administrations) were far more than just 'operators' or 'transmission belts' of elite decisions to the common people, or the other way around. They are neither common citizens nor 'elites', at least in the classic sense of the term; and yet, they were capable indeed of qualifying, modifying, changing or controlling how a given official national imaginary was to be promoted in the products or means they were in charge of.

In the case of the UK, the intermediate stratum of GPO bureaucracy (as well as the SAC) worked as a barrier to PMG Tony Benn's innovations by defending the traditional approach of the Queen as the central symbol identifying the British nation in stamps. They were also opponents to the introduction of messages about the nation, especially if they had political implications like references to non-white ethnic groups, historical events, or Scottish subjects. In the case of Mexico, and particularly for the Bicentennial celebrations, such middle-rank officers were able to propose topics; to represent national heroes in forms never attempted before; and to allude to the ideological, ethnic and territorial diversity of the Independence movements, very contrasting to the schematic, orthodox and simplifying depictions and messages used for previous Independence commemorative stamp series.

More research will be needed to fully prove this point, but the results suggest that the capability of such intermediate structures to propose or modify the contents of a given official national imaginary depends on two variables: first, the nature of the political regime as a whole (e.g. dictatorship vs. democracy); and second on the relative autonomy of the organization in charge of promoting such national imaginary in particular products, such as the GPO and SEPOMEX/CdeM for my case, *vis-à-vis* other governmental agencies, state institutions, and external political actors. It is clear that the autonomy of such intermediate stratum will depend of the institutional quality of the organization: for instance, whether it is a subordinated organization within a ministry; a separate agency within the government structure, or a fully autonomous state institution. In this sense, the promotion of national imaginaries can also be mediated by specific institutions within the state apparatus, and then by the middle-range stratum that runs them.

The fourth theoretical conclusion is probably the most important one. It is regarding how national imaginaries are reproduced and the groups in charge of it. At least in the Mexican case (where I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with officers and designers at SEPOMEX/CdeM) it was very clear that the middle-range stratum did not operate according to fixed, written rules regarding messages about the nation that should be included or avoided in

stamps. In fact, quite on the contrary: they insisted on their autonomy, particularly regarding governmental and political elites. Instead, it was clear to me that a kind of 'common sense' was the most important filter used by them in order to determinate what the limits were regarding the established nationalist narratives and mythology; which topics about the nation should be promoted in official products; and which topics and representations should be avoided altogether. In other words, they had developed a 'feeling' of what is permissible, and what is not, to be presented in postage stamp depictions, topics and messages about the nation. If this strata were not in need of supervision from political elites on how they should represent Mexico in official products like stamps (except for truly exceptional cases), *it would be most probably because it had interiorized beforehand a set of ideas about 'Mexico' and 'the Mexicans',* to the point of making close political control unnecessary.

If that is the case, then it can be argued that once the core components of an official national imaginary (like the *mestizaje* doctrine in Mexico) are successfully promoted among a given population, then the future elites and particularly, the middle-range strata will be naturally prone to reproduce it. Political elites can change drastically, according to an array of political factors. However, the middle-range strata of governmental officers and specialists tend to have a much more stable position within diverse political regimes. In turn, political elites tend to reach citizens through speeches and media. However, the intermediate strata of governmental officials might be able to have a far more direct impact on the population, thanks to their control over specific policy areas or official products, including those carrying nationalist messages – like stamps or banknotes.

In closing: if there were a group responsible for keeping the everyday, 'banal' nationalism working (Billig 1995), it is precisely this middle-range strata of 'nationally acculturated' governmental officers and specialists. The same group can also introduce small albeit meaningful changes to the official national imaginary promoted by elites. In this vein, the actors and processes involved in the *self-reproduction* of national imaginaries are, at least, as relevant as those elites involved in their creation and promotion, and certainly for many more products other than just stamps. Future research on the role of this stratum for the maintenance, reproduction and change in national imaginaries, national identities, and nationalism, seems to be very promising.

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